A Uniform Analysis for Concessive *at least* and Optative *at least*

The Puzzle: *Optatives*, (1), are clauses that express a wish without containing a lexical item that means *wish* (Rifkin 2000). Cross-linguistically, optatives often have the morphosyntax of embedded clauses and the distribution of unembedded clauses (cf. Evans 2007); (1a) illustrates an *if*-optative, (1b) illustrates a *that*-optative.

(1)   a.   **If** he'd **only** give us a chance.   *(21ˢᵗ century English)*
             ≈ {It would be good if / I wish that} he'd give us a chance.
       b.   **Oh that** Apollo would **but** drive his horses slowly!   *(from a 1682 source)*
             ≈ I wish that Apollo would drive his horses slowly.

One prototypical property of optatives is the presence of (typically scalar) particles, which are drawn from a set that includes *only*, as in (1a), *though/but*, as in (1b), and also *at least*, as in (2). In English, *at least* cannot give rise to an optative meaning, but in many other languages it can.

(2) a.   An **toulachiston /ˀ*mono** o John   iche   akusi   tin Mary!   *Modern Greek*
           if   at.least   only   the John$_{nom}$ had$_{3sg}$ listened the Mary$_{acc}$

    b.   Se **ao menos/*só / *apenas** o João tivesse ouvido   a Maria!   *Portuguese*
           if   at least   only only   the John had   listened.to the Mary

    c.   Si **almenys /*solament / *només** hagués escoltat (a) la Maria!   *Catalan*
           if   at.least   only   only   had$_{subj}$ listened to the Mary

           'If John had **at least** listened to Mary!' (≈ 'I wish John had **at least** listened to Mary!')

The connection between optativity and *at least* cannot be coincidental; it is also reflected in the diachronic development of the Middle Greek optative particle *makárie* 'happy': As a loan word, it acquired 'at least' as an additional meaning in Serbian *makar* and Romanian *măcar* (Rudolph 1996, Buchi 2008). This paper addresses the of question how *at least* is connected to optativity.

First Step of the Analysis: I argue that optative *at least* is a case of concessive *at least* (Nakanishi & Rullmann 2009, N&R; example (3) is theirs). Concessive *at least*, in (3a), conveys that higher values on a relevant scale are preferable; epistemic *at least*, in (3b), does not.

(3) a.   Mary didn't win a gold medal, but **at least** she won a silver medal.
           ⇒ *Although winning a silver medal is less preferable than winning a gold medal, a*
              silver medal is satisfactory. (= N&R's concessive *at least*)

    b.   Mary won **at least** a silver medal.
           ⇒ *The speaker is uncertain about what medal Mary won.* (= N&R's epistemic *at least*)

German has a specialized lexical item for concessive *at least*, namely *wenigstens* 'at least'. In most dialects of German, *wenigstens* 'at least' cannot be used neutrally; if the speaker uses *wenigstens* 'at least' in (4), it implies that she/he is happy that 10 people died.

(4) Bei dem Unfall gab   es   **mindestens** / #**wenigstens** 10 Tote.
    at   the accident gave it   at.least   #at.least   10 casualties
    'There were at least 10 casualties in the accident.'

Crucially, optatives require the concessive variant, *wenigstens* 'at least' (cf. Scholz 1991), (5).

(5) Wenn ich **wenigstens** / ***mindestens** viel   Zeit für meine   Familie   hätte!
    if   I   at.least   *at.least   much time for my   family   had
    'If at least I had much time for my family!'

I propose that the interaction of *wenigstens* 'at least' and the wish is indirect, as follows.

An Analysis of Optative Utterances: I argue that (by convention) unembedded *if*- and *that*-clauses can generally be used to express a wish in many languages (cf. Evans 2007). This *wish*

use does not require optative particles: As shown in (6), no particle is necessary in German. It can also be argued (against Evans 2007) that (6) is an unembedded *if*-clause, i.e. there is no elided matrix clause. If there was such a matrix clause in (6), the *because*-adjunct should be well-formed, taking scope over this matrix clause. This is possible in (7), which does involve deletion. Yet, (6) disallows this. It follows that (6) is an unembedded *if*-clause, which can express a wish.

