

GOOD WISH and PRIVATE WISH: Taxonomy of WISH - Type Imperatives in English

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1 Introduction

This paper mainly deals with wishes expressed in the imperative form. I argue that there are two major types of WISH imperatives: GOOD WISH (e.g. “have a good day!”) and PRIVATE WISH (e.g. “please don’t rain tomorrow!”). GOOD WISH and PRIVATE WISH imperatives are analyzed in terms of achievability and desirability in contrast to each other and to prototypical directive imperatives which usually serve to make/have the addressee take actions to achieve what is expressed. In addition, this distinction between GOOD WISH and PRIVATE WISH may help to explain why GOOD WISH tends to be more formulaic and less flexible than PRIVATE WISH.

2 Research background

2.1 *Illocutionary force* A linguistic construction (including words) can mean various things depending on the context and how it is said. Within the Speech Act Theory framework (Austin, 1962, Searle, 1969) the intended and interpreted meanings of an utterance would be called the illocutionary force. For instance, the English imperative construction can be used to convey various illocutionary forces as shown below all taken from Quirk et. al. (1985: 831-832)¹.

(1)	a. Fire! (fire as verb)	ORDER, COMMAND
	b. Don’t touch.	PROHIBITION
	c. Shut the door, please.	REQUEST
	d. Help!	PLEA
	e. Take an aspirin for your headache.	ADVICE, RECOMMENDATION
	f. Look out! Be careful! Mind your head!	WARNING
	g. Ask me about it again next month.	SUGGESTION
	h. Make yourself at home.	INVITATION
	i. Have a cigarette.	OFFER
	j. Help yourself.	GRANTING PERMISSION
	k. Enjoy your meal! Have a good time.	GOOD WISH
	l. Go to hell!	IMPRECATION (CURSE)

We can see from the above examples that there are many possible illocutionary forces of the imperative construction. It goes without saying, however, that the identification of illocutionary forces is not always easy and sometimes two or more of them can overlap.

2.2 *WISH-type imperatives*

2.2.1 *GOOD WISH* Among the imperatives above, it is not surprising if one feels that ORDER/COMMAND or REQUEST are relatively prototypical uses of the imperative. At the same time, there are seemingly non-prototypical uses of the imperatives such as GOOD WISH and IMPRECATION in the sense that these uses are not “directive”,

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¹ Illocutionary forces are written in capitals in this paper.

that is, these imperatives are not really meant to ask for a specific action of the addressee.² Here are some more examples of GOOD WISH imperatives taken from Jary and Kissine (2014: 66).

- (2)
- a. Have a nice holiday.
 - b. Have a nice life.
 - c. Enjoy the film.
 - d. Enjoy the game.
 - e. Enjoy!
 - f. Get well soon.

While the imperative construction can express GOOD WISH, it is said that GOOD WISH imperatives are formulaic, and thus some linguists question how much weight should be given in analyzing this use for the research of the imperative construction (Davies, 1986, Jary & Kissine, 2014). This argument is understandable, and some may even wonder whether GOOD WISH does have its roots in imperatives in the first place. For example, one could argue that imperatives and GOOD WISH happen to have the same form. However, not all WISH-like imperatives are formulaic, as we will see in the following section.

2.2.2 PRIVATE WISH The imperatives introduced below seem to be WISH-like, but they are more productive and not as conventionalized as GOOD WISH above. I call imperatives like the following PRIVATE WISH as opposed to GOOD WISH.

- (3)
- a. Fuck off and die. (Jary & Kissine, 2014: 69)
 - b. Please don't rain tomorrow.
 - c. (on one's way to a blind date)
Be rich! (Kaufmann, 2012: 137)
 - d. (Before his execution)
Give me the strength to die well.³
 - e. Dear God, make me a bird so I can fly far, far, far away from home.⁴
 - f. (You have a cat and have been out all day, about to open the door)
Please don't have made a mess!

