



Semantics & Pragmatics SoSe 2022

Lecture 20:

Cross-Linguistic Diversity in Pragmatics



Overview

Q&As

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Q&As Tutorial 10

Exercise 1b) “Few politicians are bad people.” Is the implicature (“Not all politicians are bad people”) related to Quantity 1 or 2? Can we really say that Quality 2 is relevant here?

I would say it is Quantity 2 (“Do not make your contribution more informative than is required”). At least that follows from the discussion by Kroeger (2019, p. 147), though he gives just *Maxim of Quantity* as the trigger for scalar implicatures. I would accept Quality 2 as well (“Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.”), i.e. the speaker apparently does not have enough evidence to say that “all politicians...”.

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Exercise 1b) “Few politicians are bad people.” Is the implicature (“Not all politicians are bad people”) really related to a clash between Quantity and Quality, i.e. in Group B?

It is true that this is a tricky case. The speaker chooses the term *few* (similar *some*) rather than the more explicit (*all*, *no*, or a specific number) in order to not give potentially wrong information, or because more precise information is not expected. It might be argued that in general there is no violation of the maximum of Quantity, i.e. a hearer would not expect more precise information. In this case we would assign it to Group A. If we see a violation of Quantity (i.e. the hearer expects more precise information), however, then it would be Group B. I put Group A (B?) in the solutions now.

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Exercise 2e) “This rabbit is not as fast as my hedgehog”. The solutions give “Presupposition: the hedgehog is fast”. Shouldn’t this be “Presupposition: the hedgehog is faster than the rabbit”?

No. The latter would be an entailment rather than a presupposition. It is possible that for some people the presupposition given in the solutions might not hold, i.e. we wouldn’t take from the original sentence that the hedgehog is fast (hence the parentheses around this presupposition). However, if we accept that there is a presupposition, then it has to be “the hedgehog is fast”. Note that the inference “the hedgehog is faster than the rabbit” only holds in the negated sentence, it would not hold in the non-negated sentence. Hence, it cannot be a presupposition.

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Section 1: Conversational Implicatures



Grice's Maxims

(5) The Cooperative Principle (Grice 1975: 45)

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

(6) The Maxims of Conversation (Grice 1975: 45–46)

QUALITY: Try to make your contribution one that is true.

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

QUANTITY:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

RELATION (or RELEVANCE): Be relevant.

MANNER: Be perspicuous.

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.

Kroeger (2019), p. 142.

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Group B: Violation due to Clash

Examples in which **a maxim is violated**, but its violation is to be explained by a clash with another maxim.

Context:

A is planning a trip to France and would like to visit a person C. A has a conversation about this with B.

Utterance(s):

- (1) A: Where does C live?
B: Somewhere in the South of France.

Maxim violated (in B's utterance):

Quantity 1 (less information than required due to clash with Quality)

Conversational implicatures (of B's utterance):

- ▶ I don't know the exact name of the place where C lives.

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Conversational Implicature: Cross-Linguistic Variation

“In this kind of machinery [of inferring conversational implicatures], there is in fact some space for **cross-linguistic variation** [...] Apart from the speaker not being in possession of the relevant piece of information, another reason [...] is that the extra information would go beyond the **expected level of specificity**.”

Von Fintel & Matthewson (2008), p. 42, referring to Matsumoto (1995).

(2) This is Andrew’s brother Peter.

Note: When we hear this sentence uttered by somebody in English, we would not infer that the speaker does not know whether Peter is Andrew’s *older* or *younger* brother, but that it is not considered relevant. Hence, there is no conversational implicature to this effect (i.e. based on a clash between the Maxim of Quantity and Quality).

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Conversational Implicature: Cross-Linguistic Variation

If, on the other hand, speakers of a language typically give more specific information in this particular context, then not giving the information can give rise to an implicature.

- (3) Kochira wa Takashi-kun no kyoodai no Michio-kun desu.
this TOP Takashi-Mr. GEN brother GEN Michio-Mr. COP
'Michio is Takashi's brother.'

IMPLICATURE: The speaker does not know whether *older* or *younger* brother.

Von Fintel & Matthewson (2008), p. 42, referring to Matsumoto (1995).

Note: According to Von Matsumoto (1995) Japanese typically distinguishes lexically between *ani* 'older brother', *otooto* 'younger brother', and *kyoodai* 'brother' (i.e. like English *sibling* but clearly male).

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Note

The above argumentation for Japanese hinges upon the fact that sibling age is encoded *lexically*, i.e. by having different lexical items. At least according to the discussion of Kroeger (2019), this could then be seen as rather *conventional implicature* than *conversational implicature*. Remember that for *conventional implicatures* (e.g. contrastive constructions with *but* in English) we would not expect that Grice's Maxims are necessarily relevant.

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Section 2: Presupposition



Formal Definition

“A statement A presupposes a statement B iff:

- (i) if A is true, then B is true,
- (ii) if A is false, then B is [still] true.”

Levinson (1983), p. 175, citing Strawson (1952).

- (4) Statement A: Kepler died in misery.
PRESUPPOSITION B: The name ‘Kepler’ denotes an individual.
- (5) Statement $\neg A$: Kepler did *not* die in misery.
PRESUPPOSITION B: The name ‘Kepler’ denotes an individual.

