

**(I) Background: Insubordination**

**Insubordination** is defined as the conventionalized use of a subordinate ( $\approx$  syntactically, semantically dependent) clause as a full speech act (Evans 2007).

- Can represent directives, requests, indirect speech reports, disbelief, wishes or deontic meanings, *but never assertions*
- Has pragmatic effects, like (im)politeness and (in)directness

How does a typically dependent clause get its own illocutionary force?  
 What determines and restricts this illocutionary force?  
 ...from the perspective of the **Aleut optative (OPT)** mood suffix.

**(II) Aleut optatives as insubordinate**

Generalizations about OPT

- Nonfinite (structurally/semantically dependent), but can be used independently (as a wish or strong command)  $\rightarrow$  insubordinate
- Refers to future w.r.t. matrix clause reference time
- Involves preference alternatives; epistemically unsettled

Extraction/agreement across an OPT clause boundary:

- (1) [ Theodore **taangam mayaknaa** taanga-a $\hat{x}$ -t ] alalaka-q.  
 T. **water dirty** drink-OPT-2/3 not.want-sbj  
 ‘I don’t want [ Theodore to drink dirty water ].’
- (2) [ — — Taanga-a $\hat{x}$ -t ] alalaka-ng.  
 drink-OPT-2/3 not.want-sbj/obj.  
 ‘I don’t want [ him to drink it ].’

OPT clause subject reference and temporal reference restricted by matrix clause:

- (3) a. \*Anang [ sistraam agiital qiigusi $\hat{x}$  hangaxta-a $\hat{x}$ -t ] alaku $\hat{x}$ .  
 my.mom her.own.sister accompanying mountain climb-OPT-2/3 she.wants  
 Intended: ‘**My mom**<sub>1</sub> wants [ —<sub>1</sub> to climb a mountain with her sister ].’
- b. [ Anang sistraam agiital qiigusi $\hat{x}$  hangaxta-a $\hat{x}$ -t ] alakuq.  
 ‘**I**<sub>1</sub> want [ **my mom**<sub>2</sub> to climb a mountain with her sister ].’
- (4) [ Tiglas sayu-u $\hat{x}$ -t ] alanaq.  
 Eagles win-OPT-2/3 I.wanted  
 After the game: ‘I wanted the Eagles to win.’ (always future w.r.t. the matrix time)

OPT clauses only occur under preference attitudes and encode root modal meanings:

- (5) ✓: *ala-* ‘want’, *haya-* ‘beg’, *hi $\hat{x}$ ta-* ‘tell (command)’, *i $\hat{g}$ a $\hat{x}$ ta-* ‘fear’, ...
- (6) ✗: *ida $\hat{x}$ ta-* ‘know’, *luusa-* ‘believe’, *uku $\hat{x}$ ta-* ‘see’, *hi $\hat{x}$ saasa-* ‘understand’, ...

OPT clauses involve alternatives; focus alternatives affect its truth conditions:

- (7) *Paul’s wife doesn’t want him to fish, but if he must she wants him to go on Sat.*
- a. T: [ Paavila $\hat{x}$  *Subuutam* aslaa agach chali-i $\hat{x}$ -t ] alaku $\hat{x}$ .  
 P. Saturday on instead fish-OPT-2/3 she.wants  
 ‘She wants [ Paul to fish on *Saturday* instead ].’
- b. F: [ Paavila $\hat{x}$  *Subuutam* aslaa *chali-i $\hat{x}$ -t* agach ] alaku $\hat{x}$ .  
 She wants [ Paul to *fish* instead on Saturday ].’

Unembedded OPT represents a wish or strong command of SPKR—their preference for a future event w.r.t. the utterance time.

- (8) Unguchi-i $\hat{x}$ -t. sit-OPT-2/3 ‘Sit down.’
- (9) Chi $\hat{x}$ ta-a $\hat{x}$ -t! rain-OPT-2/3 ‘Oh, that it would rain!’
- (10) Unguchi-da. sit-IMP ‘Sit.’ (more polite)

Big questions about unembedded OPT

- How does structurally/semantically deficient OPT get interpreted as a speech act?
- Why does OPT always represent speaker’s preference about utterance time’s future?
- How does OPT differentiate itself from IMP?

