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Semantics & Pragmatics SoSe 2023

Lecture 19:
Cross-Linguistic Diversity in Pragmatics

18/07/2023, Christian Bentz

Overview

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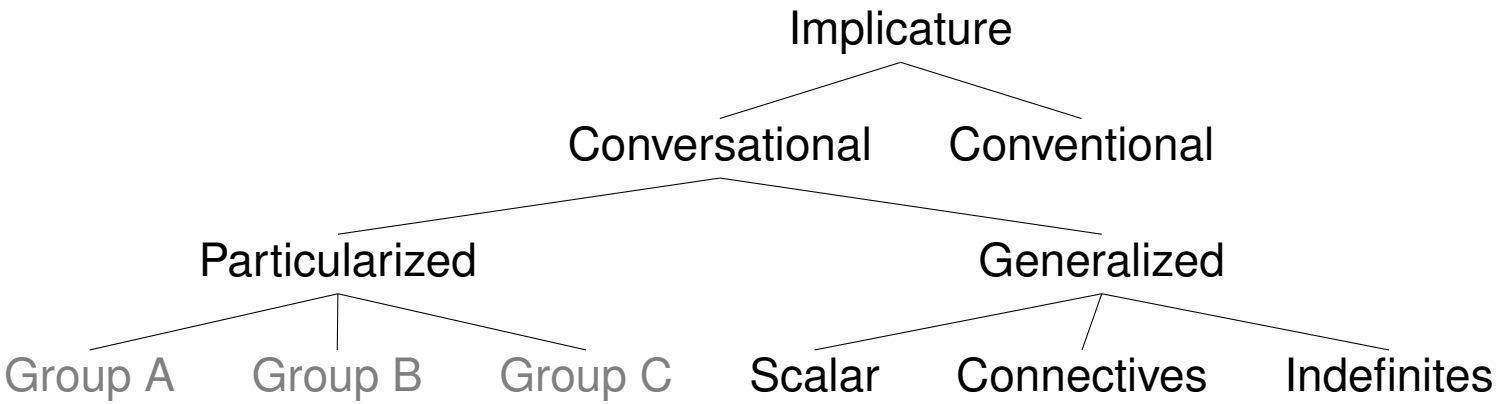
Q&As

Groups of Implicatures

In the lecture, there is a hierarchy which suggests that groups of implicature are only relevant for particularized conversational implicatures. But in the exercise groups are also given for generalized conversational implicatures.



Yes, this is an inconsistency. I removed the subgrouping under “Particularized” in the slides. At least for some “Generalized” implicatures it might be argued that different groups are relevant.

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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.

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.

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).

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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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.

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) Aspecutal predicates

(e) Temporal clauses

(f) Counterfactuals

(g) Comparisons

(h) (Scalar terms)

Kroeger (2019), p. 43.

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.

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.

Triggers: Cross-Linguistic Variation

St'át'imcets[1] (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: [ˈstɬˈætɬˈjəmxətʃ]
See also videos on revitalization projects:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ln8WerHBvwg&t=143s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YnKIaQU3qfo

Discussion Point

According to the standard theory of presupposition, definite determiners give rise to the presupposition that the noun phrase refers to a specific/familiar/unique entity. While for indefinite determiners this is not the case. What about the following examples in English?

- **A** dog has four legs.
- **The** dog has four legs.
- I saw **a** dog.
- I saw **the** dog.
- **The** brown dog was sitting there in the shade.
- **A** brown dog was sitting there in the shade.

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**.

(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 Caroll.

