

## *Or what?: Challenging the speaker* \*

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### 1. *Or what* questions

B's *or what* response in (1) to A's directive is interpreted as a challenge:

- (1) A: Eat your vegetables!  
B: Or what?

In this paper we provide an account of dialogues like (1), deriving the interpretation and felicity conditions of responses of *or what* responses. We argue first that, despite their apparently different structure and distribution, the question in (1) has close parallels to a full *or what* question, (2), i.e. an alternative questions in which the last disjunct is *what*. In other work (Biezma & Rawlins 2012a, 2016) we have argued that in order to account for the diverse range of interpretations for full *or what* questions, *what* should be treated as anaphoric to a salient Question Under discussion (QUD).

- (2) a. Do you want to go now, in the evening, or what? (Information seeking)  
b. Are you coming or what? (Cornering; cf. Biezma 2009, Biezma & Rawlins 2012b)  
c. Is he a businessman, a greedy bastard or what? (Rhetorical)

The interpretation of (1) is intuitively related: it requests that the hearer provide some salient alternatives to the move it responds to, which stands in the role of the first disjunct in (2) However, unlike in (2), the *or what* response in (1) appears without a left disjunct (from the same speaker at least), and it must follow moves that are command-like. The path to getting this interpretation is not obvious.

In this paper we adopt Biezma & Rawlins's (2016) analysis of *or what* questions: full *or what* questions 're-ask' a question under discussion via *what*, a discourse pronoun

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anaphoric with the QUD. We argue that *what* in (1) is anaphoric in the same way and offer a proposal for the mapping of imperative utterances in discourse to possible answers. We suggest that the same analysis of *or what* questions can apply to *or what* responses, along with some assumptions about how imperatives interact with disjunction. In particular, we relate *or what* responses to what we find in constructions like (3) below.

- (3) Eat your vegetables or you won't have dessert.

The construction in (3), often called *conditional disjunction*, is formed by the disjunction of an imperative and a declarative sentence. Conditional disjunctions have a conditional paraphrase: *If you do not eat your vegetables, you won't have dessert*. The overall interpretation of (3) is that of threatening the addressee. B's utterance in (1) is intuitively similar, although since the two disjuncts belong to two different discourse moves the overall interpretation is that of B challenging the speaker – an invitation to make a threat. In this paper we argue that in conditional disjunction the speaker presents an exhaustive list of alternatives of possibilities for some future-oriented QUD; the imperative form of the first disjunct marks this disjunct as preferred by the speaker out of the two options. There are several accounts of imperatives that would be able to derive the desired interpretation, but we argue that the phenomenon at hand supports an account in which imperatives have a “minimal” semantic meaning in which they denote merely the prejacent proposition (following Condoravdi & Lauer 2012). The key ingredients for interpreting *or what* responses and conditional disjunction, therefore, are not construction-specific, but rather compositional.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In §2 we sketch some background assumptions about full *or what* questions. In §3 we develop our assumptions about imperatives and introduce some basic facts about conditional disjunction and its parallels with *or what*. In §4 we develop the analysis of conditional disjunctions as QUD-aligned, and put the pieces together to show how *or what* responses work in this context.

## 2. *Or what* questions and *or what* questions across discourse

Biezma & Rawlins (2016) has two goals: to understand how full *or what* questions fit into the polar/alternative family of question types, and to give an account of how the range of interpretations seen earlier in (2) comes about.

- (4)
- |    |  |                        |
|----|--|------------------------|
| a. | Is this pragmatics?                    | (polar question)       |
| b. | Is this semantics or pragmatics?       | (alternative question) |
| c. | Is this semantics, pragmatics or what? | (or what question)     |

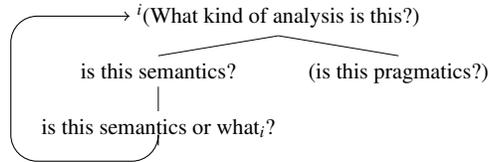
In this other work we claim that, despite being able to behave like polar questions pragmatically, *or what* questions are alternative questions in which *what* is an anaphoric discourse-pronoun whose antecedent is the QUD:<sup>1</sup> While we will not defend the full proposal in

<sup>1</sup>That *or what* questions are alternative questions and not polar questions is supported by several arguments Biezma & Rawlins (2016). The obvious ones refer to the form: one or more disjuncts coordinated by

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any detail here, the extension in the present paper could be seen as further support for the QUD-anaphoric view on *or what*.