(3a) is a case of IMPRECATION (or CURSE in some articles) similar to (11) we reviewed above. IMPRECATION/CURSE is the speaker's malicious wish, and therefore it can be said to be a type of WISH. (3b-f) can all lack the addressee present and, therefore, Wilson and Sperber (1988) call this type of imperative "audienceless cases". They also refer to imperatives like (3f) as "predetermined cases" because whether the cat made a mess or not has been already determined, but it is just that the speaker has yet to see the result. In this sense, (3c) can be called a predetermined case as well because the person coming to the blind date is either rich or not (or somewhere in between), and it is "predetermined" prior to the date. Again, it is just that the speaker lacks that information at the point of the utterance of (3b).

Sometimes, a comprehensive term "ABSENT WISH" is used in the literature for imperatives that would be categorized as this type of WISH. As Kaufmann (2012) points out, however, these types of WISH-like imperatives can have an addressee present. Thus, the term "ABSENT WISH" is not appropriate. In this paper, I call this type of more productive, non-formulaic WISH-type imperatives "PRIVATE WISH" as opposed to GOOD WISH. This is mainly because this type of non-formulaic WISH imperatives (i.e. PRIVATE WISH) have a common feature that the content of the given WISH imperative is desirable mainly for the speaker, again, as opposed to GOOD WISH. Hence "PRIVATE" WISH. We will look more closely at this point later in this paper.

² As for prototypicality of imperatives, refer to Takahashi (2012).

³ (3d) is taken from the movie called *Brave Heart* (1995).

⁴ (3e) is taken from the movie called *Forrest Gump* (1994).

3 Research Questions

Considering the research background so far, I would like to set three research questions.

- I. What are the commonalities and differences between GOOD WISH and PRIVATE WISH?
- II. There seems to be a difference in productivity between GOOD WISH and PRIVATE WISH. Where does this difference possibly come from?

4 Analysis

In this paper, I will analyze both types of WISH imperatives by discussing pragmatic features that prototypical imperatives, GOOD WISH and PRIVATE WISH have or do not have. Even though this analysis is not empirical and borne out of quantitative/objective data, I believe this study will be a good starting point for future empirical research.

4.1 Prototypical imperatives First, it is indispensable to consider what “prototypical imperatives” are like. Naturally, what are considered to be the most prototypical imperatives can vary from person to person. At the same time, it can be assumed that this personal difference would not be too big, as we all consciously/unconsciously know when and how imperatives tend to be used. Just like people would regard robins as more prototypical than penguins as a kind of bird, it is easy to guess that people would refer to ORDER or REQUEST as more prototypical than GOOD WISH, for example.

Productivity also seems to affect prototypicality too. That is, the more prototypical a use of a certain linguistic construction is, the more productive it would be. In this respect, GOOD WISH does not seem to be prototypical of imperatives because of its relatively limited productivity. Note that one of the purposes of this paper is to analyze how GOOD WISH is different from prototypical imperatives and PRIVATE WISH.

Nitta (1990, 1991), Takahashi (2012) and Jary and Kissine (2014) among others present their own semantic, pragmatic, and/or sociolinguistic characteristics of prototypical imperatives. Even though they do not propose exactly the same characteristics, many of the characteristics presented seem to me more or less similar. In this paper, I would like to focus on two specific characteristics that I think are the most important for a study of WISH imperatives: achievability and desirability. A close investigation of each characteristic will be given in the following sections.

4.2 Achievability First, we are going to look at achievability. There are many terms that express the same/similar notion of achievability of imperatives such as non-stative (Lakoff, 1966), agentivity (Ljung, 1975), controllability (Davies, 1986), capability (Takahashi, 2012), and so forth. What is important here is that most prototypical imperatives are meant to be willfully achieved (typically) by the addressee. Provided that prototypical imperatives are used to make/have the addressee do a certain thing, there is no point using imperatives in a context where the addressee has no control over the content of the given imperative.

