

## Free-Choice Items and Imperatives in Hungarian and Beyond

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The topic of my talk is the semantics and pragmatics of imperatives, with focus on free-choice items. The starting observation is that FCIs are licensed in weak (permission) imperatives but not in strong imperatives:

- (1) a. #*Most azonnal vedd fel bármelyik ruhát.*  
now at once take-IMP-2SG PRT FCI dress-ACC  
'Take any dress right now.'
- b. *Nyugodtan vedd fel bármelyik ruhát!*  
nyugodtan<sup>1</sup> take-IMP-2SG PRT FCI dress-ACC  
'Just take any dress (if you wish).' (permission/acquiescence reading)

This state of affairs is problematic for standard theories of FCIs which derive the semantics of imperatives with FCIs from the semantics of necessity modal sentences with FCIs (e.g. Giannakidou 2001, Aloni 2007). Standard theories of imperative meaning (Portner 2007, von Stechow and Iatridou 2017) also have difficulties with accommodating the data above.

In my talk, I will provide a new model for FCI-licensing in imperatives, building upon the dependent indefinite analysis of FCIs (Giannakidou 2001) and introducing a revised version of the weak semantics - strong pragmatics approach to imperatives (Portner 2007, von Stechow and Iatridou 2017). The dependent indefinite analysis assumes the FC-phrases are intensional indefinites containing a possible world variable, and are only grammatical in contexts providing alternatives (world or situations):

- (2) [[any dress]] = **dress(x)(w)** (or: **dress(x)(s)**)

Portner (2007) and von Stechow and Iatridou (2017) propose that the semantic denotation of an imperative is simply property restricted to the addressee, and the dynamic pragmatic effect of an imperative is that this property is added to the addressee's To-Do-List.

I will show based on observations concerning FCIs in imperatives and other independent evidence that the dynamic pragmatic component of this framework needs to be significantly revised. I argue that in imperatives containing FCIs, and indeed, in weak imperatives in general, the pragmatic force of the utterance is not directed at the To-Do-List of the addressee, but rather, at a separate component of the common ground which I term the List of Actions Under Consideration by the addressee. Crucially, this list is presupposed and contains alternatives ('take the blue dress', 'take the lilac dress', etc.) which can then duly license FCIs. In strong imperatives, no such list containing presupposed alternatives is evoked, and FCIs are, as a consequence, not licensed. This also explains why strong imperatives are felicitous out of the blue, while weak imperatives require an appropriate context:

- (3) a. *Állj meg!*  
stop-IMP-2SG PRT  
'Stop.' (felicitous out of the blue)
- b. *Nyugodtan állj meg.*  
nyugodtan stop-IMP-2SG PRT  
'Stop (if you wish).' (felicitous if the addressee is visibly tired, needs a rest etc.)

The prejacent of a weak imperative needs to refer back to an element of the List of Actions Under consideration, whereas strong imperatives face no such constraint.

### References:

- Aloni, Maria. 2007. Free choice, modals, and imperatives. *Natural Language Semantics* 15:1, 65-94.
- von Stechow, Kai, and Sabine Iatridou. 2017. A modest proposal for the meaning of imperatives. In Arregui, Ana et al. (eds.), *Modality Across Syntactic Categories.*, 288-319. New York: OUP.
- Giannakidou, Anastasia. 2001. The meaning of free choice. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 24, 659-735.
- Portner, Paul. 2007. Imperatives and modals. *Natural Language Semantics* 15(4). 351-383.

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<sup>1</sup> *nyugodtan* literally translates as 'calmly, peacefully, in a relaxed fashion', but in imperatives it has a grammaticalized function to indicate permission or acquiescence, cf. the very similar use of *ruhig* 'calmly, peacefully' in German (cf. von Stechow-Iatridou (2017), p. 10)