- (5) Sketch of Biezma & Rawlins's (2016) analysis with a Büring (2003)-style D-tree



In this analysis, *what* recovers all the live alternatives that are answers to the current QUD, at the same time characterizing one or more alternatives in the current QUD via the overt disjunct. This account explains why *or what* questions behave like alternative questions or like polar questions depending of the discourse structure in which they are embedded: *or what* questions are information seeking questions when the hearer can infer that there are other (fine-grained) alternatives than the one(s) spelled out (and potentially identify them); they are cornering when the hearer understands that all that matters is whether the first disjunct is true without any interest on other fine grained alternatives; and they are rhetorical when it is clear in the context of utterance that the speaker takes it to be common ground that the first disjunct is true.

*Or what* questions across discourse (*or what* responses) differ from full *or what* questions in that the correlate of the first disjunct is presented by a different speaker in the previous (directive) utterance. The overall meaning result is that of asking about the consequences of the command not being carried out:

- (6) A: Eat your vegetables!  
B: Or what? (**Paraphrase:** 'What (will happen) if I don't eat my vegetables?')

In what follows we argue that *or what* responses can be accounted for by an extension of the discourse-anaphoric proposal, combined with independently necessary theories of imperatives as well as the observation that the *or* in this construction may not be the standard binary disjunction, but rather a particle *or* that appears on the left-periphery. The basic idea is that an *or what* response behaves as if it is in a 'conditional disjunction' construction, illustrated by (7) from van der Auwera (1986) (see also e.g. Russell 2007, Franke 2008). However, like regular *or what* moves, it has the force of a question, and so instead of providing consequences, it asks about them.

- (7) Open the window or I'll kill you.

*or* and an intonational pattern featuring pitch peaks on non-final disjuncts and a fall on the final *what* disjunct (the final rise obligatory in polar questions, see Bartels 1999 a.o., is not possible in *or what* questions). Furthermore, as expected for alternative questions, *or what* questions cannot appear embedded under dubitatives (Karttunen 1977), while polar questions can, and also as predicted for alternative questions, they can appear in the antecedent of unconditionals, while polar questions can't.

In a typical conditional disjunction, the first disjunct is a command, and the second disjunct provides an alternative result if the command is not followed. In an *or what* response, the command serves the role of the first disjunct, and the question asks about alternative results. In this paper we cannot defend a full theory of imperatives in conjunction structures (sometimes termed ‘pseudo-imperatives’, involving conjunction and disjunction; see Fraser 1969, Lawler 1975, Bolinger 1977, van der Auwera 1986, Clark 1993, Russell 2007, Franke 2008, Eckardt 2011, van Rooij & Franke 2012, a.o.), and nor can we defend a full theory of imperatives; for this reason, many questions regarding imperatives, discourse and discourse connectives will be left open. We focus on the special case of disjunctive imperatives and leave open how exactly our assumptions might generalize.

### 3. Imperatives in conditional disjunction

For conditional disjunction, the obvious puzzles are how to derive a conditional interpretation, and how to interpret the disjunction of an imperative and declarative clause. Our starting point is a parallelism in distribution/felicity between certain uses of imperatives, and *or what* responses. Not all imperative uses can appear in conditional disjunction. For example, (7) above contrasts minimally with Van Der Auwera’s example (8):

(8) #Open the window or I’ll kiss you.

Unless a kiss is interpreted as threatening (8) is infelicitous. The second disjunct has to provide *negative* consequences, and the overall impact is that of a threat. More generally, not all imperatives can be followed up by disjunction. In particular imperatives interpreted as invitations, disinterested wishes or advices (9d)–(9f) cannot be disjunctive and have the same interpretation, though regular wishes and certain kinds of permission can be.

- (9)
- a. Eat your vegetables or you won’t have dessert. (Directives)
  - b. Oh! Please rain tomorrow or I’ll have to go on that date. (Wishes)
  - c. Ok, close the window or I’ll never hear the end of it. (Concessive permission<sup>2</sup>)
  - d. (Host to his guest) Take a cookie. (Invitation)
  - e. (Mother’s farewell to his son) Have fun! (Disinterested/well wish)
  - f. [Strangers in the streets of Palo Alto.]  
 A: Excuse me, how do I get to San Francisco?  
 B: Take the train that leaves from over there in 10 minutes. [points to train station] (Disinterested advice)

If a disjunctive phrase is added, the imperative is treated differently, as non-disinterested advice. Similarly, *or what* responses are infelicitous in response to these categories.