**(III) Analysis**

Assumptions

- Objects in the discourse can be added to 1 of **3 universal discourse objects of different semantic types** (see Portner 2004, Biezma 2025):
- (11) **CG (common ground)**: propositions
- (12) **Q (question set)**: sets of propositions (i.e., sets of sets of worlds)
- (13) **PREF<sub>x</sub> (preference set of x)**: sets of (ordered) sets of situations (adapted from Starr 2020)  
 $\{ \langle \lambda s. \dots, \lambda s. \dots \rangle, \dots \}$ , where *x* prefers the first set to the second set
- Left periphery includes a Speech Act head, SPKR, utterance time (UT) (adapted from Speas & Tenny 2003, Wiltschko & Heim 2016).

OPT clauses represent sets of future situations (*s*; partial worlds) that start at a time *t*. (Portner 1997)

(14)  $[[\text{rain-OPT}]] = \lambda t. \lambda s. \exists e [ \text{rain}(e) \wedge e \text{ in } s \wedge s \text{ starts at } t ]$

OPT clauses are only defined if there are alternatives available in the discourse. (Villalta 2008)

(15)  $[[\text{rain-OPT}]]_{Alt} = \{ \lambda t. \lambda s. \exists e [ \text{be.sunny}(e) \wedge e \text{ in } s \wedge s \text{ starts at } t ], \lambda t. \lambda s. \dots \}$

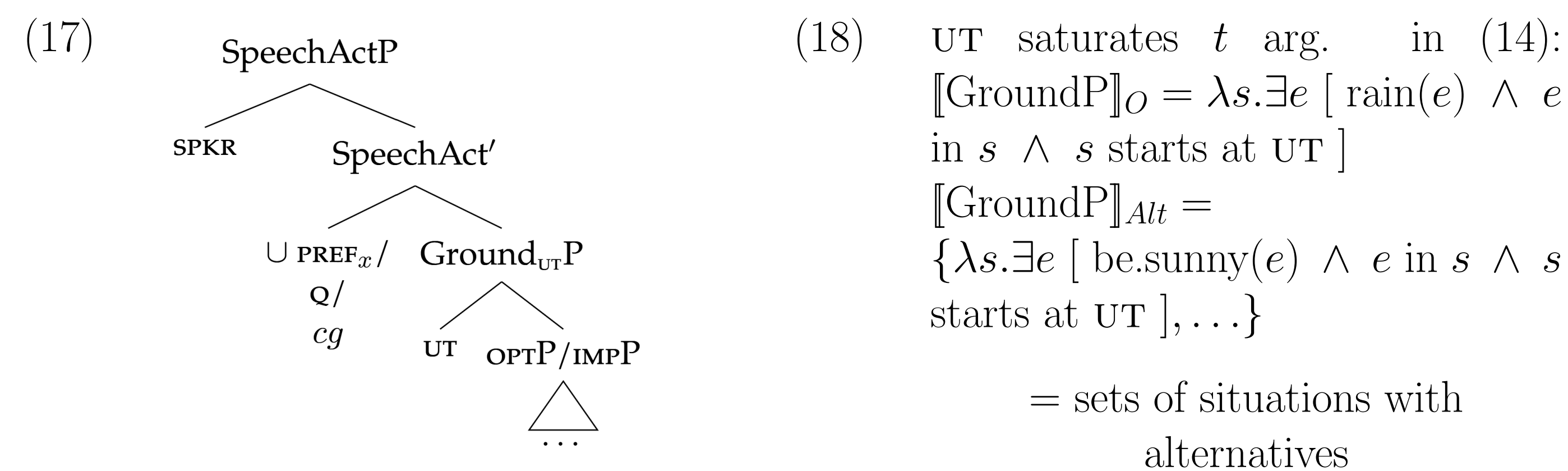
- $\rightarrow$  Only denotes future-oriented situations
- $\rightarrow$  Dependent on matrix clause for *t* argument
- $\rightarrow$  Generates alternatives that will need to be *evaluated* somehow

