Semantics & Pragmatics SoSe 2023
Lecture 20: Pragmatic Universals

20/07/2023, Christian Bentz

Overview

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.

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.

(1) 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. (Quantity 1 clashing with Quality 2)
     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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Universality of Gricean Maxims

"It should be clear that this cross-linguistic difference is **not a difference in the applicability of the Gricean machinery** but a difference in what the relevant alternatives to a given utterance are and thus what kinds of rationality comparisons need to be calculated."

Von Fintel & Matthewson (2008), p. 42.

Variation in Coding

brother → male sibling
brother → older male sibling
brother → younger male sibling

kyoodai → male sibling
ani → older male sibling
otooto → younger male sibling

Gricean Maxims

Quality
Quantity
Relevance
Manner

Universality of Gricean Maxims

"Thus we expect **variation in the details of specific Gricean calculations** but not **in the shape of the machinery**. We concur with Green when she writes that "it would astonish me to find a culture in which Grice's maxims were not routinely observed, and required for the interpretation of communicative intentions, and all other things being equal, routinely exploited to create implicature"."

Von Fintel & Matthewson (2008), p. 43-44, citing Green (1990), p. 419.

Malagasy as a Counter-Example?

"Given that most communication involves eliciting information whose content is not known to hearers, much of the communication in a Malagasy community is characterized by **speakers' reluctance to impart information**. In many talk-exchanges, **Malagasy interlocutors are simply uninformative**."

Keenan (1976), p. 79.
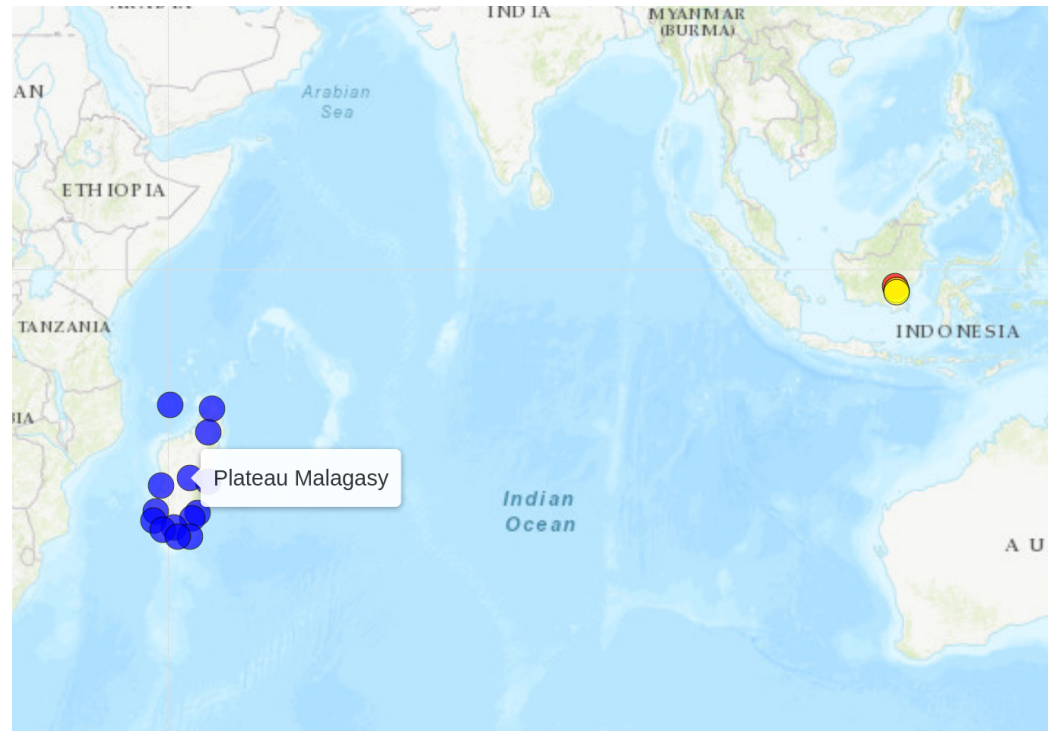
Plateau Malagasy (plt)[1]
Family: Austronesian
Macroarea: Africa
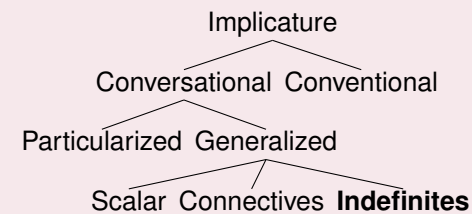[1]There are many Malagasy varieties as can be seen in the map. It is unclear if this is the variety referred to here (https://glottolog.org/).