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Presupposition Triggers

Over the years, a large number of **presupposition triggers** have been identified (for English). These include but are not limited to:

- (a) Definite descriptions:
 - ▶ definite noun phrases
 - ▶ possessive phrases
 - ▶ restrictive relative clauses
- (b) Factive predicates
- (c) Implicative predicates
- (d) Aspectual predicates
- (e) Temporal clauses
- (f) Counterfactuals
- (g) Comparisons
- (h) (Scalar terms)

Kroeger (2019), p. 43.

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Triggers: Definite Descriptions

The usage of a **definite noun phrase** (just as the usage of a proper noun) presupposes that there is an individual that the noun phrase refers to. The usage of a **possessive phrase** presupposes the existence of the possessee. A **restrictive relative clause** presupposes the existence of an individual with a property described in the relative clause.

(6) The King of France is wise.

PRESUPPOSITION: There is an individual that is the King of France.

(7) My cat is wise.

PRESUPPOSITION: The speaker has a cat (i.e. there is a cat which is owned by the speaker).

(8) I'm looking for the man who killed my father.

PRESUPPOSITION: There is a man of whom it holds true that he killed the speaker's father.

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Triggers: Cross-Linguistic Variation

“[...] **not all languages possess exactly the same presupposition triggers**. For example, Matthewson (1998) argues that (along with all other languages of the Salish family), St’át’imcets lacks any **determiners** which presuppose familiarity or uniqueness.”

Von Fintel & Matthewson (2008), p. 35, citing Van Eijk & Williams 1981: 19.

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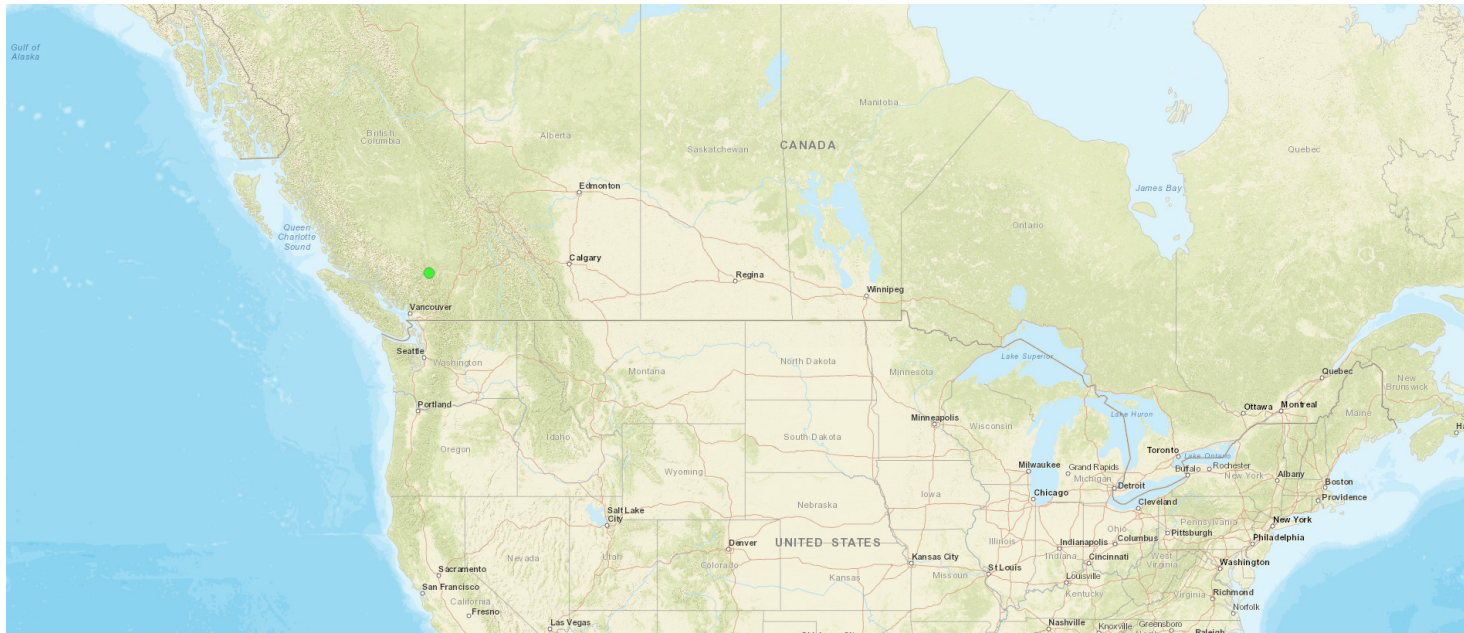
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Triggers: Cross-Linguistic Variation

St'át'imcets¹ (Lillooet) (Salish: North America)

- (9) húy'-lhkan ptakwlh, ptákwlh-min lts7a [ti smém'lhats-a] ...
going.to-1SG.SUBJ tell.story tell.story-APPL here [DET girl-DET]
'I am going to tell a legend, a legend about [a girl]_i ...
- (10) wa7 ku7 ílal láti7 [ti smém'lhats-a]
IMPF REPORT cry DEIC [DET girl-DET]
['The girl]_i was crying there.'

Note: While the usage of definite *the* in English presupposes that the respective girl is part of the common ground, this is not the case for the determiner *ti...-a* in St'át'imcets, which does not distinguish between definite and indefinite.

