

Pragmatics, discourse context, and common ground: Hymn-initial injunctives in the *R̥gveda*

Ian Hollenbaugh
University of California, Los Angeles
ihollenbaugh@humnet.ucla.edu
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It is understood that the concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not.

– Saussure (1916 [1959]:117)

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The *R̥gvedic* injunctive has long been recognized as a form “undifferentiated” (Renou 1952:368–9) or “underspecified” (Kiparsky 2005, 1968) for tense and mood (similarly Macdonell 1916:349–50 and Hoffmann 1967:276, 278).
- 1.2 Accordingly, in the *R̥gveda* the (non-prohibitive) injunctive can be interpreted as:
 - present—typically “general” present (e.g., *RV* II.5.3b, 5b, VII.104.20d),
 - past (e.g., *RV* II.11.18d, 13.9c),
 - “modal,” which may have the character of:
 - imperative (e.g., *RV* II.24.1d, VIII.17.1c),
 - optative (e.g., *RV* I.17.6b, V.50.1d),
 - subjunctive (i.e., future) (e.g., *RV* VII.86.2d).
- 1.3 Context is typically said to determine which reading of the injunctive is understood in any given utterance (so Macdonell 1916:349–50, Renou 1952:369, and Kiparsky 1968).
 - Thus, an injunctive following an indicative aorist or imperfect will receive past tense interpretation (e.g., *RV* V.32.1), while one following an indicative present will be interpreted as presential (e.g., *RV* I.165.10d), and one following a marked modal will receive a corresponding modal interpretation (see Kiparsky 2005:221–2 for examples).
- 1.4 However, the linear order “marked indicative or modal *followed by* injunctive” in fact has nearly as many exceptions as not. Accordingly, Kiparsky (2005:225) broadens his formulation as follows:

“The temporal/modal interpretation of injunctives is analogous to determining the antecedent of a pronoun, a process in which the hearer relies not only on the local syntactic environment, but also on the discourse context, and on the common ground shared between hearer and speaker.”

1.5 Yet there are problems with even this highly permissive formulation for the interpretation of the injunctive.

- On the one hand, we find many examples where the injunctive co-occurs with other forms that are “specified” for tense or mood, yet rather than matching in temporal and modal interpretation they seem to be juxtaposed specifically for the purpose of *contrast*.
 - So, for example, in *RV* X.116.9ab the pres. ind. *prá iyarmi* ‘I send forth’ contrasts temporally with the pres. inj. *prá irayam* ‘I sent forth’. Or at *RV* II.20.7 *tūtót* ‘he empowers’ contrasts with two past-referring imperfects (similarly *RV* I.152.3d, II.34.2–3, 38.8cd, V.45.1, VII.7.6, 58.6).
 - Contrasting in modality are *gāyata* ‘sing!’ beside *svadayanta* ‘they sweeten’ at *RV* IX.105.1 (similarly *RV* II.23.12cd, 33.14ab,¹ 38.11, IV.37.2ab, VII.42.1, 64.1d, IX.92.1, X.31.4d, 172.1, 182.1–3cd).
- On the other hand, there are over 70 examples of an injunctive occurring as the first verb in a hymn (acknowledged by Kiparsky (2005:225)). In discourse-initial position, it is simply not clear what the injunctive is supposed to mean. Is it past or present referring? Is it modal? How does it pick out its “antecedent,” as it were?

1.6 These issues will primarily occupy the present investigation. In particular:

- Do pragmatic pressures from the rest of the verbal system give rise to any special uses of the injunctive standing in contrast to more “marked” verb forms?
- What factors must be at work to determine the meaning of an injunctive in discourse-initial position?
- What sort of utterance-initial “common ground” can exist between speaker and hearer?
- Are there any restrictions found on the interpretation of injunctives in this environment as opposed to those found elsewhere?

2 Prior account: Kiparsky (2005)

2.1 Kiparsky’s (2005:225) claim that the injunctive typically “follows the verb with marked tense/mood” is only partly true.

- Verbs coordinated with *ca* do seem to invariably have the injunctive second,² though with *utā*

1. Here, the optative *pári...vrjyāḥ* in the a-pāda is followed in the b-pāda by *pári...gāt*, which could be read, by “conjunction reduction” (cf. Kiparsky 1968:38), as optative in meaning (‘may it go around’). However, it is more likely to have its usual imperatival force (‘let it go around’; two imperatives follow in cd), which it has by virtue of the fact that this inj. “fills in” for a wanting imperative to the root aorist of $\sqrt{gā}$ ‘go’ (Hoffmann 1967:256, 264). Since both interpretive alternatives represent a kind of directive modality, the difference here is slight, but it seems to me that *gāt*, like *dāt* ‘give!’ and *dhāt* ‘put!’, gets its directive force *pragmatically*—filling a paradigmatic gap—rather than purely contextually (cf. *RV* IV.37.2ab, where the inj. *guh* ‘they go’ probably does *not* have directive force, despite following an imperative; cf. also II.38.11b, where *ā gāt* (if truly inj.) is probably an imperatival directive ‘let it come’ but is *followed* by the subjunctive *bhāvāti* ‘will become’, thus failing to adhere to the predictions of conjunction reduction both in terms of its linear order and the mismatch in modal functions (directive vs. future)).