Implicatures of Indefinites

"When someone in American society says 'There is a girl coming' or 'I see a girl' or 'I see a person', the hearer infers that the speaker is not intimately associated with the referent. In fact, Grice cites precisely this usage as an example of a conversational implicature that may hold in all contexts."

Keenan (1976), p. 73, citing Grice.

Implicature
Conversational Conventional
Particularized Generalized
Scalar Connectives **Indefinites**

(2) I walked into a house. (alienable)
GENERALIZED IMPLICATURE: The house was not my house.

(3) Arthur is meeting a woman tonight. (alienable)
GENERALIZED IMPLICATURE: The woman is not Arthur's wife or close relative.

Implicatures of Indefinites

"The hesitation to make explicit statements concerning the actions and beliefs of individuals affects a wide range of speech behaviors [in Malagasy]. One finds, for example, that speakers **regularly avoid identifying an individual in their utterances**. Many villagers feel that in identifying an individual, they may bring his identity to the attention of unfriendly forces."

Keenan (1976), p. 71-74.

Context: A mother asking her son about her husband:

(4)　Mbola mator y ve ny olona?
　　　'Is the person still sleeping?'

　　　GENERALIZED IMPLICATURE (English): The person is unknown to the speaker.
　　　GENERALIZED IMPLICATURE (Malagasy): ?

Further Examples

Section 1:
Conversational
Implicatures

Section 2:
Presuppositions

Section 3:
Speech Acts

Summary

References

Context: A boy talking about his sister coming:

(5)   Misy zazavavy ho avy.
      'There is a girl who is coming.'

      GENERALIZED IMPLICATURE (English): The girl is unknown to
      the speaker.
      GENERALIZED IMPLICATURE (Malagasy): ?

*Context: The speaker knows that the dishes were washed by another
person called Bozy:*

(6)   Nosasana tamin'ny savony ny vilia.
      Washed   with.the soap   the dishes
      'The dishes were washed with the soap.'

      GENERALIZED IMPLICATURE (English): The washer of the dishes
      is unknown to the speaker.
      GENERALIZED IMPLICATURE (Malagasy): ?

Is the Maxim of Quantity relevant in Malagasy?

"It would be misleading to conclude that the maxim 'Be informative' does not operate at all in a Malagasy community. [...] Rather, it is simply that they [Malagasy speakers] do not have the contrary **expectation that in general interlocutors will satisfy one another's informational needs** [...] Three dimensions of the speech situation influence adherence to or abandonment of the maxim:"

► *The significance of the information*: Information is more likely withheld when it is not easily accessible to the hearer.

► *Personal relationship*: A speaker is more likely to provide information to a socially close hearer.

► *The gender of the speaker*: Women are more likely to be informative.

Keenan (1976), p. 75-78.

Isolating-Monocategorial-Associational (IMA) Languages

► *morphologically isolating*:
  no word-internal morphological structure;

► *syntactically monocategorial*:
  no distinct syntactic categories;

► *semantically associational*:
  no distinct construction-specific rules of semantic interpretation.

Gil (2009). How much grammar does it take to sail a boat?

Example: Riau Indonesian

(7)   *Ayam   makan*
chicken eat
A(CHICKEN, EAT)

"The chicken is eating."
"The chickens that were eaten."
"The reason chickens eat."
etc.

