

Modal indefinites and free-choice inference in imperatives

PUZZLE There is growing evidence that certain modal indefinites behave differently in epistemic and deontic contexts. For example, that *irgendein* triggers different modal inferences: (i) ignorance (modal variation) in epistemic contexts and (ii) free-choice in deontic contexts (as argued by [2]). The situation is even more clear-cut in Romanian, where the indefinite *vreun* can only be used under epistemic operators ([4]). This paper investigates the distribution of *vreun* in another modal-like context, namely imperatives, where *vreun* is typically ruled out ([3]):

- (1) a. **Ia vreun prăjitură* b. **Apasă vreun tastă* (pentru a continua)
take.IMP.2SG VREUN cookie press.IMP.2SG VREUN key (for to continue)

On the assumption that imperatives are similar to deontic/‘preference-related’ modals (e.g. [6]), the ungrammaticality of (1) fits straightforwardly with the restriction to epistemic contexts. However, this uniform picture of *vreun* in modal contexts breaks up in imperatives like (2), where *vreun* can occur:

- (2) *Intreabă vreun localnic cum e vremea în perioada asta a anului!*
Ask.IMP.2SG VREUN local how is weather-the in time-the this of year.GEN
‘Ask some local how is the weather around this time of the year’

The main goal of this paper is to provide an appropriate characterization of the contrast between (1) and (2), and capture in a uniform way the distribution of *vreun* in epistemic and imperatives contexts.

PROPOSAL: I argue that the imperatives that license *vreun* (2) can be characterized as **alternative-presenting** imperatives, in the sense of [1]. Their crucial property is the fact that they do not give rise to the free-choice permission inference that typically arises with disjunctions in modal contexts. In particular, disjunctive imperatives like *Do x or y* entail *You may do x and you may do y*; however, it has also been observed that in addition to this choice-offering reading, disjunctive imperatives have a weaker, alternative-presenting reading, where the free-choice permission is absent: i.e. *Stop that foolishness or leave the room* does not entail *You may stop that foolishness and you may leave the room*.

Once we identify the lack of free-choice inference as the relevant property for the (non-)occurrence of *vreun* in imperatives, we can extend the alternative-based analysis recently advocated in [4]. This account relies on the assumption that *vreun* activates alternatives (which we can represent as disjunctions) and seeks to derive its restricted distribution from the interaction between the implicatures triggered by these alternatives and the semantic properties of operators in its local context. In particular, it is argued that *vreun* imposes a **partial variation condition** on its domain of quantification, which requires that not all alternatives in the domain qualify as possible options (which is tantamount to one of the alternatives being false). This is best illustrated by the fact that all contexts of occurrence of *vreun* are compatible with the overt exclusion of one possible satisfying value, as in (3):

- (3) *E posibil să se fi întâlnit cu vreun prieten, dar nu poate fi Luca tocmai l-am văzut.*
‘It’s possible he met some friend, but *it cannot be Luca*, I have just seen him.’

The partial variation condition is argued to clash with deontic modals, which give rise to the free-choice permission inference: *You may eat the cake or the icecream*, is understood as *You may eat the cake and you may eat the icecream*, i.e. **each** disjunct must qualify as a possible option. Since there is no way to guarantee that one of the alternatives is false, *vreun* is ruled out in deontic contexts. Epistemic modals also trigger free-choice readings (*He might be a lawyer or a doctor* triggers *He might be a lawyer and he might be a doctor*), but I argue that the uncertainty/evidentiality component of epistemic modals obviates the clash with the partial variation condition. More precisely, it is well-known that epistemic modals trigger an ‘uncertainty’

inference: the entire assertion might be false (as attested by the felicity of *As far as I know, he **might/must** be a doctor, but **maybe I am wrong***): This additional inference leads to the existence of worlds in which one of the alternatives activated by *vreun* fails to hold, as required by the partial variation condition.

The precise factors that lead to the satisfaction of the partial variation condition are still a matter of investigation, and there is currently no full-fledged proposal on how to derive the different behavior of modal indefinites in *epistemic* vs *deontic* contexts. However, the alternative-based account provides an interesting way to unify the distribution of *vreun* in epistemic and (what I have argued to be) alternative-presenting imperatives. More precisely, I argue that the absence of free-choice inference in alternative-presenting imperatives satisfies the partial variation condition imposed by *vreun*. As shown by [1], alternative-presenting imperatives are fully compatible with a continuation of the type *don't do X*, overtly excluding one of the disjuncts (4):

(4) Stop that foolishness or leave the room! Don't you dare leave this room!

Since one of the alternatives can always be false, the partial variation condition imposed by *vreun* is fully satisfied in alternative-presenting imperatives.

INDEPENDENT TEST My proposal to characterize imperatives which license *vreun* as alternative-presenting imperatives has the advantage of putting together epistemic contexts and imperatives, but it faces an obvious challenge: the lack of clear ways to distinguish choice-offering and alternative-presenting readings of imperatives. As a solution, I argue that alternative-presenting imperatives can be syntactically marked in Romanian by the presence of an overt subject modified by the additive particle *și* 'and, also':

(5) A: What should I do to make Mary feel better?

B: Du-o **și tu** la un film!/Mergeți **și voi** într-o vacanță!
Take.IMP.2SG-her ADD you(SG) at a movie Go.IMP.2PL ADD you(PL) in a vacation
'Take her to a movie/Go on a vacation'

The presence of an overt subject in an imperative is normally disallowed in Romanian, thus raising the question of the role of *ADD+SUBJ* in (5). I show that *ADD+SUBJ* is incompatible with orders (and other choice-offering) imperatives, but possible in alternative-presenting ones. Taking as a starting point the fact that imperatives like (5) typically occur as answers to questions, I argue that they are similar to contrastive topics CT (e.g. [5]). In particular, I take *și* to be an additive particle, which expresses that the predication holds for at least one alternative of the expression in the focus (here *you*). The similarity with CT is relevant in two respects: (i) CT in answers indicate that the answer is *partial* along the dimension indicated by associate and (ii) the condition of *disputability*, which requires that the sentence must not fully decide the issue for all alternatives of the CT. Accordingly, *ADD+SUBJ* brings about the alternative-presenting reading of the imperatives (i.e. lacking the free-choice inference). If *ADD+SUBJ* can only occur in alternative-presenting imperatives, we predict *vreun* to always be possible with this construction. This prediction is born out: e.g. *ADD+SUBJ* can be inserted in (2), *vreun* can occur in (5) and moreover, attested cases of *vreun* in imperatives very frequently involve the presence of this construction.

[1] Aloni 2007. Free Choice, Modals and Imperatives. *NALS*. 15, 65-94; [2] Aloni & Port 2010. Epistemic indefinites cross-linguistically. *Proceedings of NELS 41*; [3] Farkas 2002. 'Extreme Non-Specificity in Romanian', in C. Beyssade et al. (eds), *Romance Languages and Linguistic Theory 2000*; [4] Falas 2010. Alternatives as sources of semantic dependency. *Proceedings of SALT 20*, David Lutz & Nan Li (eds); [5] Krifka 1999. Additive Particles under Stress. *Proceedings of SALT 8*:111–128. [6] Schwager 2006. *Interpreting Imperatives*. PhD.thesis, Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe Universität zu Frankfurt.