How to get *even* with imperatives

**keywords:** even, imperatives, polarity

1. Rhetorical imperatives.

It is commonly assumed that imperatives are upward-entailing (UE) environments and that they do not license negative polarity items (NPIs). These assumptions must be qualified in light of the previously unobserved data in (1).

(1)  
   a. Break *even* ONE record that I can’t
   b. Show me a party that *EVER* cared for us AT ALL
   c. Show me a party that would so much as lift a finger to help the poor

   (1-a) contains *even* that associates with a weak predicate, which would yield a contradiction in UE environments (cf. Lahiri 1998). (1-bc) contain so-called strong NPIs (cf. Krifka 1995): a minimizer in (1-b) and stressed weak NPIs *ever* and *at all* in (1-c). The imperatives in (1) may only be used in contexts that satisfy (2). Accordingly, we call them ‘rhetorical imperatives.’

   (2) **Non-compliance bias**
       The speaker expects (wants) the hearer to have difficulty with the task

2. Challenges.

An important step towards understanding rhetorical imperatives is made by looking at their paraphrases (3). They contain a directive speech act predicate *challenge* (see also *dare*, *defy*); (3-b) indicates that performativity is not a crucial component of these examples.

(3)  
   a. I *challenge* you to break *even* ONE record that I can’t
   b. John *challenged* Mary to *EVER* forget the title song “Fame”

3. Analysis.

We explain the distribution of rhetorical imperatives by explaining the felicity of *even* associating with weak predicates under *challenge*. The three ingredients of our analysis are the scalar presupposition of *even*, an analysis of strong NPIs as *even*-NPIs, and the meaning of *challenge*.

3.1. Ingredients.

The scalar operator *even* triggers the scalar presupposition in (4); we assume the additive presupposition is derived pragmatically (cf. von Stechow 1991, Rullmann 1997). *Even* may scope out of its base position at LF (Wilkinson 1996 and others).

(4)  
   \[
   [\text{even}]^C(p)(w) \text{ is defined only if } \forall q \in C \cdot [p <_{<} c q]. \text{ If defined, } [\text{even}]^C(p)(w) = 1 \text{ iff } p(w) = 1
   \]

   Strong NPIs like stressed weak NPIs and minimizers are licensed by a covert *even* (Heim 1984, Krifka 1995). Accordingly, an analysis of *even* with weak predicates is effectively an analysis of strong NPIs.

   The meaning of *challenge* has two components (5). The felicity conditions of *challenge* require the challenged task to be difficult and the subject to be an authority. A challenge is an announcement that a task is desirable. The desirability measure – and thereby the assertive component of *challenge* – is non-monotonic (cf. Heim 1992, Villalta 2008). *Challenge* is directive because of the authority presupposition (cf. Schwager 2006).

(5)  
   \[
   [\text{challenge}]^C(w)(y)(P)(x) \text{ is defined only if } x \text{ is an authority over } y \text{ in } w \text{ & it is difficult in } w \text{ for } y \text{ to } P. \text{ If defined, } [\text{challenge}]^C(w)(y)(P)(x) = 1 \text{ iff } x \text{ announces in } w \text{ to } y \text{ that it is desirable for } y \text{ to } P
   \]
3.2. Derivation.
In (6-a), if *even* scopes below *challenge*, it triggers an inconsistent presupposition (cf. Lahiri 1998). If *even* scopes above *challenge* (6-b), it triggers the presupposition in (6-c). We show that this presupposition is felicitous.

(6) a. I challenge you to break even ONE record that I can’t
   b. [even C][I challenge you break one\textsubscript{F} record that I can’t]
   c. ∀n>1: that I challenge you to break 1 record <\textsubscript{c} that I challenge you to break n records

There are two salient scales with respect to which challenges may be ranked. The first scale is ranked by how likely it is for a task to qualify as a challenge; the second scale is ranked by how likely the task is. The presupposition in (6-c) is satisfied wrt the first scale: Namely, breaking 1 record is less difficult than breaking 2 or more records. Accordingly, it is less likely that my announcement of an easier task (you breaking 1 record) is a challenge than that my announcement of a more difficult task (you breaking 2 records) is a challenge. So, the scalar presupposition is valid. Furthermore, the felicity condition of challenges corresponds to the non-compliance condition.

Imperatives allow for a challenge construal. The analysis of *even* associating with weak predicates in imperatives thus parallels overt *challenge* examples (7). Performative modals behave differently: they do not license strong NPIs (8). This is due to their UE meaning; they also do not allow for a challenge construal.

(7) a. Show me even ONE party that cares
   b. [even C] [I CHALLENGE YOU show me one\textsubscript{F} party]

(8) #You must\textsubscript{perf} break even ONE record

Finally, if compliance bias obtains, the presupposition of *even* is inconsistent since the second scale is utilized (= how likely is the task). This can be seen with *command*, which arguably presupposes compliance (Schwager 2006).

(9) #I command you to break even ONE record

Word count: 750

References