"The present analysis of Riau Indonesian runs counter to arguments [...] about grammatical simplicity being compensated for by "hidden complexity" in the semantics or pragmatics [...] rather, simple forms map onto simple meanings with no reason to believe that the pragmatics then automatically steps in to fill in any number of additional more complex details [...]."

Gil (2009). How much grammar does it take to sail a boat? p. 23-24.

Discussion Point

Does Riau Indonesion run counter the "Gricean machinery"? I.e. is the Maxim of Quantity simply not acting here in the background when speakers are communicating?

(8) *Ayam   makan*
chicken eat
A(CHICKEN, EAT)

"The chicken is eating."
"The chickens that were eaten."
"The reason chickens eat."
etc.

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Section 2: Presuppositions

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).

(9)   Statement A: Kepler died in misery.
       PRESUPPOSITION B: The name 'Kepler' denotes an individual.

(10)   Statement ¬A: Kepler did *not* die in misery.
       PRESUPPOSITION B: The name 'Kepler' denotes an individual.

Universality of Presuppositions

According to Von Fintel & Matthewson (2008) "almost every semanticist" (and hence likely also pragmaticists) would hold that:

(11)   **All languages have presuppositions**.

So this implies the **universality** of the pragmatic concept of presupposition.

Universality of Presuppositions

They then re-formulate this rather coarse-grained statement by teasing it appart:

(12)   All languages allow their speakers to express aspects of meaning which

    (a)   are not asserted, but somehow taken for granted,
    (b)   impose some constraints on when an utterance is felicitous,
    (c)   project through certain entailment-canceling operators [e.g. negation].

However, since there is relatively little cross-linguistic research on presuppositions, it is hard to really assess the validity of the statements above.

Von Fintel & Matthewson (2008), p. 34.

Universality of 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
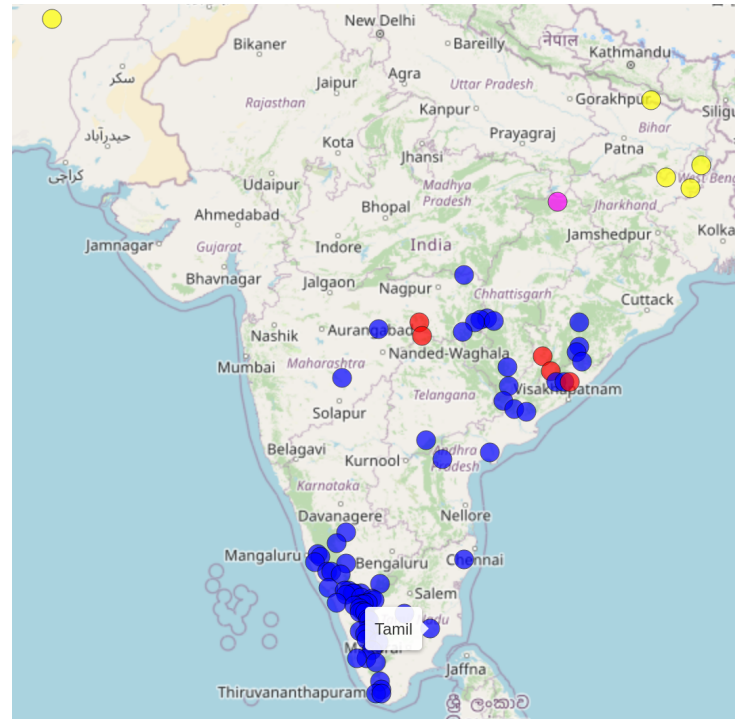
(g) Comparisons

(h) Scalar terms

Kroeger (2019), p. 43.

Empirical Evidence: Tamil and English

"In this paper [...] we have chosen to concentrate on the extremely detailed parallelism between English and one Non-Indo-European language, the colloquial Tamil of South India."

