

Focus Effects on Directives

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What are the differences in how classes of directives interact with focus? Harner (2013) offers a characterization that distinguishes *advise* as focus sensitive in a way that *order* is not (1). This characterization shows that when focus is used in the scope of *advise*, only the focused material represents the advice, and the nonfocused material is not semantically indicated as advice (see 3a). Yet with a directive like *order*, both the focused and non-focused material is part of the order (see 3b). For this reason, altering the focus structure under *advise* will affect whether the sentence is judged true or false (see 2a and 2b). In contrast, focus structure under *order* does not affect truth values (see 2c and 2d). Yet focus structure under *order* does affect pragmatic felicity (compare 2c to 2d).

Based on the distinction of focus sensitivity in (1), directives are separated into two different classes: SUGGESTIVES such as *advise* display this focus sensitivity; MANDATIVES such as *order* do not. Harner (2013) proposes that this is a manifestation of semantic differences between the classes: predicates like *advise* are comparative; predicates like *order* are not. The semantics of *advise* compares the prejacent to a set of alternative worlds. The worlds where the prejacent is true rank more highly than the compared worlds where the prejacent is not true, based on the ordering source propositions (4). Focus interacts with the semantics of *advise* by indicating the set of worlds that is in comparison to the prejacent. *Order* lacks comparison to alternatives; its semantics state simply that the ordering source propositions are true in all those worlds where the prejacent is true (5). Thus focus has no effect on its semantics because it cannot indicate a set of worlds which are in comparison to the worlds where the prejacent is true.

This explanation of semantic differences accounts for the varying judgments between focus under *advise* and *order* as seen in (3a) and (3b). Yet it does not account for the judgment of infelicity based on focus structure under *order* as in (2d). I propose to account for this infelicity as an effect of focus on the pragmatics of *order*.

In order to explain focus effects on pragmatics, I draw a conceptual parallel between directives and modal auxiliaries. Modal auxiliaries differ in strength: a (semi-)auxiliary like *ought* is a weak necessity quantifier; *must* is a strong necessity quantifier. A common explanation for this strength difference (see e.g. von Fintel & Iatridou 2008) is based on whether the prejacent is true in all of the considered worlds (6). As proposed in Harner (2013), this explanation for strength differences between modal auxiliaries is applicable to differences between SUGGESTIVES and MANDATIVES; as discussed above, SUGGESTIVES have a comparative semantics, so are weak necessity quantifiers, and MANDATIVES lack comparative semantics so they are strong necessity quantifiers. Having shown that these directives behave either like weak or strong modal auxiliaries, I offer an explanation for their pragmatics based on Rubinstein's (2012) explanation of the pragmatics of weak and strong modal auxiliaries. She argues that weak necessity *ought* is used when there is a presupposition that there is no collective commitment to some of the ordering source propositions, but strong necessity *must* presupposes collective commitment for all ordering source propositions. I revise this analysis in order to extend it to directives. I then show that these presuppositions account for judgments of infelicity as seen with *order* in (2d).

(1) **Characterization of focus sensitivity for propositional attitude verbs**, from Harner 2013: When a predicate P takes a sentential complement which has both focused and backgrounded, *i.e.* non-focused, material [$S_1P[S_2F,B]$], then only F is P'ed; B is not P'ed.

(2) **Scenario:** *Penny's major decisions* (from Harner 2013): Penny is going to start college next year. She was accepted at both Georgetown and George Washington but can't decide which school to attend. Her interests are also very diverse: she has been wavering between studying linguistics or public policy. Recently, she had decided to study public policy, rather than linguistics. Her friend, Mark, and her father, Mark, believe that public policy is a terrible major for her and that linguistics is a much better fit. Both Marks also believe that Georgetown is a better school to attend than George Washington.

Mark the friend: Mark tries to persuade Penny to study linguistics but Penny is firm that she wants to study public policy. Mark respects Penny's wishes for her major and gives her advice to attend Georgetown to study public policy.

(2a) Mark advises Penny to study public policy at GEORGETOWN. (True)

(2b) Mark advises Penny to study PUBLIC POLICY at Georgetown. (False)

Mark the father: Mark tries to persuade Penny to study linguistics but Penny is firm that she wants to study public policy. Mark respects Penny's wishes for her major and orders her to attend Georgetown to study public policy.

(2c) Mark orders Penny to study public policy at GEORGETOWN. (True)

(2d) ? Mark orders Penny to study PUBLIC POLICY at Georgetown. (True?)

(3) **Scenario:** [continued] Penny ends up going to Georgetown to study public policy, but she doesn't like it as a major. Frustrated, she returns to Mark and asks him why he told her to study it.

Mark the friend: Mark tries to excuse himself from reminding Penny of his advice.

(3a) "Look Penny, I advised you to study public policy at GEORGETOWN, but I didn't advise you to study PUBLIC POLICY at Georgetown." (True, Coherent)

Mark the father: Mark tries to excuse himself by reminding Penny of his order.

(3b) "Look Penny, I ordered you to study public policy at GEORGETOWN, but I didn't order you to study PUBLIC POLICY at Georgetown." (False, Incoherent)

(4) $advise(p)(\alpha)(w) = \text{true in } w \text{ iff } p \text{ is better than non-}p\text{-alternatives according to } f(w) \text{ and } g(w)$

(5) $order(p)(\alpha)(w) = \text{true in } w \text{ iff } p \text{ is true in all worlds compatible with } f(w) \text{ and } g(w)$

(6) von Fintel & Iatridou 2008, p. 119 "[S]trong necessity modals say that the prejacent is true in all of the favored worlds, while weak necessity modals say that the prejacent is true in all of the very best (by some additional measure) among the favored worlds.

Selected References

- von Fintel, Kai, and Iatridou, Sabine. 2008. How to Say *Ought* in Foreign: The Composition of Weak Necessity Modals. In *Time and Modality*, ed. Jacqueline Gueron and Jacqueline Lecarme, volume 75 of Studies in Natural Language and Linguistic Theory, 115–141. New York: Springer.
- Harner, Hillary. 2013. Focus Sensitivity and Deontic Strength. Paper presented at Penn Linguistics Colloquium 37. Philadelphia, PA: March 22-24, 2013.
- Rubinstein, Aynat. 2012. Roots of Modality. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.