When embedded: Matrix predicate provides a scale by which OPT is compared to its alternatives. (Villalta 2008)

(16)  $[[\text{ala- ‘want’}]] = \lambda P_{\langle i,vt \rangle}. \lambda t. \lambda x. \lambda w. \forall s' \forall s [ P(t)(s) = 1 \wedge s' \neq s \wedge s' \in [[\text{OPTP}]]_{Alt} \rightarrow s >_{DES_{x,t,w}} s' ]$

- a. Only takes sets of situations (not whole worlds), and compares them based on **desire**
- b. Plugging in  $[[\text{rain-OPT}]]$  for  $P_{\langle i,vt \rangle} \approx$  “future raining situations are more desirable to *x* at *t* in *w* than the contextually available alternatives”

When insubordinated: Left-peripheral structure saturates *t* argument and OPT is nearly compatible with other objects in PREF<sub>x</sub>.



In Aleut, speakers can “rescue” the above denotation from failing to produce a speech act by forcing the components of (18) into an ordered pair that can undergo  $\cup \text{PREF}_x$ . This is **conventionalized use of an otherwise subordinate clause**.

IMP creates an ordered pair for direct  $\cup$  with PREF<sub>x</sub>.

- (19)  $[[\text{IMP}]] = \lambda f_{\langle et \rangle}. \lambda t. \langle \lambda s. \exists e [ s \text{ begins at } t \wedge f(e) \text{ in } s \wedge \text{ACTOR}(e) = \text{ADDRS} ], [[\text{IMP}]]_{Alt}^g \rangle$
- a.  $\approx$  “the ordered pair consisting of a set of situations beginning at *t* and its contextual alternatives”
- b. IMP can be directly added to the discourse through the Speech Act head  $\cup \text{PREF}_x$ ; no extra calculation

The pragmatic effect arises because OPT requires an extra calculation.

- Not all languages allow this, which is why insubordination of different clause types is **language-specific**.
- Evans: “[T]he actual pragmatic value of insubordinated clauses need not be more ‘polite’ than a more direct form” (2007:393–394)  
 E.g.: German optatives, Japanese *kudasai* ellipsis, Spanish and French directive subjunctives

**(IV) Broader implications**

Are there insubordinate clauses that join with Q?

Aleut dubitative (DUB) clauses are typically subordinate, but can exceptionally represent “a wondering question” (Bergsland 1997:96).

- (20) *Embedded DUB*:
- a. Ayaga $\hat{x}$  [ chi $\hat{x}$ ta-a $\hat{x}$ ta-a ] almataku $\hat{x}$ .  
 woman rain-DUB-3 asks  
 ‘The woman asks [ if it’s raining ].’
- (21) *Unembedded DUB*: Pragmatic effect: hesitation, uncertainty
- a. Alaadika $\hat{x}$  qa-atu-u $\hat{x}$ ta-an?  
 fry.bread eat-want-DUB-2  
 ‘Perhaps you want to eat fry bread?’

$\rightarrow$  DUB may represent **sets of propositions with alternatives** in both situations, and contrast with more canonical ways of making questions (other mood markings)

An emerging insubordinate typology

Belief alternatives:	Preference alternatives:
sets of propositions $\rightarrow$ Q	sets of sets of situations $\rightarrow$ PREF <sub>x</sub>
questions, statements of uncertainty or incredulity	directives, requests, wishes or deontic meanings

**(V) Conclusions**

Insubordinate clauses are incorporated into the discourse set in a **round-about, conventionalized way** by matching semantic types.

- Insubordination involves alternatives of either propositions or sets of situations  $\rightarrow$  it never results in assertion
- Left-peripheral structure can ground a dependent clause in the SPKR’s attitudes at the utterance time

(See separate handout for references.)