(6) Wenn ich deine Statur hätte (… # weil ich dann auch so erfolgreich wäre) !
    if   I   your build had   because I   then also so successful was
    'If (only) I had your build (#because I'd be as successful)!' (adapted from Evans 2007)

(7) A: Under which circumstances would you be happy? / What would be good?
    B: Wenn ich deine Statur hätte, weil ich dann auch so erfolgreich wäre.
       '~~I would be happy / it would be good~~ if I had your build because I'd be as successful.'

Following Grosz (2010), the optative use of *if*-clauses is modeled as a speech act that targets the speaker's *Ideal List*, a set of propositions that reflects the speaker's ideals (based on Han's 2000 *Plan Set*, Portner's 2004 *To-Do List*). The Ideal List roughly serves as an ordering source (Kratzer 1981), establishing a ranking of worlds into better and less good ones. Optatives add the expressed proposition *p* to a speaker's Ideal List or reactivate *p* from this list. Optative particles like German *wenigstens* 'at.least' add presuppositions, which further refine the expressed wish.

Analyzing Optative *at least*: I propose a uniform analysis for concessive *wenigstens* 'at least' and optative *wenigstens* 'at least', as given in (8), based on N&R's analysis of the former.

(8) a. For any proposition *p* used in a speech act ϕ, $\|wenigstens\ p\|$ is defined iff

    (**i.**) the speaker intends to add *p* to the set of propositions *C* that ϕ targets, (**ii.**) there is a salient scale that reflects a preference, (**iii.**) there is a proposition *r* that ranks higher than *p*, and (**iv.**) there is a proposition *u* that ranks lower than *p*.

   b. *Descriptive Statements* (e.g. *Assertions*) target the Common Ground (Stalnaker 1974).
   c. *Evaluative Expressions* (e.g. *Optatives*) target the Ideal List.

Example (9) illustrates the analysis. It shows that *if-at-least-ψ* optatives mark the modified proposition as a low preference (ψ-worlds aren't ideal, but they are better than $\neg\psi$-worlds, (10)).

(9) *Context: The speaker didn't want Otto to go to the recent demonstrations against Emperor Ferdinand I. Nevertheless, Otto went, and he was detained for provoking the policemen.*
    Ach, wenn er **wenigstens** nicht die Polizisten provoziert hätte!
    oh   if   he at.least   not   the police.men provoked   had
    'Oh, if at least he hadn't provoked the policemen!'
    "wish use" $\Rightarrow$ Speaker adds *Otto didn't provoke the police men* to Speaker's Ideal List
    wenigstens $\Rightarrow$ Speaker presupposes that there is a better proposition (*Otto didn't go there.*)

(10) *Preferences (from best to worst):*
    Otto didn't go there. < Otto went, but didn't provoke the police. < Otto provoked the police.

Conclusion: The phrase *at least* in optatives can be analyzed uniformly with concessive *at least* in non-optative clauses; its contribution lies in its inherent orientation towards a preference scale.

References (selected and abbreviated): Buchi, É. 2008. Joan Coromines et l'étymologie lexicale romane. • Evans, N. 2007. Insubordination and its uses. • Grosz, P. 2010. Facts and Ideals. • Han, C.-H. 2000. The Structure and Interpretation of Imperatives. • Nakanishi, K & H Rullmann. 2009. Epistemic and Concessive Interpretations of *At Least*. • Portner, P. 2005. The Semantics of Imperatives within a Theory of Clause Types. • Rifkin, J. 2000. If only *if only* were *if* plus *only*. • Rosengren, I. 1993. Imperativsatz und "Wunschsatz". • Rudolph, E. 1996. Contrast: adversative and concessive relations. • Scholz, U. 1991. Wunschsätze im Deutschen.