¹ IPA: [ˈstʰætʰjəmɬətʃ]

See also videos on revitalization projects:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ln8WerHBvvg&t=143s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YnKlaQU3qfo>

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Triggers: Cross-Linguistic Variation

The speakers of St'át'imcets also do not seem to react to typical examples of presupposition failures such as the ones for **scalar terms**.

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- (11) “Take some **more** tea,” the March Hare said to Alice, very earnestly. “I’ve had nothing yet,” Alice replied in an offended tone, “so I can’t take **more**.”

Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll.

St'át'imcets (Lillooet) (Salish: North America)

Context (social, not an elicitation context): B has just walked into A’s house and there has been no prior conversation apart from greetings.

- (12) A: wá7-lhkacw ha xát'-min' ku hu7 ku tih
 IMPF-2SG.SUBJ YNQ want-APPL DET **more** DET tea

‘Would you like **some more** tea?’

B: iy

‘Yes.’

Von Fintel & Matthewson (2008), p. 37.



Note

Of course, the entire argumentation here depends on identifying the “circumfix” *ti -a* as a kind of determiner, and identifying *hu7* as a scalar term with the same function as *more* in English. Such mappings are often called into question by other grammarians who describe a given language.

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Section 3: Speech Acts



Speech Acts

“We are attuned in everyday conversation not primarily to the sentences we utter to one another, but to the **speech acts** that those utterances are used to perform: *requests, warnings, invitations, promises, apologies, predictions, and the like.*”

Green (2017).

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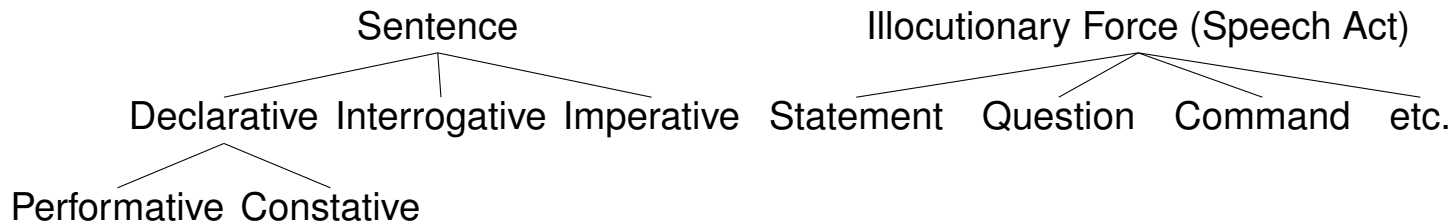
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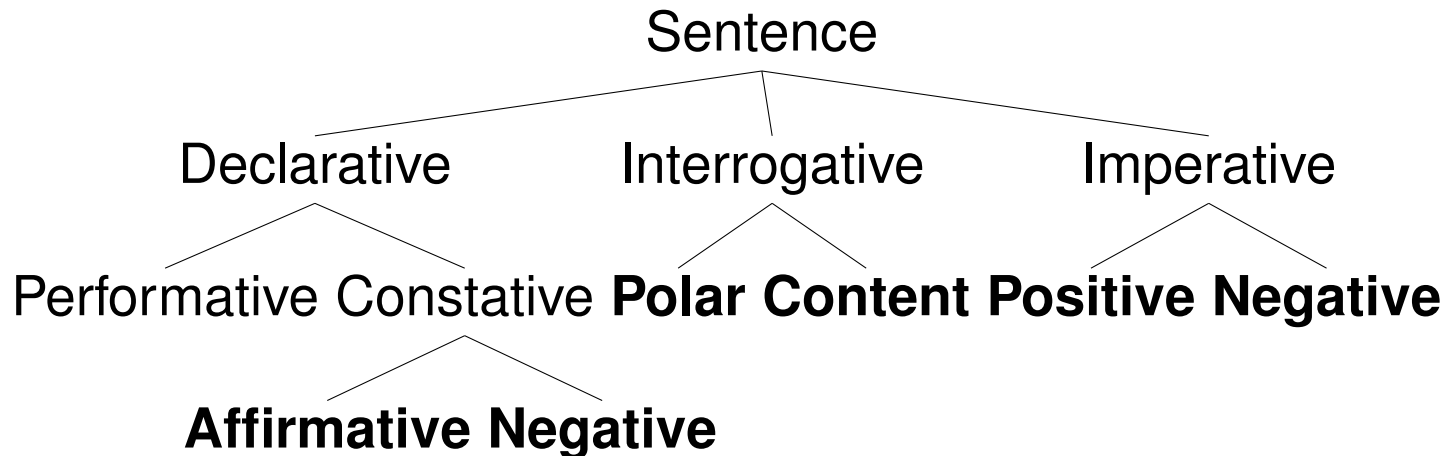


Note: This distinction between *types of sentences* and *types of illocutionary forces/ speech acts* is mostly not strictly adhered to. This is apparent also in Kroeger (2019), p. 181: “Austin called this special class of declarative sentences performatives. He argued that we need to recognize performatives as a new class of speech acts [...] in addition to the commonly recognized speech acts such as statements, questions, and commands.



Sentence Types

According to Velupillai (2012) sentence types might be further subdivided as seen below. The question then is how different **languages across the world encode these sentence types**, and hence the illocutionary forces/ speech acts associated with them.