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<sup>2</sup>There are different kinds of permissions. While with some permissions the speaker is neutral towards the addressee bringing about the prejacent proposition, this is not the case what we have termed a ‘concessive permission’ in (9c). In this case, the speaker also wants the the addressee to close the window so s/he stops the whining. This is why we find permissions in different groups later in (11).

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- (10) a. ?Take a cookie or you'll miss a great delicatessen. (#Invitation)  
 b. ?Have fun or you will regret it. (#Well wish)  
 c. A: Try a cookie. (Invitation)  
     B: #Or what?  
 d. A: Have fun! (Well wish)  
     B: #Or what?  
 e. A: Excuse me, how do I get to San Francisco?  
     B: Take the train that leaves from over there. (Disinterested advice)  
     C: #Or what?

While there may be some intuitive preference for ‘threat’-like readings of disjunctive conditionals, this is far from an absolute, as seen with the wish example in (9b).

Following Condoravdi & Lauer (2012) we can classify the different uses of imperatives in four groups based on how they line up with respect to speaker desire (whether the content proposition is something that the speaker desires himself, independently of the addressee) and addressee inducement (whether it is the utterance of the imperative what induces the addressee to bring about the content proposition). This classification is shown in Table (11).

(11) *Summary of imperative types*

Imperative use	Speaker's Desire	Addressee Inducement
Group I: Directives	✓	✓
Group II: Wishes, concessive permissions	✓	X
Group III: Permissions and Invitations	X	✓
Group IV: Disinterested Advice	X	X

Directives (Group I) and wishes (Group II) pattern together regarding the speaker's wishes but differ with respect to addressee's inducement. In C&L's classification, wishes occur in contexts in which the addressee cannot do anything. In Group III the speaker merely “communicates in response to a manifest or potential addressee's desire, that the speaker does not mind something happening”, (this is the case of invitations and permissions) and, similarly, in Group IV “the speaker has no interest in the fulfillment of the imperative” (as in the case of disinterested advice, disinterested wishes and permissions).<sup>3</sup> In this last case, “the addressee is not enticed by the speaker imperative to realise the content [...] any motivation the addressee may have for doing so derives from a prior goal of his” (quotes from C&L pg. 39-40).

What is important for our purposes is that in the case of Group III and IV, the preference expressed by the speaker by uttering the imperative is purely motivated by what he thinks the addressee's desires/goals may be. These cases are in opposition to what we find in

<sup>3</sup>We minimally depart from C&L, who place disinterested/well wishes such as (9e) in Group II. We consider these to really belong to Group IV, although we acknowledge that there is room for discussion. We have also allowed for some permissions involving concession to be in Group II.

Group I and II and are precisely cases in which we cannot spell out the disjunctive phrase (without changing the use of the imperative). The felicity generalization can be rephrased: disjunctive conditionals and *or what* responses are either infelicitous following a group III/IV imperative, or restrict interpretation to be as either a group I/II imperative.

To analyze conditional disjunction we will use a blend of ideas from Eckardt (2011) (on conditional disjunction) and Condoravdi & Lauer (2012), Lauer (2013) (on imperatives more generally). A crucial common thread between these two proposals is that, at some point in the semantic derivation, the denotation of an imperative clause is that clause's content proposition; the 'force' of the utterance is added on top of this. For Eckardt this process is compositional, and for C&L it is pragmatic, a matter of convention. Below we give C&L's version (their analysis is compatible with several possible semantic assumptions, which they discuss; this is the final version considered there):<sup>4</sup>

(12)  $\llbracket !\phi \rrbracket = \llbracket \phi \rrbracket$  (where '!' is the imperative operator, and  $\phi$  is its prejacent).

(13) *Imperative Convention* (from Lauer 2013)

When a speaker utters an imperative that has the content  $\llbracket \phi \rrbracket$ , he thereby commits himself to prefer  $\llbracket \phi \rrbracket$  to be actualized.

In this proposal, all other features of interpretation are accounted for pragmatically.<sup>5</sup> One consequence is that imperatives give rise to obligations only in particular contexts, accounting this way for the heterogeneous uses of imperative utterances.