- (4) (To the addressee whose leg is broken)
 - a. ??Run!
 - b. ??Jump!
 - c. ??Go on a walk!

As the examples above show, the achievability of the intended addressee for the given imperative seems to be an important feature of typical, directive imperatives.

4.2.1 Lack of Achievability Now look at WISH-type imperatives. WISH-type imperatives usually lack achievability. A number of GOOD WISH and PRIVATE WISH imperatives are repeated below.

- (5) GOOD WISH
 - a. Have a nice life.
 - b. Enjoy the film!
 - c. Get well soon!

- (6) PRIVATE WISH
- a. Please don't rain tomorrow.
 - b. Go to hell!
 - c. Please don't have made a mess! (in the same context as (3f))

What is expressed in GOOD WISH does not seem very willfully achievable or controllable, as Jary and Kissine (2014: 66) say, “[g]ood wishes do not relate to an action to the addressee’s control”. For instance, we do not know how to willfully achieve the goal of having a nice life (some people may argue that they know, but whether it is achievable or controllable is a totally different matter). If we could willfully get better soon, then the medical industry would not thrive the way it currently does. Thus, GOOD WISH seems to lack achievability.⁵

PRIVATE WISH is an even clearer example of the lack of achievability. As for (6a), weather is clearly not controllable. As for (6b), one would not know how to “go to hell” in the first place. The addressee, if there is any, cannot even take a step to achieve (6b). (6c) is predetermined so nothing can be done to willfully achieve it. Therefore, we can make a conclusion that when an imperative is interpreted as WISH, it usually lacks achievability.⁶

4.3 Desirability In the previous section, we saw that prototypical imperatives have achievability, whereas GOOD WISH and PRIVATE WISH lack achievability. In this section, we are going to investigate another feature of imperatives; desirability. It has been discussed in many studies of imperatives that prototypical imperatives have this feature of desirability (Wilson & Sperber, 1988, Nitta, 1990, 1991, Dominicy & Franken, 2001, Condoravdi & Lauer, 2012, Takahashi, 2012, Jary & Kissine, 2014). If a prototypical imperative works to have the addressee do a certain thing, this “thing” should be desirable; otherwise, the speaker would not use an imperative in the first place. For example, one would say “open the window” because he/she wants the window open barring unusual circumstances. This feature of desirability seems to be found in WISH-type imperatives as well. See the examples below.

- (7)
- a. ??Please don't rain tomorrow, though I don't care about tomorrow's weather.
 - b. ??Get well soon, though I don't want you to be healthy.

(7a, b) both have two clauses, the first of which is a WISH imperative and the second of which says something seemingly contradictory to the first clause. As we saw above, the two WISH imperatives in the first half of (7a, b) would be judged to be acceptable as wishes. However, (7a, b) start to sound strange when the second clauses follow, even though the second clauses themselves are grammatical and syntactically fine. A possible explanation is that the first WISH imperatives and the second non-desire-showing clauses in (7a, b) are pragmatically incompatible, because the WISH imperatives seem to express desire of the speakers, while the second clauses sound as if the speaker does not have such desire. Therefore, we can realize that desirability is an important factor of WISH imperatives as well as prototypical imperatives.

4.3.1 For whom is it desirable? The above section just shows the idea of most imperatives encompassing desirability inside. It is not that simple, however. Wilson and Sperber (1988: 10-11) point out that “the expression of desirability is a three-place relation- x regards y as desirable to z”. What it implies is that it is not always the speaker for whom the realization of a given imperative is desirable. Based on this claim, Wilson and Sperber (1988) group several illocutionary forces of imperatives into two:

⁵ Bolinger (1977: 166) provide the following imperatives.

- (i)
- a. Sleep well—mind you, now, I mean it!
 - b. Get well—that's an order!