Levinson & Annamalai (1992), p. 239.

Tamil (tam)[1]
Family: Dravidian
Macroarea: Eurasia
[1]Glottolog 4.2.1., online at https://glottolog.org/

List of Presupposition Triggers

The following list is found in Levinson & Annamalai (1992), p. 230-234. Note that the respective presuppositions are supposed to arise in both English and Tamil.

1. **Definite descriptions**

   (13) reNTu tale paampe   paatteen/paakkale.
         two   head snake-ACC I.saw/didn't.see
         'I saw/didn't see the snake with two heads.'

         PRESUPPOSITION: There exists a snake with two heads.

2. **(Non-)restrictive relative clauses**

   (14) onne katicca   reNTu tale paampe   paatteen.
         you   having.bit two   head snake-ACC I.saw
         'I saw the two headed snake which bit you.'

         PRESUPPOSITION: A two headed snake bit you.

3. **Factive verbs**

(15)   enakku maRe pencatu terincatu/teriyale.
        to.me   rain   falling   was.known/not.known
        'I knew/didn't know that it was raining.'
        PRESUPPOSITION: It was raining.

4. **Temporal clauses**

(16)   maRe Peyya munnaale avan vantaan/varale.
        'He came/didn't come before the rain fell.'
        PRESUPPOSITION: The rain fell.

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5. **Change of state verbs**

(17) jaan ciukareT kuTikkirate niruttiTTaan/niruttale.
      John cigarette imbibing   stopped/didn't.stop

      'John stopped/didn't stop smoking.'

      PRESUPPOSITION: John had been smoking.

6. **Implicative verbs**

(18) naan avankiTTe colla marantuTTeen/marakale.

      'I forgot to tell him.'

      PRESUPPOSITION: I wanted to tell him.

Note: There are several more examples, i.e. clefts, implicit clefts, iteratives, presuppositions of questions, which we haven't discussed before though.

Empirical Evidence: Tamil and English

It was shown that:

► Presupposition triggers in English and Tamil are precisely parallel.

► Presupposition behavior in complex sentences is similar in English and Tamil.

Levinson & Annamalai (1992), p. 239.

Empirical Counter-Evidence: St'át'imcets

"[...] **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.

St'át'imcets[1] (Lillooet) (Salish: North America)

(19) 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]$_i$ ...

(20) 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.

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[1]IPA: [ˈst͡ɬʼæt͡ɬʼˈjəmxət͡ʃ], see also youtube video *St'at'imc Language Program* for how to pronounce it.

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Empirical Counter-Evidence: St'át'imcets

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**.

(21)   "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.

(22)   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.

Conclusion: Universality of Presuppositions (?)

"We therefore tentatively conclude that **all languages do have presuppositions**, but how those presuppositions behave may differ from language to language. We also observe, as noted earlier in this section, that even if all languages possess presuppositions, there is **cross-linguistic variation** in whether or not certain elements (such as determiners) are presuppositional."

Von Fintel & Matthewson (2008), p. 41.