Eckardt's (2011) proposal is mainly devoted to the behavior of imperatives together with disjunction and conjunction.<sup>6</sup> Eckardt provides two key insights about conditional disjunction, both of which we will adopt: (i) conditional disjunction expresses a preference for the imperative-marked disjunct over the other disjunct, and (ii) many species of regular imperatives act as if there is some covert disjunct, i.e. the imperative-marked clause still expresses a disjunctive preference in some sense. Eckardt's particular proposal accomplishes this with classical  $\vee$  by building the *or*-phrase in as an optional argument to the impera-

<sup>4</sup>This version in Condoravdi & Lauer (2012), Lauer (2013) do not adopt a theory of speech acts that link form and use via an operator scoping the entire sentence as in e.g. Krifka (2001, 2014). Rather, they assume that the effect of imperative utterances is determined via convention in the speech community and captured extra-compositionally.

<sup>5</sup>See von Stechow & Iatridou (2015) for further arguments favoring a minimal semantics for imperatives in the context of conditional conjunction, though they are working in a very different framework: von Stechow & Iatridou (2015) adopt the proposal for imperatives in Portner (2007, 2012) (who also assumes a minimal semantics) while acknowledging and discussing its shortcomings. The authors also present one potential argument against a preference-theory of imperatives: while preferences may convey permissions, expressions of desire such as *I want you to go out* cannot. However, notice that preferences are not the same as desires and hence it is not unexpected that imperatives and expressions of desires do not behave alike.

<sup>6</sup>See the discussion in Eckardt (2011) regarding other approaches for dealing with conditional disjunction in imperatives such as Schwager's (2006) approach (see also Kaufmann 2012), who relies on Geurts (2005) take of disjunction as a conjunction of modal quantification. We leave a full comparison of our proposal itself to Kaufmann's for the future, but we note for now that we are adopting a very similar structure to her analysis by adopting a non-classical discourse component to *or*, also motivated by Zimmermann (2000) (see Biezma & Rawlins (2012b), so the two approaches may ultimately converge.

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tive operator – treating all imperatives as potentially disjunctive, even if the disjunction is implicit. A simplified version is given in (14) (see Eckardt (2011) for the full details).<sup>7</sup>

$$(14) \quad \llbracket !\phi \text{ (or } \psi) \rrbracket^{w_0} = \forall w[(\text{Future}(w_0, w) \wedge \text{Circ}(w_0, w) \wedge \text{LEWIS-SIM}(w_0, w)) \rightarrow (\llbracket \phi \rrbracket(w) \vee \llbracket \psi \rrbracket(w))]$$

Presupposes: Speaker prefers  $\phi$ -worlds to  $\psi$ -worlds.

We cannot adopt this proposal as-is, since the shape of an *or what* response provides evidence against there always being a disjunctive argument to the imperative operator. *Or what* suggests that the presentation of an alternative can be distributed across multiple utterances while placing the same interpretive constraints on its antecedent imperative that a local disjunction would, as shown above, something quite challenging to account for if the disjunct is an actual argument.

In what follow we start with C&L’s proposal for imperatives, adapting it in a way that captures Eckardt’s two key insights above. Our basic proposal is that imperatives are always potentially disjunctive in a discourse sense: they provide a potential resolution of some QUD; when the disjunction is overt, this exploits general interactions of disjunction with QUDs. We do not intend here to defend C&L’s theory of imperatives against all other theories of imperatives, nor are we claiming this theory is free of problems in its current form (a full analysis of all theories of imperatives is beyond the scope of this paper). The goal is to show that the account of *or what* questions adopted in this paper, together with a theory of imperatives and a theory of disjunction independently argued for can deliver the right results; we think that the proposal can be adapted to other approaches to imperatives, but we will leave this for the future.<sup>8</sup>

C&L’s theory of imperatives make use of preference structures, the agent’s set of ranked propositions according to her/his (consistent) preferences at a particular time, the *effective preference structure*. At each time point a set of maximal elements in the preference structure can be identified; the utterance of an imperative makes one of these speaker’s preferences public, conveying the public commitment of the speaker to having the content proposition in the imperative as a maximal preference. Following Belnap (1991), C&L link preferences to action choices in a way in which actions-choices are determined by preference structures together with the agent’s beliefs. This theory allows us to both keep the treatment of disjunction that we see in simple declaratives targeting propositional content, as well as refer to future alternatives.