The first part of (ia, b) are GOOD WISH, but the second part sounds like COMMAND/ORDER. Because GOOD WISH tends to have the addressee(s) present, the degree of achievability may be felt differently depending on the context. Nevertheless, it is unclear how achievable or controllable (ia, b) would be.

⁶ Schmerling (1982: 211) introduces an interesting example of imperatives as HEALING.

- (ii) Walk! (As an utterance of a healing ritual to a patient whose legs are paralyzed).

The speaker is trying to make the state of affairs in a HEALING imperative come true right away with some magical, supernatural power, leaving the addressee no room to infer any actions for realization of the state of affairs. In this sense, I would argue HEALING is a type of WISH imperatives.

- (A) ORDER/COMMAND, REQUEST, GOOD WISH, PRIVATE WISH (audienceless and predetermined cases)
 (B) ADVICE, PERMISSION

Note that in Wilson and Sperber (1988)'s categorization, GOOD WISH and PRIVATE WISH are put together in the same group as REQUEST and ORDER/COMMAND. It seems strange to me that GOOD WISH is sorted into the speaker's desire group. Taking the GOOD WISH "get well soon" for example, it is most likely that the addressee will get the most benefit from the realization of this GOOD WISH. Wilson and Sperber (1988) themselves clearly mention as an assumption of GOOD WISH that "she [the speaker] manifestly regards this state of affairs [in a GOOD WISH imperative] as beneficial to the hearer" (p. 11).

Why is GOOD WISH categorized into the same group as REQUEST, ORDER/COMMAND, PRIVATE WISH in Wilson and Sperber's categorization? According to Wilson and Sperber (1988), it is not who gets the most benefit, but who regards the realization of a given imperative as desirable that determines the categorization of the illocutionary forces of imperatives. In other words, Wilson and Sperber (1988) focus on X in "X regards Y as desirable to Z" as the criterion for categorization. It is true that we can never know if the addressee truly regards the state of affairs expressed in a GOOD WISH as desirable for him/herself. For example, if you say "enjoy your meal" to someone, we can never know whether this person really wants to enjoy the meal or not.

However, this analysis is actually applicable to any given imperative, even for ADVICE and PERMISSION. Let us see the case of an ADVICE imperative. When you say an ADVICE imperative such as "take an aspirin for your headache" to the addressee, it is possible that the addressee might not want to take an aspirin for some reason (e.g. this person does not want to rely on medicine). This is definitely an "unwelcomed" piece of advice for the addressee, and therefore we cannot say "the addressee regards as desirable the state of affairs expressed in this ADVICE imperative". After all, we cannot know what the addressee truly wants unless he/she says it out loud (and even in this case, the addressee still can tell a lie). Therefore, all the speaker can do is "infer" what the addressee wants. In short, because we can never know what the addressee truly regards as desirable, categorization using the addressee's point of view, which Wilson and Sperber (1988) present, would always meet some difficulty.

4.3.2 *Who gets the most benefit from third person's view?* Instead of focusing on who regards the content of a given imperative as desirable, I argue that it is more sensible to focus on who benefits most from the realization of the given WISH imperative from *a third person's point of view*. More specifically, it is more sensible to focus on Y in <X assume that the speaker of the given imperative regards the state of affairs expressed in it as desirable/beneficial mainly for Y>. Let me give supplemental information here. X can be anyone. It can be a bystander, the reader (like us), and, of course, the addressee. X can possibly even be the speaker. Speakers also should be consciously/unconsciously thinking from the third person's (or addressee's) point of view how their imperative (or any utterance) would sound and how it would be interpreted by other people. Because of this nature, they can convey what they intend to others and others would interpret more or less what is originally intended. Otherwise, communication breakdown would occur very frequently to the extent that the communication is not successful. Y would typically be either the speaker or the addressee, but it could be both and/or someone else like the general public as in proverbs.⁷ Moreover, it is very important to note that the notion of desirability is relative, not absolute. That is, desirability has gradient degrees. We will get back to this point later in this paper.