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Declaratives: Affirmative

“**Affirmative declaratives** are typically used for descriptive speech acts, such as asserting something, describing something, [...]. It is typically the most frequent sentence type, it is typically the least restricted in its distribution, [...]”

Velupillai (2012), p. 346.

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German (Indo-European (Germanic))

- (13) Du sitzt auf dem Boden. (declarative)
‘You are sitting on the floor.’
- (14) **Sitzt du** auf dem Boden? (interrogative)
‘Are you sitting on the floor?’
- (15) **Sitz** auf dem Boden!² (imperative)
‘Sit on the floor!’

²More naturally: *Setz dich auf den Boden!*



Declaratives: Affirmative

“While affirmative declaratives are **most commonly unmarked** as a sentence type, this is by no means an absolute universal.”

Velupillai (2012), p. 346.

Sheko (Afro-Asiatic (North Omotic): Ethiopia)

- (16) kom-s maak-ab-əra ífi-fe-**ke**
chief:DEF-M tell-REL-ACC 3PL-forget-**DECL1**
‘They forgot what the chief told them.’

Note: The declarative marker *-ke* is obligatory on the verb.

**kom-s maak-ab-əra ífi-fe*, would be considered ungrammatical.

However, it could also be argued that *-ke* is a realis marker rather than purely a declarative marker.

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Declaratives: Negative

“In all known languages **clausal negation**³ is realized through **morphology** one way or another: “[t]here are no known instances of languages in which negation is realized by a change in word order or by intonation, and all languages have negative morphemes”[...]. Languages tend to have either **negative particles** or **negative affixes** [...]”

Velupillai (2012), p. 348, citing Dryer (2011g).

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Gaagudju (Australian: Australia)

- (17) **gaayu** i-n-yii-ngi
NEG 3I-IRR-go-PAST
 ‘He didn’t go.’

Chichewa (Niger-Congo (Bantoid))

- (18) Mkângo **s-ú-ku-wá-phwány-a** maûngu.
 III.lion **NEG-III.SM-PRES.-VI.OBJ-smash-FV** VI.pumpkins
 ‘The lion is not smashing them, the pumpkins.’

³Clausal negation is contrasted with *constituent negation*, where only a constituent is negated and not the whole clause, e.g. *no tea could be found* (only the subject NP is negated).



Feature 112A: Negative Morphemes



This feature is described in the text of chapter 112 Negative Morphemes by [Matthew S. Dryer](#) cite

You may combine this feature with another one. Start typing the feature name or number in the field below.

Submit

Values

● Negative affix	395
● Negative particle	502
● Negative auxiliary verb	47
● Negative word, unclear if verb or particle	73
● Variation between negative word and affix	21
● Double negation	119

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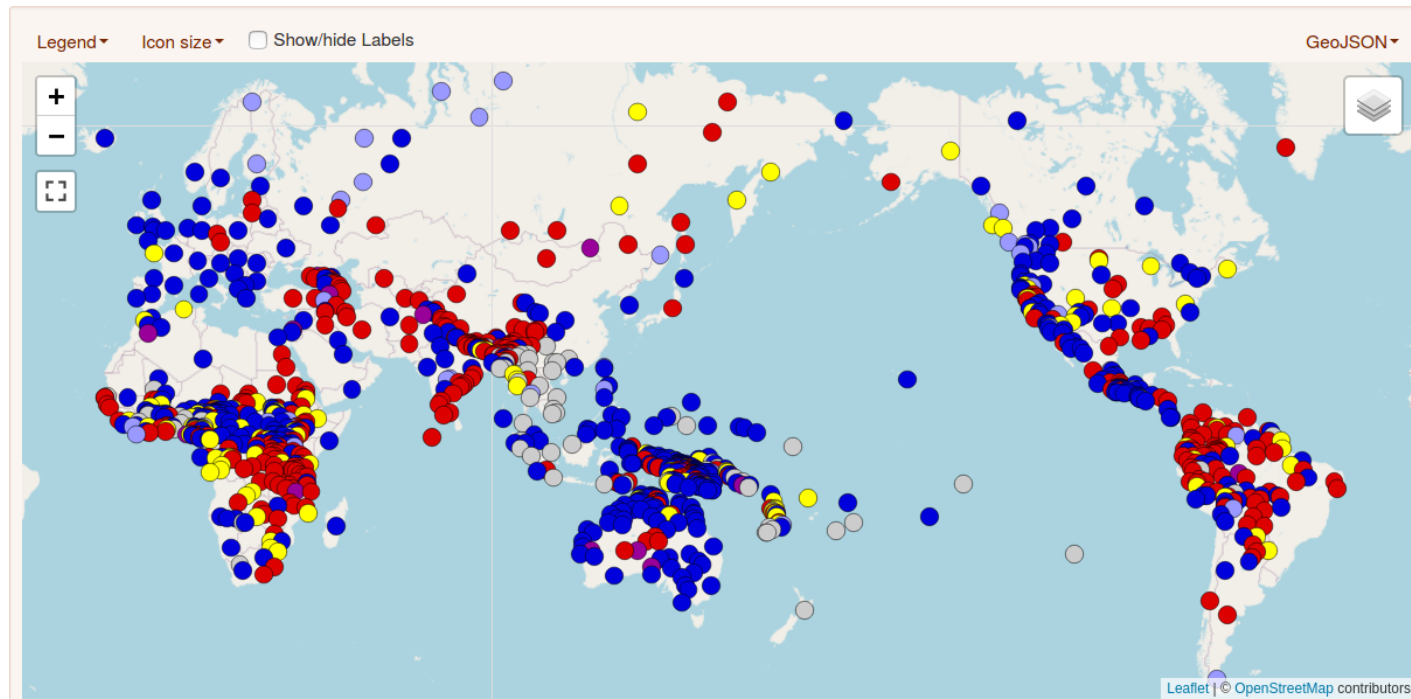
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Dryer (2013), online at <http://wals.info/chapter/112>.