## 4. Back to “or what?”

Although in C&L’s theory imperatives denote just the content proposition, they maintain that imperatives are future oriented (something that is also captured in other theories of imperatives). Making a commitment to a preference is making a “commitment to act in a certain way” because “keeping a commitment means making the right action choices” and

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<sup>7</sup>Future, Circ are intended to deliver the future and circumstantial alternatives, and LEWIS-SIM ensures similarity with the actual world *à la* Lewis.

<sup>8</sup>Among others: Portner (2005, 2007), Schwager (2006), Kaufmann (2012), Starr (2013).

hence constraining future actions. This agrees with the tense/aspect morphology we see in a second disjunct, which necessarily indicates or is compatible with future time:

(15) Eat your vegetables or you won't get dessert.

Hence, if we were to identify the QUD an imperative may be responding to, this would always involve alternatives for the future. In the general case, imperatives can always be understood as answers to (16). Imperatives can also respond to more specific and even overt QUDs, as in (17)

(16) What are the alternatives for the future? / What will happen?

(17) A: Where can I get a newspaper?

B: Try the 7-eleven.

Our basic proposal is this: a disjunctive imperative, appearing with a standard final falling intonation (building on Zimmermann 2000, Biezma 2009, Biezma & Rawlins 2012b) describes a set of possible alternatives that may resolve the current QUD, and indicates that this set of alternatives is 'closed' relative to the current QUD – exhaustive and mutually exclusive. In this we build on Simons's 2001 *Topic Condition* applied to disjunction: Simons proposes that for a discourse contribution to be acceptable, it must have an identifiable topic ( $\approx$  QUD) and that "in order for [a disjunction]  $d$  to have an identifiable discourse topic for  $P$ , there must be a question  $Q$  such that each disjunct of  $d$  is an answer to  $Q$  for  $P$ ." That is, disjunctions must align with the QUD. Because exactly one of these possible answers is in imperative form, that disjunct is marked as being the speaker's preference (in C&L's terms), and so induces a preference structure where the first disjunct is ranked over the second. When there is no overt disjunction in the imperative, an *or what* can potentially be used to question other resolutions to the QUD beyond the issuer's speaker's preference .

How does this lead to a conditional interpretation? A speaker facing a disjunctive phrase with two disjuncts, each providing a possible (exhaustive) answer to the QUD, knows that the second (last) disjunct has exhausted the logical space not covered by the first (previous) disjunct. Therefore, one way of characterizing the logical space not covered by the first (previous) disjunct is to identify it as the  $\neg A$  space, without any further fine-grained distinction (as in the cornering cases seen above). From an exhaustive disjunction, it can therefore be concluded that each disjunct is conditional on the negation of the other.

(18) Utterance: (!**A**) or **B** implies:

$\neg$  [**A**]  $\rightarrow$  [**B**] (the  $\neg A$ -worlds are  $B$ -worlds)  
&  $\neg$  [**B**]  $\rightarrow$  [**A**] (the  $\neg B$ -worlds are  $A$ -worlds)

So far this could get us one of two conditional interpretations, but the disjuncts are asymmetrically marked, given the imperative form. This leads to paraphrases as in (19).

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(19) Eat your vegetables or you won't have dessert.

**Paraphrase:** The alternatives for the future (in the actual world) are that either you eat your vegetables (the speaker prefers this alternative) or that you don't have dessert.

The 'pure' semantics of (19) is the same as the semantics of the utterance of two disjoined propositions. In addition, we assume that the imperative convention applies also in (some) embedded contexts, in particular, disjunction. The paraphrase as a conditional falls out of the resulting preference structure: the secondary (non-preferred) alternative is a back-up plan to the preferred alternative, and so the conditional disjunction says: please eat your vegetables, but if you don't, the remaining alternative involves you not having dessert. As with disjunction in general, the negation of the primary preference has the function of a domain restriction when considering the secondary alternative, and so has a similar effect on the domain of possible worlds under consideration that an *if*-clause would. The conditional interpretation of imperatives with disjunctive phrases is thus the result of the interpretation of imperatives and the interpretation of disjunctive phrases.