Section 3: Speech Acts

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.
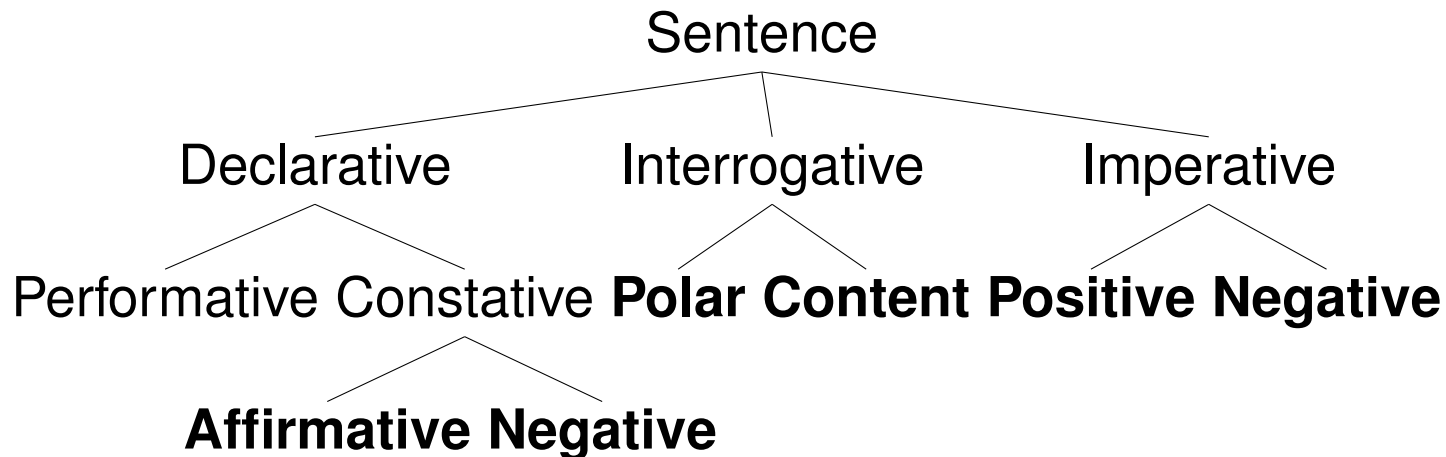
Sentence

Declarative   Interrogative   Imperative

Performative Constative **Polar Content Positive Negative**

Affirmative Negative

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
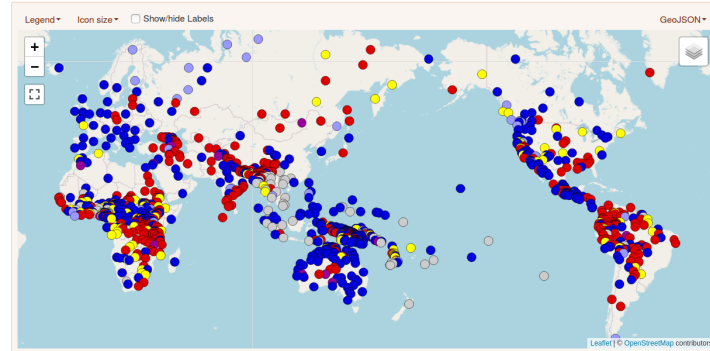
Feature 93A: Position of Interrogative Phrases in Content Questions

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
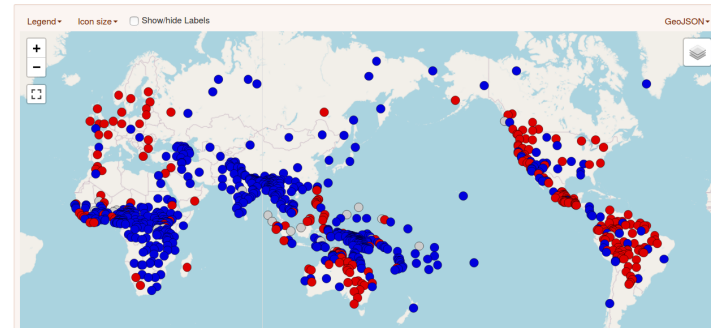
Feature 116A: Polar Questions

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
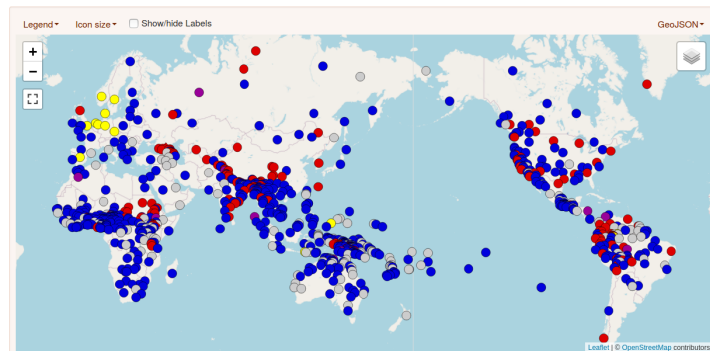
Feature 70A: The Morphological Imperative