Interrogatives: Polar questions

Polar questions (aka yes-no questions) are typically answered with *yes* or *no*. The majority of languages has a specific strategy to form a polar question, or a combination of strategies. “It is very common for languages to have a **distinct intonation pattern** for polar questions. Often a polar question has a rising intonation, [...]”

Velupillai (2012), p. 352.

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Italian (Indo-European (Romance))

- (19) Laura viene con ↘**noi** (declarative)
‘Laura is coming with us.’
- (20) Laura viene con ↗**noi** (interrogative)
‘Laura is coming with us?’



Interrogatives: Polar questions

“The by far most common strategy in Dryer’s database is to have **question particles**, which may either be a free particle or a clitic added to the declarative sentence. This is found in 584 languages (61.2%) spread all over the world.”

Velupillai (2012), p. 354.

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Ainu (Isolate: Japan)

- (21) pirka-p ne **ya**
rich-person be **Q**
‘Is (he) a rich person?’

Tzutujil (Mayan: Guatemala)

- (22) **la** n-at-war-i
Q INCOMPL-2SG-sleep-IV_{NPFS}
‘Are you going to sleep?’



Interrogatives: Polar questions

“A well known, but actually quite rare strategy for marking polar questions is through change of word order. This is found in only 13 languages [...] almost all of them clustered in Western Europe [...]”

Velupillai (2012), p. 353.

Swedish (Indo-European (Germanic))

(23) Han kommer (declarative)

‘He is coming.’

(24) **Kommer han** (interrogative)

‘Is he coming?’

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Interrogatives: Polar questions

“In Nkore-Kiga, the only difference between the statement and the question is how the final syllable is pronounced. In declaratives the final syllable is **whispered** (indicated through superscript here), while in interrogatives it is voiced.”

Velupillai (2012), p. 355.

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Nkore-Kiga (Niger-Congo (Bantoid): Uganda)

(25) n'-omushai^{ja} (declarative)

AC-man

'It is a man.'

(26) n'-omushaija (interrogative)

AC-man

'Is it a man?'



Feature 116A: Polar Questions



This feature is described in the text of chapter 116 Polar Questions by Matthew S. Dryer cite

You may combine this feature with another one. Start typing the feature name or number in the field below.

Values

● Question particle	585
● Interrogative verb morphology	164
● Mixture of previous two types	15
● Interrogative word order	13
◆ Absence of declarative morphemes	4
● Interrogative intonation only	173
○ No interrogative-declarative distinction	1

Q&As

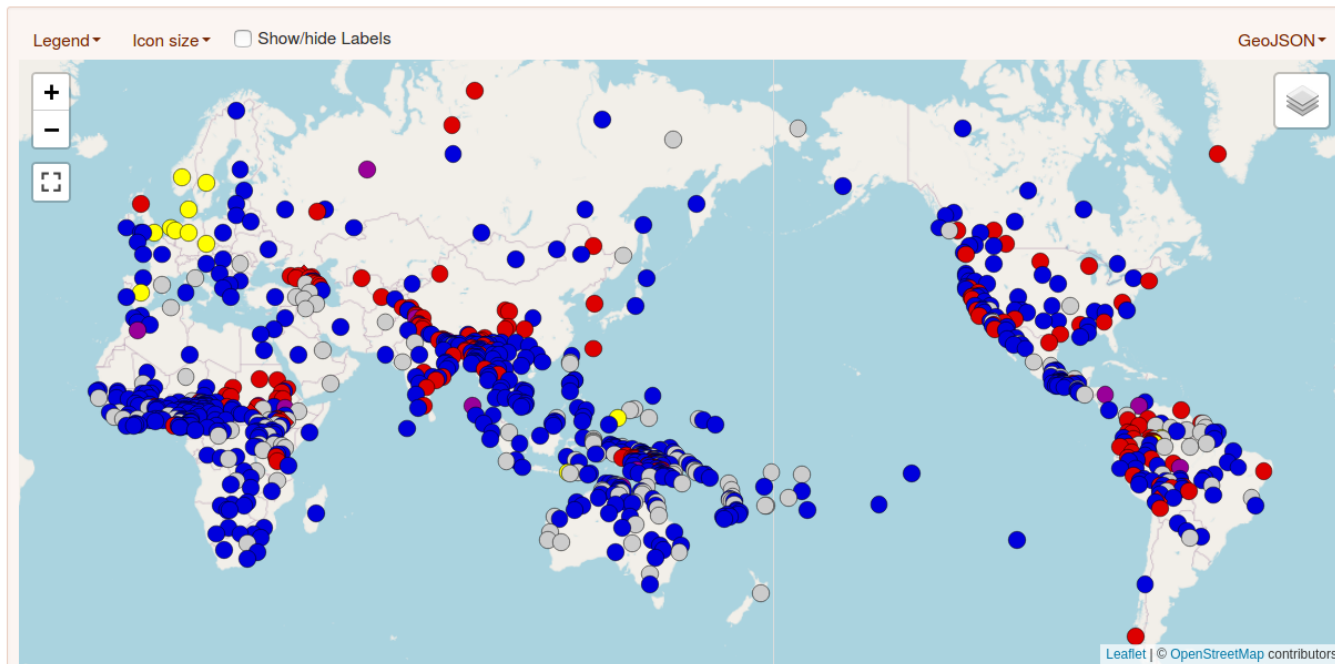
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Dryer (2013b), online at <http://wals.info/chapter/116>.