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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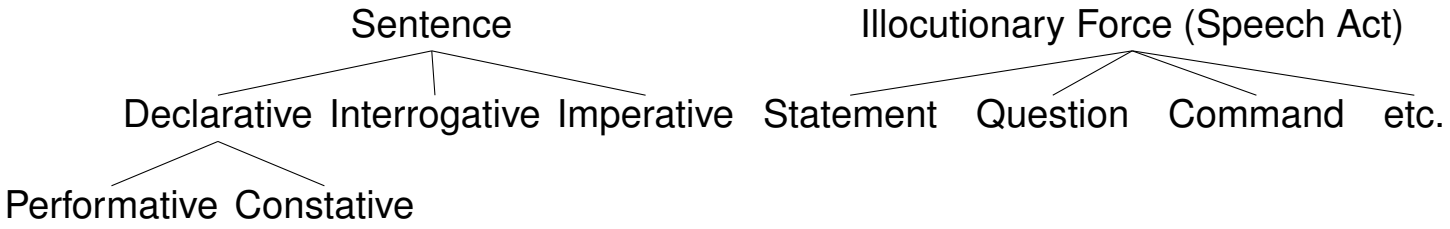
Section 3: Speech Acts

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."

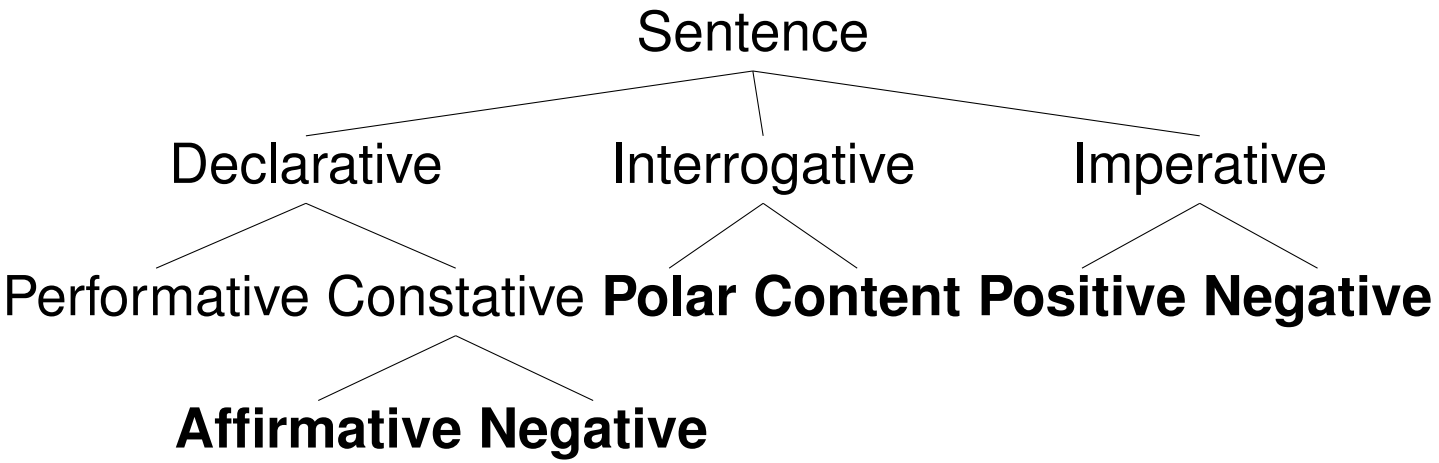
Green (2017).



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**, end hence the illocutionary forces/ speech acts associated with them.



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.

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!'

[2]More 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 íʃi-ʃe-**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 íʃi-ʃe*, would be considered ungrammatical.
However, it could also be argued that *-ke* is a realis marker rather than purely a declarative marker.

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).

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.'