When we use this new criterion, PRIVATE WISH and GOOD WISH will be categorized into different categories. PRIVATE WISH would be categorized into the same category as prototypical, directive imperatives such as COMMAND/ORDER, and REQUEST, where the states of affairs expressed in a given imperative would be assumed to be desirable mainly for the speaker. GOOD WISH, on the other hand, would be categorized with ADVICE and PERMISSION, where the states of affairs expressed in an imperative would be assumed to be desirable mainly for the addressee.

- (8) Desirable/beneficial mainly for the speaker from 3rd person's view:
- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| a. Fire! | ORDER/COMMAND |
| b. Shut the window please. | REQUEST |
| c. Go to hell! | PRIVATE WISH (IMPRECATION) |
| d. Please don't rain tomorrow! | PRIVATE WISH (audienceless case) |

⁷ The general public can be regarded as "addressees" in a sense in the case of proverbs. It is just that the speaker has no specific, individual addressee in mind.

- e. Please don't have made a mess! PRIVATE WISH (predetermined case)
- (9) Desirable/beneficial mainly for the addressee from 3rd person's point of view:
- a. Take an aspirin for your headache. ADVICE/RECOMMENDATION
 - b. Help yourself. PERMISSION
 - c. Get well soon. GOOD WISH

Note that IMPRECATION, audienceless cases, and predetermined cases are all sorted in the speaker desire/benefit category. Even though I have not clearly explained why I use the term "PRIVATE WISH", this is closely related to the reason why I call them PRIVATE WISH altogether. Of course, while there needs to be some empirical evidence/research, people would agree that these three WISH-type imperatives are mainly desirable for the speaker rather than addressee (recall that these imperatives often even do not have an addressee in the first place). For instance, who do we normally think would get the most benefit from the realization of (8c), (8d), and (8e)? It is most likely the speaker. This is the very reason why I call these kinds of WISH-type imperatives "PRIVATE WISH" as opposed to GOOD WISH since the speaker is expressing their own private wishes using the imperative form.

5 Possible explanation of the reduced productivity of GOOD WISH

The above categorization is made broadly for two reasons: (i) It explains an intuitive difference between PRIVATE WISH and GOOD WISH. As most researchers treat PRIVATE WISH and GOOD WISH separately, there seems to be some difference between the two uses, and this categorization successfully separates these two WISH types. (ii) It may be useful for a possible explanation of why GOOD WISH is less productive and tends to be more formulaic than PRIVATE WISH (and of course prototypical imperatives). As we saw above, both PRIVATE WISH and GOOD WISH lack achievability as opposed to prototypical imperatives. And now we have just explored that prototypical directive imperatives and PRIVATE WISH would be regarded as desirable/beneficial for mainly the speaker from a 3rd person's viewpoint whereas GOOD WISH would be regarded as desirable/beneficial mainly for the addressee from a 3rd person's view. This means that PRIVATE WISH shares more features with prototypical imperatives than GOOD WISH. Considering this fact, we can obtain the following chart.

