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Melanie Bervoets

# The Semantics of Opinion

Attitudes, Expression, Free Choice, and  
Negation



Springer

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# Preface

The expression of opinion is an exceedingly common use of natural language, so it is not surprising that most languages have a number of different ways to explicitly signal when it occurs. This work will focus on one of these ways, corresponding to a class of verbs that can be used to describe the external expression of a subject's opinion toward a future possibility. These “future-directed opining” verbs, some examples of which are given in (1), have a number of interesting grammatical characteristics, which can be tied to the fact that they can be thought of as simultaneously internal and external—the eventuality described involves the internal position of the subject, but also an external expression of that position.

- (1) (a) Quentin recommends that you go hiking.  
(b) Tyrone demands that you leave immediately.  
(c) Olga offered to lend you her car.  
(d) Javier promised to show you around tomorrow.

Working out a semantics for the verbs that can accurately capture this dual nature is the principal purpose of this investigation, but it will overlap with discussions of how the verbs bear on several well-known grammatical puzzles. For example, future-directed opining environments play host to free choice effects—unexpected conjunctive-like inferences known to be found in disjunctive environments when a modal or other quantifier is present—as well as unexpected readings with negation, often labeled as “Neg-raised” readings when present with a subset of the internal attitudes.

There is a lot in here, even apart from the new data introduced. From the complex semantic structure assigned to the verbs, to the discussions of dispositions and their establishment, the evidence for an account of implicature that is both grammatically based and sensitive to contextual relevance, and the drive to provide a unified, principled, and economical approach to the derivation of negative interpretations, there are certainly arguments to be made for breaking this book apart into more digestible chunks. However, because some of the arguments and decisions hinge on those made in other chapters, presenting the ensemble as a whole will hopefully paint a more coherent and compelling picture of the nature of the verbs. Additionally, this

will allow for a sustained attempt to situate the future-directed opining verbs within the broader class of opinion verbs contributing to a multidimensional sketch of the domain of verbal opinion, something that can hopefully act as a starting point for future investigations.

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