[3]Clausal 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

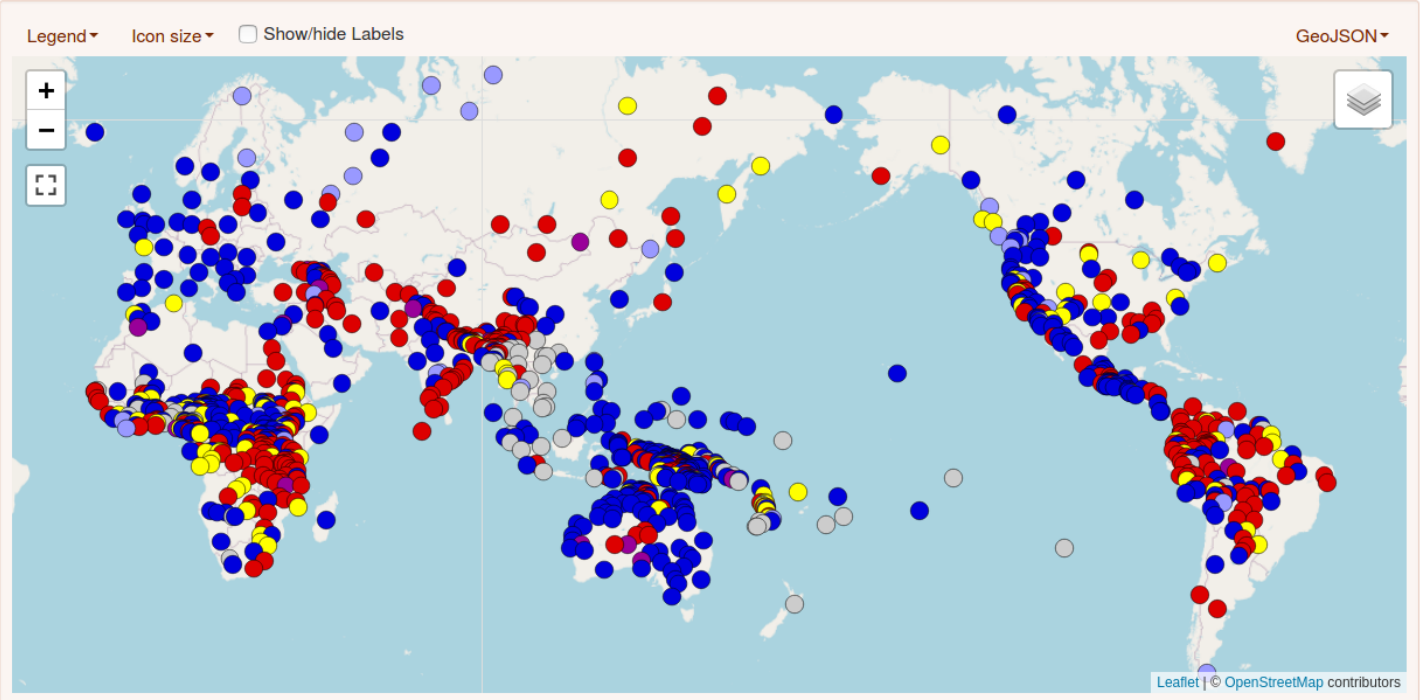
This feature is described in the text of chapter 112 Negative Morphemes by Matthew S. Dryer cite

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

× 112A: Negative Morphemes 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



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.

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.

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?'

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.

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

(25) n'-omushai$^{\textbf{ja}}$ (declarative)
AC-man
'It is a man.'

(26) n'-omushai**ja** (interrogative)
AC-man
'Is it a man?'