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
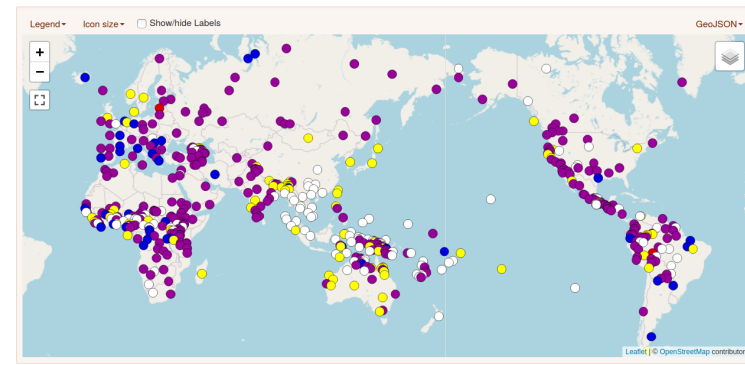
Universality of Sentence Types (?)

"The three basic sentence types, or types of speech act,[2] that **seem to be universal to human language** are declaratives, interrogatives and imperatives. Often we may identify further sentence types, such as prohibitives and optatives, as subcategories of these basic speech act types."
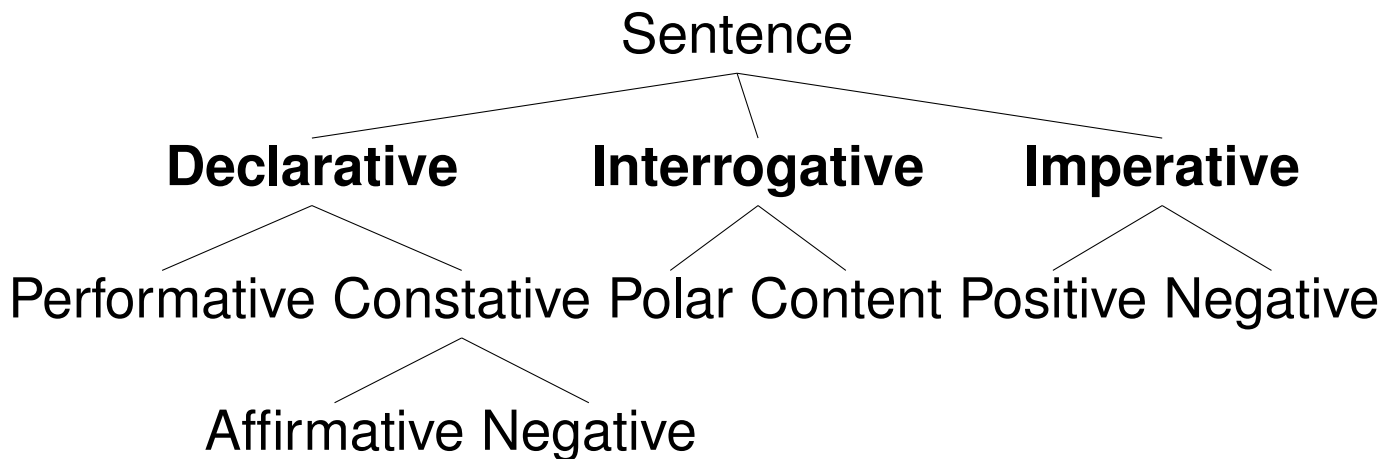
Velupillai (2012), p. 345.

```
                            Sentence
                 _____|_____
                |               |               |
          Declarative     Interrogative     Imperative
            ___|___          ___|___          ___|___
           |       |        |       |        |       |
      Performative Constative Polar Content Positive Negative
                 ___|___
                |       |
           Affirmative Negative
```

[2]Note here again the interchangeable usage of *sentence type* and *speech act*.