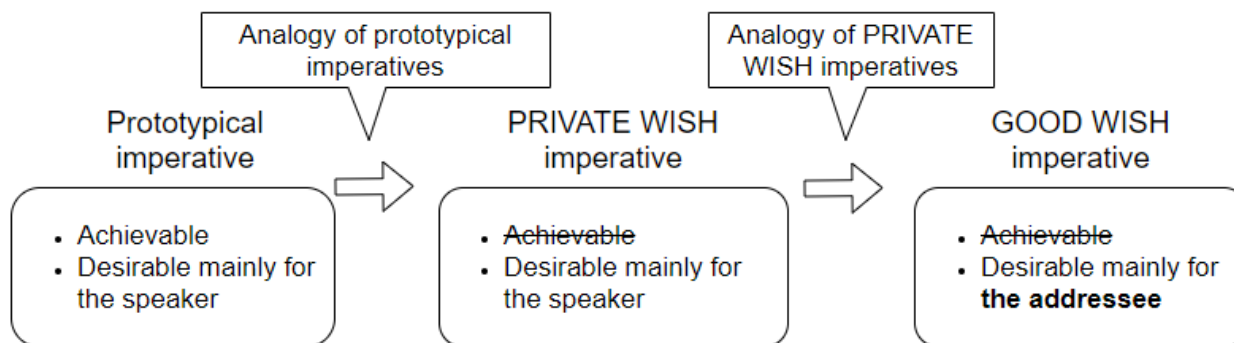


Figure 1. Summary of three types of imperatives

This chart indicates that PRIVATE WISH is an analogous use of the prototypical directive imperatives. And GOOD WISH is an analogous use of PRIVATE WISH. And therefore, deductively, we can see that GOOD WISH is an analogous use of prototypical imperatives. The point here is that GOOD WISH is two steps away from prototypical imperatives. Because GOOD WISH is farther than prototypical imperatives, this may limit situations where GOOD WISH can be used and, as a result, GOOD WISH becomes more formulaic.

6 When GOOD WISH and PRIVATE WISH overlap

It is worth mentioning that it is possible that imperatives considered desirable and beneficial mainly for the

addressee such as ADVICE and PERMISSION can be desirable and beneficial for the speaker as well to some extent.⁸ This is also the case for GOOD WISH. For instance, imagine that the speaker of the following GOOD WISH imperatives is a parent and the addressee is a child of his/hers.

- (10) a. Get well soon.
 b. Be safe.
 c. Don't get a cold.
 d. Stay healthy.

Simply and objectively looking at these GOOD WISH imperatives, the realization of them seems to be desirable and beneficial for the addressee. However, because the speaker is the parent of the addressee, it is natural that the speaker (the parent) truly wishes (10a-d) for his/her child (the addressee). In this case, the degree of desirability/benefit of these GOOD WISH imperatives for the speaker can get as high as for the addressee. And as a result, it becomes difficult to distinguish GOOD WISH from PRIVATE WISH and they start to overlap in terms of categorization. As a matter of fact, I assume that one can think of a situation where the speaker says (10a-d) in their heart without an addressee, which is typical of PRIVATE WISH. What this overlap implies is not the failure of the categorization between GOOD WISH and PRIVATE WISH but the fact that GOOD WISH and PRIVATE WISH essentially have shared characteristics and thus GOOD WISH is not just an outlier of the use of imperatives.

7 Summary

In this paper, I have argued the following points:

- WISH-type imperatives can be divided into two major categories: PRIVATE WISH and GOOD WISH. They are simultaneously similar and different. They are both usually understood to lack achievability but different in terms of who benefits most from the realization of the given WISH imperative from a third person's point of view.
- If one interprets that the content of a WISH imperative is desirable and/or beneficial mainly for the speaker, it would be interpreted as PRIVATE WISH. On the other hand, if he/she interprets it to be desirable and/or beneficial mainly for the addressee, it would be interpreted as GOOD WISH.
- This distinction may help explain why GOOD WISH tends to be more formulaic and less flexible than PRIVATE WISH. While PRIVATE WISH is closer to prototypical, directive imperatives in terms desirability, GOOD WISH is farther than PRIVATE WISH from prototypical imperatives. This could restrict possible situations where GOOD WISH is available and, consequently, the use GOOD WISH can be more formulaic and less flexible than PRIVATE WISH.
- The distinction between PRIVATE WISH and GOOD WISH is by no means absolute. That is, they can overlap, being hard to distinguish from each other. This is because desirability/benefit for the speaker and addressee is not complete dichotomy; the realization of a WISH imperative can be desirable and beneficial for both the speaker and the addressee.

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⁸ This is why I have kept using the word "mainly" in <X assume that the speaker of the given imperative regards the state of affairs expressed in it as desirable/beneficial mainly for Y> and other places.

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