Feature 116A: Polar Questions

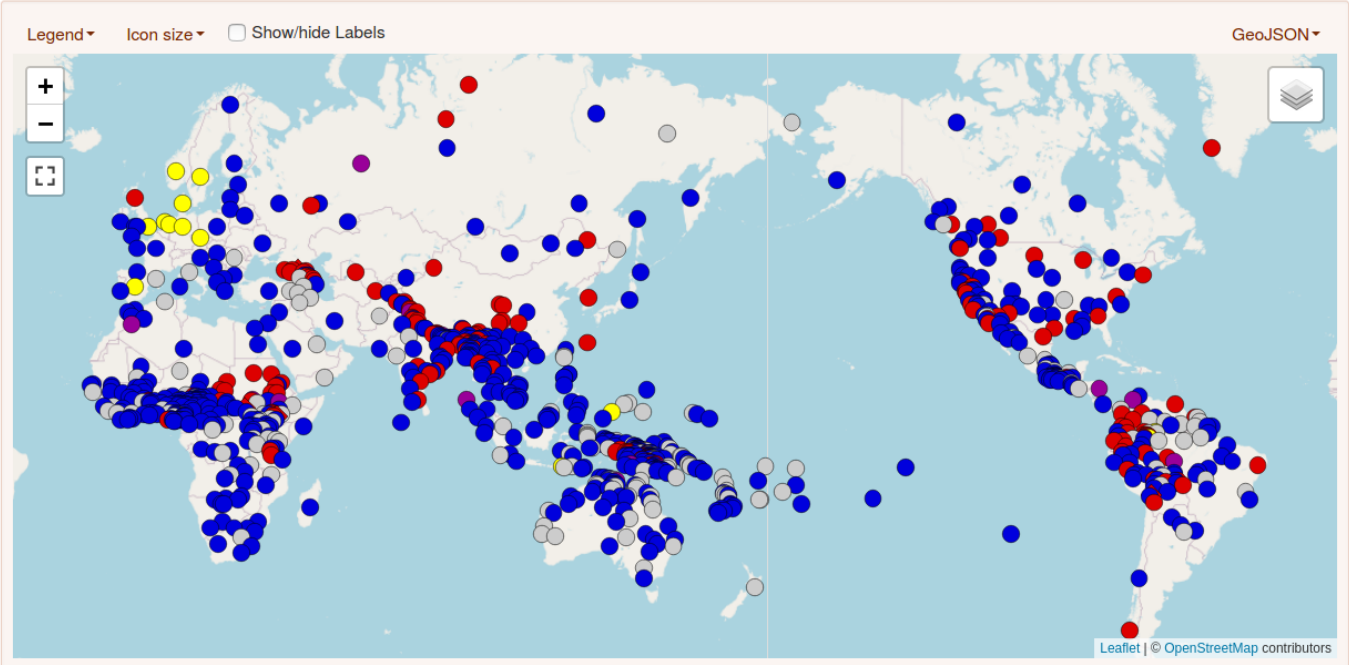
This feature is described in the text of chapter 116 Polar Questions by Matthew S. Dryer cite

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

× 116A: Polar Questions Submit

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



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.

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-dzɨ-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

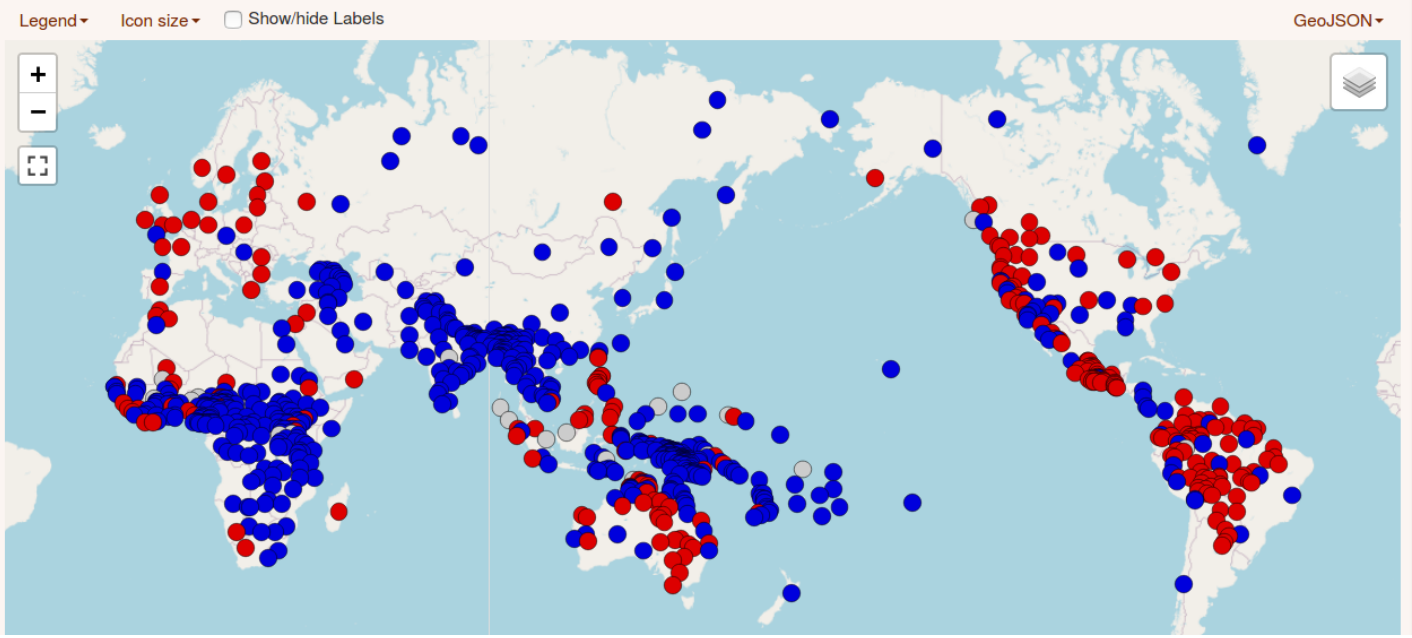
You may combine this feature with another one. Start typing the feature name or number in the field below.