2. The only examples of an imperfect coordinated with a present injunctive are: *RV* IV.42.3d, VI.18.10d, IX.97.54c. All three involve active *āya*-present stems (cf. Klein 1985:83, Hoffmann 1967:213). The putative example of an injunctive coordinated with an imperative (i.e., *RV* III.30.20ab) probably does not show matching “illocutionary value” (despite Klein 1985:83), *paprāthaḥ* being better regarded as subjunctive (‘will spread out’). Examples of an injunctive coordinated with a verb “marked” for tense/mood are thus vanishingly rare, such that not much can be made of the “exceptionlessness” of Kiparsky’s (2005) rule.

only the opposite order is attested (*RV* X.31.4d and probably VI.60.1a, cf. Narten 1964:258–9, Klein 1985:366).

2.2 By far more common, however, is coordination of verbs that *match* in tense and modality (ibid.:82–3 “in almost all cases”). If conjunction reduction is a synchronic process, why does it apply so occasionally and with so many exceptions?

2.3 By Kiparsky’s (2005:225) own admission, the ordering of injunctive and non-injunctive outside overt verbal conjunction is not strict, as shown in (1).³

(1) INJUNCTIVE PRECEDING INDICATIVE OR MODAL

a. *sr̥jó*_[INJ.] *mahīr indra yá āpinvah*_[IND.] (*RV* II.11.2a).⁴

‘You **released**_[INJ.] the great (waters), Indra, which you **swelled**_[IND.]’ (tr. adapted from Jamison and Brereton 2014:413).

b. *īndro dāśad*_[INJ.] *dāśūṣe hānti*_[IND.] *vṛtrām* (*RV* II.19.4b; cf. similarly II.18.2cd).

‘Indra **serves**_[INJ.] his servant: he **smashes**_[IND.] Vṛtra [/Obstacle]’ (tr. adapted from ibid.:428).⁵

c. *prā brahmāṇo āṅgiraso nakṣanta*_[INJ.] *prā krandanūr nabhaniyasya vetu*_[IPV.] (*RV* VII.42.1ab; cf. also II.22.4f–h, where the inj. is likely modal).

‘The Aṅgirasas, possessors of the sacred formulation, **are reaching forth**_[INJ.]. **Let** the roar of (the hymn? fire? soma?) that is set to burst out **go questing forth**_[IPV.]’ (tr. ibid.:937).

2.4 Even where the linear order is in line with Kiparsky’s (2005) generalization, often the meaning is not as he would predict (or at least not obviously so).

(2) NON-ANAPHORIC INTERPRETATIONS OF THE INJUNCTIVE

a. *ā yāhi*_[IPV.] *vānasā sahā gāvaḥ sacanta*_[INJ.] *vartanīm yād údhabhiḥ* (*RV* X.172.1).

‘**Drive here**_[IPV.] along with your longing. The cows **follow**_[INJ.] your track, when (they have given milk) with their udders’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:1651).

b. *gārbho bhārām bharati*_[IND.] *ā cid asya ṛtām pīparti ānṛtaṃ ní tārit*_[INJ.] (*RV* I.152.3cd).

‘He **guides**_[IND.] the truth across; he **has brought down**_[INJ.] untruth’ (tr. ibid.:330).

c. *uttānāyām ajanayan*_[IND.] *sūśūtam bhūvad*_[INJ.] *agnīḥ purupésāsu gārbhaḥ* (*RV* II.10.3ab).

‘In her with (legs) agape [=kindling sticks] they **engendered**_[IND.] him whose birth is easy. Agni **becomes**_[INJ.] the embryo in the (women) of many ornaments [=logs].’ (tr. ibid.:412).

2.5 In addition, neither local syntactic environment nor discourse context can obviously explain hymn-initial injunctives that lack neighboring verbs to establish a context-based interpretation.

3. Kiparsky’s (2005) counts are dubious here as well. In hymn-initial verses of the *R̥gveda* in which an injunctive occurs alongside some more “marked” verb form (i.e., indicative or modal), I find that about 60% of cases *do not* show either the order or the meaning that Kiparsky (2005) would predict.

4. Cf. IV.28.1 for the same order in coordinate clauses; cf. VII.3.2ab for the indicative in a temporal clause.

5. This example is complicated. The pres. inj. *dāśat* is plausibly to be read as past, ‘served’, since its object is Manu (in the preceding pāda). This would make it an example not only of the wrong order for “conjunction reduction” but also another example of a temporal mismatch between the interpretation of the inj. and the ind. within the same pāda, of the type in (2).