On this picture, an *or what* question across discourse will involve asking about the alternative where the imperative's content proposition is not true, i.e. asking for alternatives dispreferred by the imperative's issuer. In so doing, the questioner resists committing to the issuer's preference structure without more information. In many cases, such as (6) this acts as a challenge or question about an implicit threat, since the context is such that by default B has to fulfill A's preference. In other contexts, as we saw above, the *or what* question does not necessarily challenge the speaker uttering the imperative, such as (20).

(6) A: Eat your vegetables!

B: Or what? **Paraphrase:** 'If I don't eat my vegetables, what is the future like?'

(20) A: Please, rain tonight!

B: Or what?

A: Or I'll have to go on that date.

In both cases, we can maintain the analysis of *or what* questions as 're-asking' the QUD, because in order to handle disjunction à la Eckardt, we have proposed that conditional disjunctions are already addressing a QUD. The questioner asks for the alternatives open in discourse regarding what the future looks like. In some cases, this is most naturally treated as a 'broad' QUD.

(21) QUD: (What are the alternatives for the future?)

Response: One alternative is that you eat your vegetables, and the speaker prefers it.

Or what?: What are the alternatives for the future in which I don't eat my vegetables?

What about the cases in which neither the disjunctive phrase nor an *or what* response is possible? The prediction of the QUD account is that these will be inappropriate in contexts where the speaker-dispreferred alternatives would not be relevant. One such case is disinterestedness, where the speaker temporarily adopts someone else's perspective: e.g. disinterested advice/wishes, as well as invitations and some kinds of advice, where the preference is oriented to (or at least includes) the addressee. What we suggest is that this is tied to the type of QUD that such imperatives can be used to respond to, and in particular, these QUDs tend to be 'mention-some' questions. We illustrate this with the case of disinterested advice in which A's *or what* question is not felicitous once s/he has asked for directions:

- (22) A: Excuse me, how do I get to San Francisco?  
 B: Take the train that leaves from over there in 10 minutes.  
 A: #Or what?  
 B: (Perplexed/confused by A's question) Er..., well, I guess it will take you much longer to get to San Francisco...

Here, there is an overt QUD provided by A's initial question. Crucially, A's question in (22) is a mention some-question, i.e. A does not need to hear every route to Brooklyn to have the question resolved (see van Rooy 2003 for an overview of the problems presented by mention some questions for a pragmatic theory of questions), but rather is just asking for some (approximately best) way. The imperative response is considered a 'complete' answer: B suggests that the best way to arrive to Brooklyn is to take the A train. In answering a mention-some question, the speaker assumes the hearer's preference as his own and can do this as far as this preference doesn't trump his own preferences (see Condoravdi and Lauer's principle of *cooperation by default*. An *or what* in this context would involve A challenging, from a position of ignorance, what B takes to be A's ideal preferences.<sup>9</sup>

While mention-some cases predominate, they are not the only way that conditional disjunction can be infelicitous. Let us look now at cases in which there is (obviously) false pretense, e.g. challenges. This is the case in the whistle-blower scenario below, shown as both a conditional disjunction and an *or what* response:

- (23) Scenario: A is a mobster who discovers that B is a whistle blower in his organization. A confronts B:  
 A: #Go on rat, report me to the police or nothing bad will happen to you.
- (24) A: Go on rat, report me to the police.  
 B: #Or what?

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<sup>9</sup>There are ways of requesting this sort of information in a more neutral fashion. For example, the utterance of *what if I don't/can't take the A train?* would be acceptable in the scenario in (22) (see Rawlins 2010). This argues in favor of a view in which the conditional paraphrase of disjunctive imperatives is just a close paraphrase, and not literally the analysis. Intuitively, an *or what* question asks for other best-answers to the same QUD, whereas a *what if*-question asks a new followup question to that QUD, and no longer needs to maintain the same goal structure involved in a mention-some question.

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Let us agree that, by the conventions of such a scenario, if B reports A to the police, something very bad is going to happen to B. A obviously has a real preference to not be reported to the police; the challenge indicates a preference to the opposite. In this scenario, the threat comes in from the background knowledge: A pretends that they aren't concerned about the consequences of being reported to the police and adopts B's preferences, but by doing so indicates that they would be perfectly happy to cause bad things to happen to B. Why is the conditional disjunction infelicitous? The answer is simple with the current set of assumptions: It is implausible that B would be willing to adopt the preference ranking indicated by the disjunction. The licensing of the *or what* is similar: once again, it would involve a speaker rejecting their own assumed preferences.