93A: Position of Interrogative Phrases in Content Questions

Submit

Values

Initial interrogative phrase	264
Not initial interrogative phrase	615
Mixed	23



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)

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).

Comanche (Uto-Aztecan (Numic): USA)

(32) yu-kat+
quiet-sit(SG.SUBJ)
'Sit down and be quiet!' (said to one person)

(33) yu-y+kwi-**p+kw+h**
quiet-sit(PL.SUBJ)-**DU.IMP**
'Sit down and be quiet!' (said to two persons)

(34) yu-y+kwi-**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

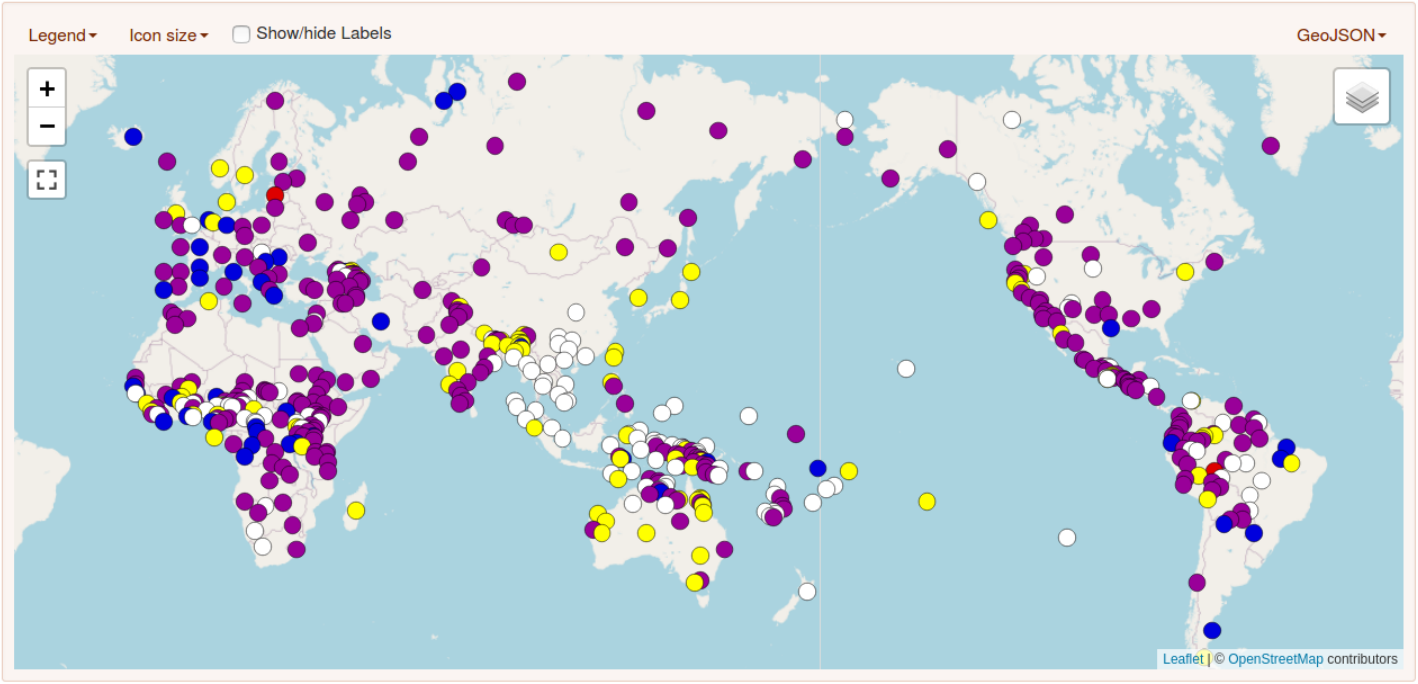
You may combine this feature with another one. Start typing the feature name or number in the field below.

