

Imperatives as weak modals: Evidence from *even* and *any*

This talk explores two puzzles about imperatives and argues that both can be solved if imperatives contain a silent existential modal operator.

Modals can be strong (universal, \square) or weak (existential, \diamond). Likewise, imperative sentences can give rise to strong (e.g., command; \square) or weak (e.g., acquiescence, indifference; \diamond) readings.

The first puzzle is about the distribution of *even*: *even* can take broad focus in imperatives only when they receive a weak reading (1a vs. 2a), but can take broad focus in declaratives containing both strong and weak modals (1b vs. 2b).

1. Context: *Prof. X is invigilating an exam and orders the students to stop writing.*
 - a. Put down your pens. [Close your exam papers]_F **#even!** \square_{imp}
 - b. You have to put down your pens. You **even** have to [close your exam papers]_F. \square_{mod}

2. Context: *Prof. Y is telling students that they no longer have to complete the exam they have been writing.*
 - a. Put down your pens. [Close your exam papers]_F **even!** (None of this matters.) \diamond_{imp}
 - b. You're allowed to put down your pens. You're **even** allowed to [close your exam papers]_F. \diamond_{mod}

This pattern can be accounted for if we assume that i) *even* has an additive component to its meaning (Karttunen & Peters 1979) and ii) imperatives contain a silent modal operator (Schwager 2006/Kaufmann 2016), and iii) the strength of the imperative operator is underlyingly existential (\diamond_{imp}), with strong readings derived by exhaustification (Schwager 2005, Oikonomou 2016). When seen in this light, the puzzling incompatibility between *even* and strong imperatives can be reduced to an incompatibility between the additive component of *even* and the exclusive component of the exhaustivity operator.

The second puzzle is about the distribution of free choice *any*: in the absence of subtrigging, free choice *any* is licensed only under weak modals (3B' vs. 4B') (see e.g. Dayal 1998), but is licensed in both strong (3B) and weak (4B) imperatives (Giannakidou 2001, Aloni 2007, Kaufmann 2012; *pace* e.g. Haspelmath 1997).

3. A: What are your orders?
B: Read **any** book. \square_{imp}
B': #You must read **any** book. \square_{mod}

4. A: May I read a book?
B: Sure! Read **any** book! \diamond_{imp}
B': Sure! You may read **any** book. \diamond_{mod}

This pattern can be accounted for on the existential semantics for modals if we assume that i) *any* is subject to a strengthening requirement (Kadmon & Landman 1993) which can be implemented via a covert *even*-like operator (Crnic 2017), ii) free choice inferences are derived via exhaustification over subdomains of *any* (Fox 2007, Fox & Bar-Lev 2017), and iii) the exhaustivity operator that derives free choice, and the covert *even* that enforces the licensing of *any*, are located below the exhaustivity operator that derives the strong reading for the imperative. On this view, strong imperatives like (1B) contain the same weak modal structure as (4B) and (4B'); the strengthening of the existential imperative operator happens too late for the licensing of free choice *any* to be sensitive to the distinction between strong and weak imperatives.