As we have seen above, imperatives can be understood and used in discourse as answers to questions about the ways the future may look like. When hearing an imperative out of the blue, we suggest that hearers will reconstruct some relevant QUD. But of course, as we have seen above imperatives are not necessarily uttered out of the blue. *Or what* questions responding to some imperative serve to ask about other alternatives in the QUD besides the one indicated by that imperative. The behavior of *or whats* parallels that of conditional disjunction, where the second disjunct serves to list alternative resolutions to the QUD beyond the speaker-preferred alternative.

### 4.1 Disjunction in “or what” responses

The proposal so far is non-specific about the actual account of disjunction, beyond assuming that a Simons-like Topic Condition applies. Following Simons, we assume that full conditional disjunctions are aligned to a QUD, and (in)felicity follows largely from the types of QUDs this leads to. *Or what* responses request alternatives to the responded-to imperative. On this story, *what* is exactly the same thing we have argued in other work is involved in regular *or what* questions (Biezma & Rawlins 2012a, 2016): a proform anteceded by a QUD.

However, it isn't obvious that the *or* seen in this construction is the same disjunction seen in regular conditional disjunction. A natural idea might be to take *or what* response to be elliptical for a full *or what* question, but this doesn't lead to the right paraphrase. That is, a full *or what* question responding to an imperative doesn't have the same meaning as an *or what* response:

- (25) A: Eat your vegetables!  
B: Do I eat my vegetables or what?

We suggest that what is different here is the disjunction itself. Rather than being the standard, well-studied, binary disjunction, *or what* responses involve the relatively unstudied *particle disjunction*, which shows up on the left periphery in spoken registers of English. We do not have space here to explore or defend a particular theory of particle disjunction, which has rather broad uses, but the basic idea is that the disjunction in an *or what* response is the same thing seen in the following discourses:

- (26) a. A: Eat your vegetables!  
B: Or you'll yell at me?
- b. A: John isn't here.  
B: Or he's being very quiet.
- c. A: Eat your vegetables! (to B)  
C: Or you won't get any dessert. (to B)

Here, the clause in the responses is prefaced with an *or*, and the response again indicates some alternative resolution of a question that A's move addresses. This does not appear to be an ordinary binary disjunction, as in these examples the disjoined clauses would have to be distributed across utterances. Moreover, in (26b) we see that this needn't be used for just responses to imperatives: B is the particle *or* to suggest an alternative explanation for John's apparent absence. Our proposal about particle *or* is that it is a unary operator signaling two things: (i) its prejacent satisfies Simons' Topic Condition (is aligned with the QUD) and (ii) that at least one possible answer to the QUD is given in prior discourse. A question-like *or* response (e.g. with rising intonation) then requests confirmation about whether the prejacent alternative is a possible answer, and an assertion-like *or* response signals that the speaker thinks the prejacent alternative is a possible answer. An *or what* response is the limiting case of questioning responses with particle *or*: it requests information about any possible answers the hearer may be able to identify. We leave a full exploration of particle *or* for the future.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper we have developed an account of *or what* responses to imperatives, and in consequence a unified account of disjunctive imperatives with conditional-like readings. The proposal has three main ingredients. First, imperatives are always addressing some QUD about the future. Second, by way of Condoravdi & Lauer (2012) imperative-marking conventionally indicates a speaker's preference about how this QUD is to be resolved. Third, disjunction involving imperatives obeys Simons's 2001 Topic Constraint for disjunction generally – disjuncts must be aligned to the QUD. Disjunctive imperatives therefore present two exclusive and exhaustive alternatives for resolving the QUD, one marked with the speaker's preference. *Or what* responses question alternatives to the speaker's preference, and in so doing, resist adopting that preference. Infelicity results when the QUD is such that alternatives to the imperative-marked one wouldn't be relevant, or would involve conflicting preference structures for the same individual.

There are (at least) three key open lines of investigation. First, we have sketched the analysis relatively informally: can this proposal be developed in a more formal, compositional way? Second, we have introduced the idea that the *or* in *or what* is a unary particle disjunction, but much more needs to be said about this. Third, we have not dealt with conjunctive imperatives, or the apparent impossibility of *and what* responses in many cases. We leave these questions for the future.

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