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



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.

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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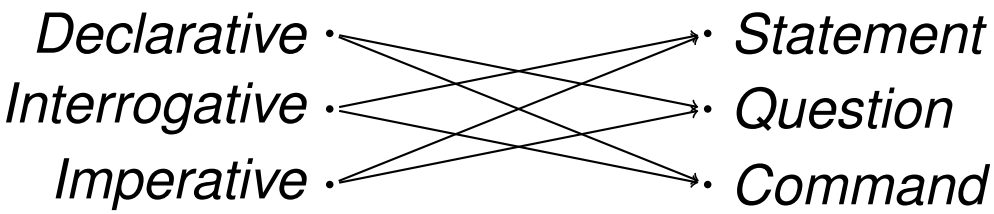
Indirect Speech Acts

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.



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.

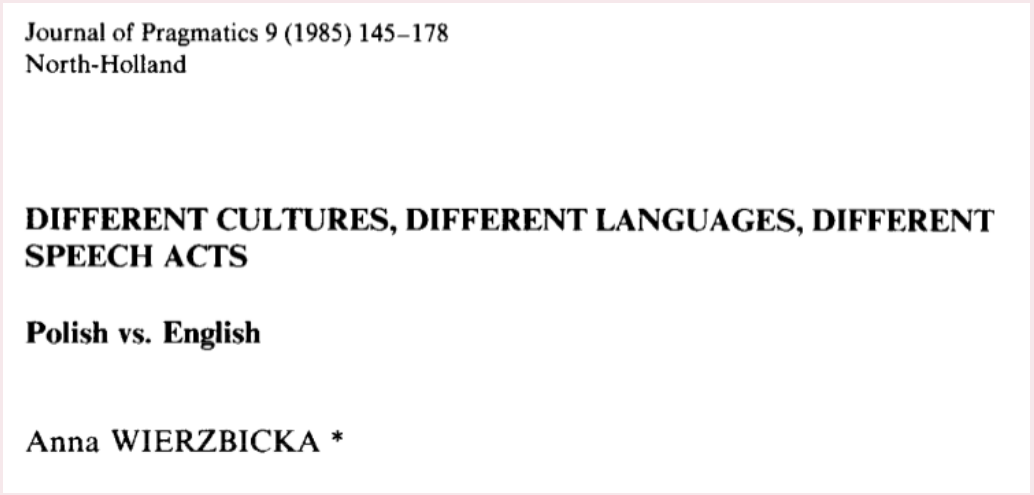
(39) A to B (at the dinner table): Would you like some more potatoes?
B: No, thank you.
INDIRECT SPEECH ACT I (by A): Offer (in form of a question). ✓
INDIRECT SPEECH ACT II (by A): Request to ask back. x

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 *

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

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

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

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

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.

References

References

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Thank You.

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