Interrogatives: Content questions

“**Content questions** (also called **question-word questions**, **information questions**, **wh-questions** and **constituent interrogatives**) contain an **interrogative phrase** and demand a specific answer containing other information than just a confirmation or nonconfirmation.”

Velupillai (2012), p. 356.

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German (Indo-European (Germanic))

(27) **Was** iss-t du?
what eat-2SG you
‘What are you eating?’

Dumi (Sino-Tibetan (Bodic): Nepal)

(28) an-a **mwo:** a-dzi-t-a
2SG-ERG **what** MS-eat-NPST-23S
‘What are you eating?’



Feature 93A: Position of Interrogative Phrases in Content Questions



This feature is described in the text of chapter 93 [Position of Interrogative Phrases in Content Questions](#) by Matthew S.

Dryer [cite](#)

You may combine this feature with another one. Start typing the feature name or number in the field below.

× 93A: Position of Interrogative Phrases in Content Questions

Submit

Values

● Initial interrogative phrase	264
● Not initial interrogative phrase	615
● Mixed	23

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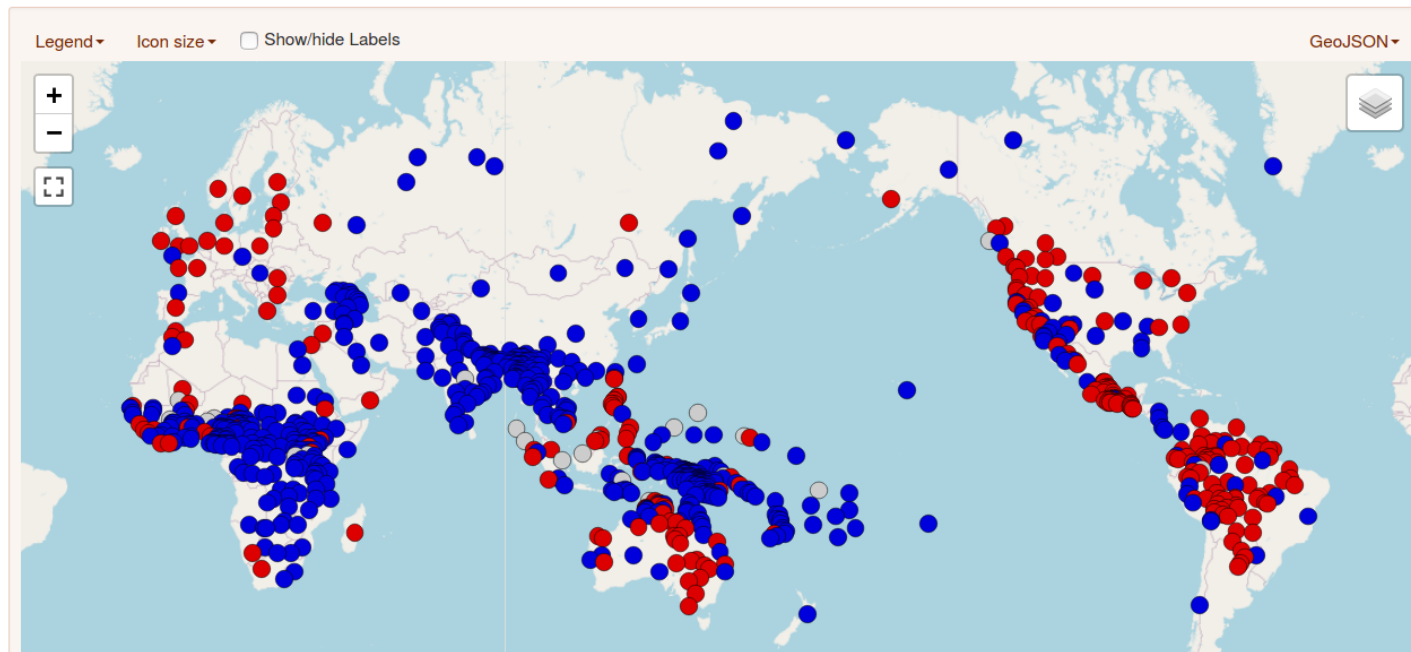
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Dryer (2013c), online at <http://wals.info/chapter/93>.



Imperatives: Positive

Positive imperatives (aka directives), “usually simply termed *imperatives*, are used to initiate action.”

Velupillai (2012), p. 359.