Sentence Types in Sign Languages

"Like spoken languages, **all known sign languages** have ways to carry out the basic functions of giving information, gleaning information and issuing commands. The declarative is typically the basic, unmarked sentence type."
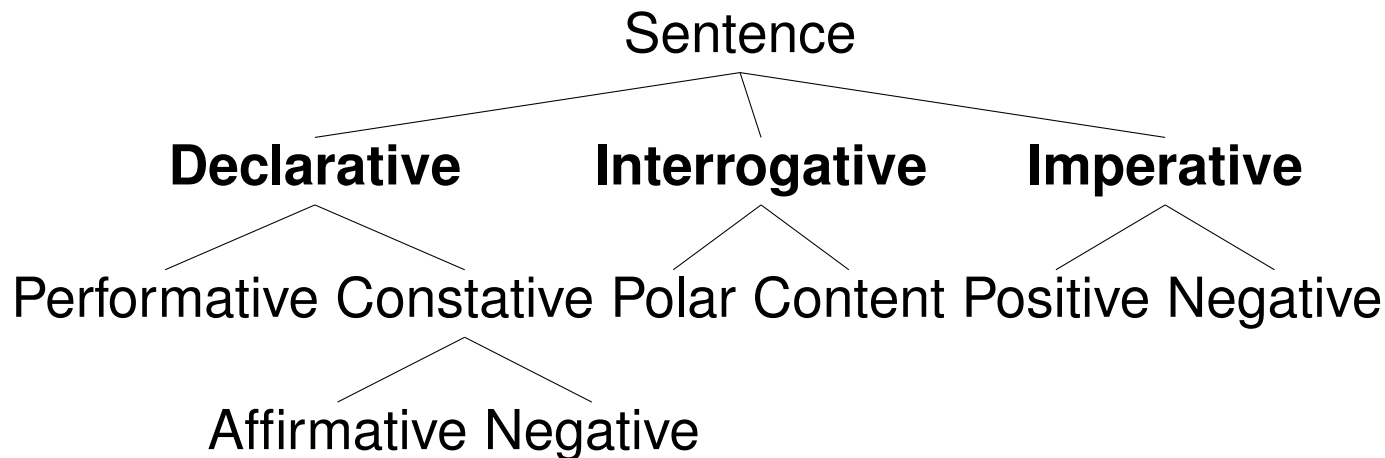
Velupillai (2012), p. 377.

```
                            Sentence
            ┌──────────────────┼──────────────────┐
        Declarative       Interrogative        Imperative
        ┌──────┴──────┐   ┌──────┴──────┐   ┌──────┴──────┐
  Performative   Constative  Polar   Content  Positive  Negative
              ┌──────┴──────┐
         Affirmative    Negative
```

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Sign Languages: Declaratives (Negative)

Figure 2: CAN
(German Sign Language)

CANNOT

Figure 3: LIKE
(Ugandan Sign Language)

LIKE-NOT

Zeshan (2013a), online at https://wals.info/chapter/139

Sign Languages: Interrogatives (Polar)

Figure 1: YES-NO
(Lengua de Señas Española)

Figure 2: PALM-UP
(Finnish Sign Language)

Zeshan (2013b), online at https://wals.info/chapter/140

Summary

Summary

► Whether certain **conversational implicatures** are inferred (or not) depends on the **cultural background** of the language (e.g. Japanese, Malagasy). However, it is still commonly argued that the Gricean Maxims are **universal** in the sense of being a standard expectation in human communication.

► **Presuppositions** as a category of inference are potentially **universal**. Specific **presupposition triggers** might be shared across typologically diverse languages (e.g. Tamil and English), but they not necessarily have to (St'at'imcets).

► **Types of speech acts** (sentences) are **differently encoded** across languages, but the existence of **three basic types** (declaratives, interrogatives, imperatives) seems to be **universal**.

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Thank You.

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