German (Indo-European (Germanic))

- (29) **Iss!**
eat.**IMP.2SG**
‘Eat!’ (imperative)
- (30) Du iss-t.
you eat-IND.2SG
‘You are eating.’ (declarative)
- (31) Iss-t du?
eat-IND.2SG you
‘Are you eating?’ (interrogative)

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Imperatives: Positive

“English does not have a **special morphological form** for the imperative, but in fact it is much more common to have one: 425 of 547 languages (or 77.7%) [...] have a special morphological form for the imperative while 122 (22.3%) do not.”

Velupillai (2012), p. 220, citing Van Auwera & Lejeune (2013).

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Comanche (Uto-Aztecan (Numic): USA)

- (32) yu-kat̪i
quiet-sit(SG.SUBJ)
‘Sit down and be quiet!’ (said to one person)
- (33) yu-y̥ikwi-p̪ikw̪ih
quiet-sit(PL.SUBJ)-**DU.IMP**
‘Sit down and be quiet!’ (said to two persons)
- (34) yu-y̥ikwi-ka
quiet-sit(PL.SUBJ)-**PL.IMP**
‘Sit down and be quiet!’ (said to more than two persons)



Feature 70A: The Morphological Imperative



This feature is described in the text of chapter 70 The Morphological Imperative by Johan van der Auwera and Ludo

Lejeune with Umarani Pappuswamy and Valentin Goussev cite

You may combine this feature with another one. Start typing the feature name or number in the field below.

* 70A: The Morphological Imperative

Submit

Values

● Second singular and second plural	292
● Second singular	43
● Second plural	2
● Second person number-neutral	89
○ No second-person imperatives	122

Q&As

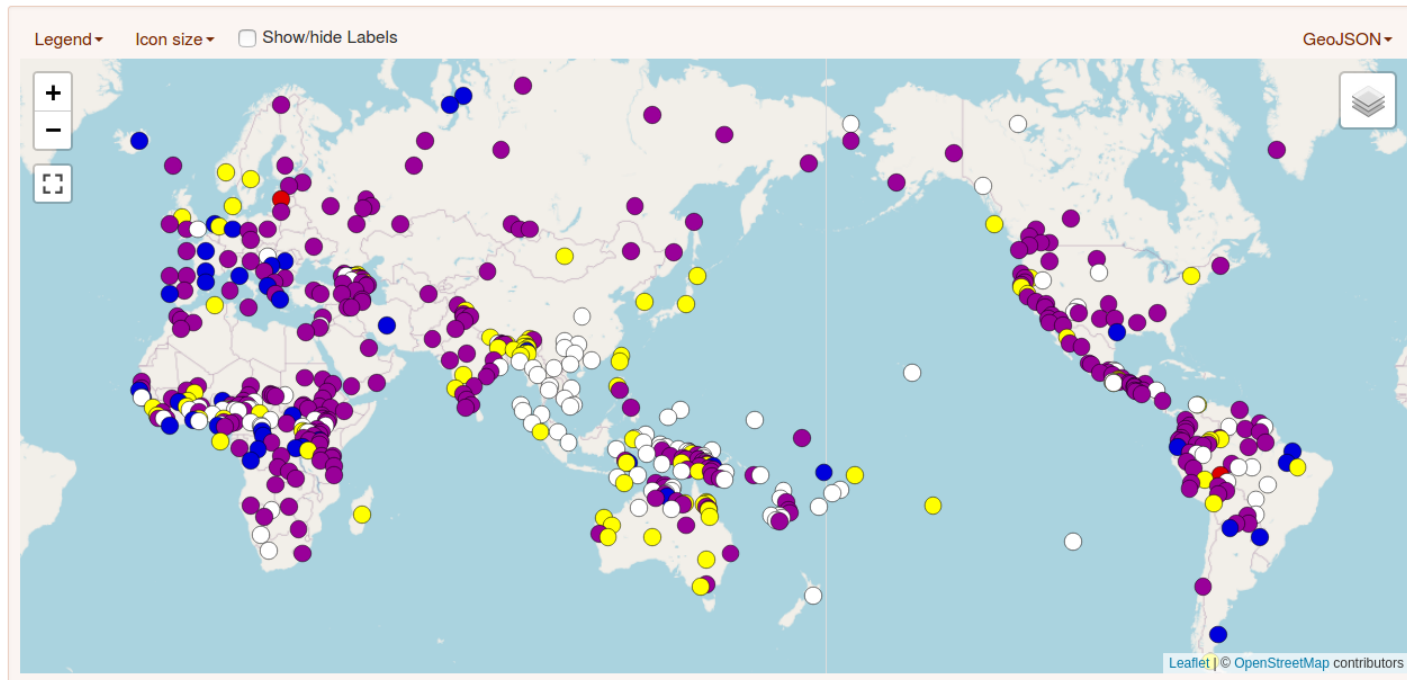
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Van der Auwera & Lejeune (2013), online at <http://wals.info/chapter/70>.



Imperatives: Negative

“All known languages have a way of commanding someone not to do something, but how this is expressed may differ. **Negative imperatives**, or **prohibitives**, are the device used to tell someone not to carry out an action.”

Velupillai (2012), p. 364.

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German (Indo-European (Germanic))

(35) Iss das!
 eat.IMP.2SG this
 ‘Eat this!’

(36) Iss das **nicht!**
 eat.IMP.2SG this **not**
 ‘Don’t eat this!’

Note: In the sample by Van der Auwera & Lejeune (2013b) with overall 495 languages, 113 of them (or 22.8%) use the positive imperative form with a regular negative (e.g. particle as in German) to form a prohibitive. The most common strategy (182 languages) is to use a negative particle which is different from the regular one.



Imperatives: Negative

There are several other more or less common strategies. Another (rather uncommon) strategy is to have **verbal morphology** for both positive imperatives and prohibitives.

Velupillai (2012), p. 365-366.

Kayardild (Australian (Tangkic): Australia)

- (37) duura-**tha** ngad
poke-**IMP** 1SG.NOM
'Poke me!'
- (38) duura-**na** ngad
poke-**PROHIB** 1SG.NOM
'Don't poke me!'

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Indirect Speech Acts



Indirect Speech Act

“We might define an **indirect speech act** (following Searle 1975) as an utterance in which one illocutionary act (the **primary act**) is intentionally performed by means of the performance of another act (the **literal act**). In other words, it is an utterance whose **form does not reflect the intended illocutionary force.**”

Kroeger (2019), p. 186.

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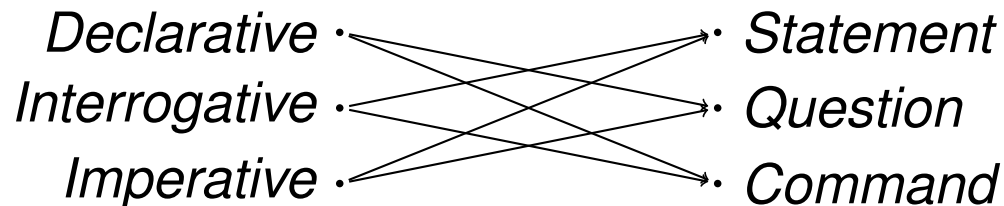
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Indirect Speech Acts as Politeness Markers

Indirect speech acts might function as **politeness markers** (besides other strategies such as honorifics). However, whether this strategy works or not depends heavily on the cultural context, and even on individual differences within the same culture.

Velupillai (2012), p. 368-369.

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(39) A to B (at the dinner table): Would you like some more potatoes?

B: No, thank you.

INDIRECT SPEECH ACT I (by A): Offer (in form of a question). ✓

INDIRECT SPEECH ACT II (by A): Request to ask back. ✗

Note: Person A might just intend to politely offer person B more. However, they might also expect to be asked back. So B's answer works fine in the first case, but in the second case there is miscommunication.



Speech Acts: Cultural Differences

“[...] specific differences between languages in the area of indirect speech acts are motivated, to a considerable degree, by **differences in cultural norms and cultural assumptions**, and the general mechanisms themselves are **culture-specific.**”

Wierzbicka (1985), p. 173

Journal of Pragmatics 9 (1985) 145–178
North-Holland

DIFFERENT CULTURES, DIFFERENT LANGUAGES, DIFFERENT SPEECH ACTS

Polish vs. English

Anna WIERZBICKA *

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Speech Acts: Giving Advice

“In a language like Polish, advice is typically offered in the form of an imperative [...] In English advice would normally be formulated more tentatively.”

Wierzbicka (1985), p. 150

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Polish (Indo-European (Slavic))

- (40) Ja ci radzę powiedz mu prawdę.
‘I advise you: tell him the truth.’ (imperative)

English (Indo-European (Germanic))

- (41) If I were you I would tell him the truth. (declarative)
(42) Why don't you tell him the truth? (interrogative)



Speech Acts: Requests

“In English, if the speaker wants to get the addressee to do something and if s/he does not assume that s/he could force the addressee to do it, s/he would normally not use a bare imperative.”

Wierzbicka (1985), p. 150

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English (Indo-European (Germanic))

- (43) Will you close the window please?
- (44) Would you close the window please?
- (45) Do you want to close the window?
- (46) Why don't you close the window?
etc.



Speech Acts: Requests

“Not a single one of these utterances could be translated literally into Polish and used as a request. In particular, literal equivalents of sentences in the frame *why don't you* would be interpreted as a combination of a question and a criticism.”

Wierzbicka (1985), p. 150

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Polish (Indo-European (Slavic))

- (47) Dlaczego nie zamkniesz okna?
(Literally:) ‘Why don’t you close the window?’



Speech Acts: Second Language Learning

“Poles learning English must be taught the potential ambiguity of *would-you* sentences, or *why don't you*-sentences, just as they must be taught the polysemy of the word *bank*.”

Wierzbicka (1985), p. 174

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English (Indo-European (Germanic))

(48) Would you close the window?

SPEECH ACT OPTION I: Would you close the window (if you were in the position to)? (genuine question)

SPEECH ACT OPTION II: Please close the window. (request)



Summary



Summary

- ▶ **Conversational implicatures** might differ according to the expectation of what, for instance, the Maxims of Quality and Quantity require in any particular language community/culture (e.g. Japanese words for ‘brother’).
- ▶ **Presuppositions** can differ with regards to the **particular triggers** employed in any given language (e.g. determiners in English versus St’at’imcets.)
- ▶ **Speech acts** differ considerably on the side of the “encoding”, i.e. the sentence type and encoding strategy used, but also potentially on the side of the illocutionary force. Especially, **indirect speech acts** require conversational implicatures that can again differ between cultures.

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Thank You.

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