- This is particularly clear in the case of performatives, as in (3), since this meaning is regularly expressed by the injunctive rather than the indicative (Hoffmann 1967:251–5, 269 “Koinzidenzfall”).

(3) PERFORMATIVE INJUNCTIVE AORIST

*ápūrviyā purutāmāni asmai mahé vīrāya tavāse turāya
virapśīne vajrīṇe śāmtamāni vácāṃsi āsā sthāvīrāya takṣam* (RV VI.32.1).

‘For him I **fashion** with my mouth these words, unprecedented, best of many, most wealful— for the great hero, powerful and precipitous, conferring abundance, bearing the mace, stalwart.’ (tr. adapted from Jamison and Brereton 2014:816).

- 2.6 It also remains unexplained *why* the poet should slip into the injunctive (given proper context) and then return to the indicative in the same line, as in (4) (cf. similarly RV II.13.9, 15.7, 8, 17.2; with pres. ind. IX.92.3).

(4) INCONSISTENT MIXING OF THE INJUNCTIVE AND INDICATIVE

- a. *sá mātārā súriyeṇā kavīnām ávāsayaḍ_[IND.] rujád_[INJ.] ádrimḡ ḡṇānāḥ
suādhībhir ḡkvabhir vāvaśāná úd usriyāṇām asrjan_[IND.] nidānam* (RV VI.32.2).

‘He **made** the two mothers of the poets **shine**_[IND.] with the sun; he **broke**_[INJ.] the rock as he was being hymned.

Bellowing [/being eager] along with the very attentive versifiers, he **let loose**_[IND.] the binding of the ruddy cows’ (tr. *ibid.*:816).

- b. *yá udnāḥ phaligám bhinán_[INJ.] níak síndhūṃr avásrjat_[IND.]
yó góṣu pakvám dhārāyat_[INJ.]* (RV VIII.32.25).

‘[He w]ho **split**_[INJ.] the bolt of the water and **released**_[IND.] the rivers downward, who **fixed**_[INJ.] the cooked (milk) fast in the cows’ (tr. *ibid.*:1095; cf. Hoffmann 1967:213).

3 Interpretation based on factors other than discourse context

3.1 Presuppositions: Text type and assumed common ground

- 3.1.1 To get at the heart of the issues outlined above, I reason that it will be most instructive to examine the injunctive in hymn-initial position, which is as close as we can get to a “null context.”

- 3.1.2 What emerges quite clearly is that text type is an extremely important factor in establishing the “common ground,” making the meaning of the injunctive recoverable in an utterance-initial environment.

- 3.1.3 To recover one reading or another for the injunctive hymn initially, a listener needs to understand:

- (i) Who the subject of the hymn is, which bears presuppositions about when certain events are likely to be happening.
- (ii) Whether we are talking about a ritual or mythical event, or both.

- 3.1.4 For example, in hymns beginning with the ritual installation of Agni, we find injunctives referring to the current moment in a variety of ways.

- With the aorist injunctive, the meaning is either:

- “recent past”/resultative, of the type *didhiṣāyāḥ bhūt* ‘has become desirable to install’ (RV II.4.1c; cf. similarly X.46.1c), or
- performative, of the type *áchā... gāsi* ‘here I sing’ (RV V.25.1ab).
- With the present injunctive, the meaning can be:
 - reportive (e.g., *agnīm nárah. . . janayanta* ‘men (hereby) give birth to Agni’, RV VII.1.1ab), or
 - progressive (e.g., *prá... navanta* ‘(flames) are bellowing out’, RV X.176.1b) (cf. similarly *sīdat* ‘sits, is seated’ at X.46.1b).

3.1.5 By “performative” and “reportive” I mean the following:⁶

- performative ⇒ type *I now pronounce you man and wife*.
 - The speech act itself imposes some change on the state of the world.
 - Typically 1st person (mostly singular, mostly active), though others are possible.
 - Regularly expressed in the RV by the aorist injunctive⁷ (e.g., *prá vocam* ‘I proclaim’) or present indicative.⁸
- reportive ⇒ type *she shoots, she scores!*
 - Narrates events as they happen in the present moment (without imposing a change).
 - Typically 3rd person, sometimes 2nd.

6. Though the present indicative can express performative/reportive meanings as well (e.g., RV I.82.6a, II.12cd, VIII.27.1c, X.4.1a, 85.25a), it plainly does not stand in a “conjunction reduction” type relationship with the injunctive in this use in the vast majority of cases. A performative use of the aorist indicative is marginal at best, though a performative subjunctive is reasonably well attested (cf. n.7 below).

7. There are also some possible examples of performative *indicative* aorists (Schwyzer–Debrunner:282): e.g., *astoṣi* ‘I (hereby) praise’ (RV I.122.1c, VIII.39.1a, X.77.1d; recent-past/resultative at V.41.10a; cf. *nú stoṣam* ‘now I praise’ (I.187.1a), *úpa... asrkṣi* ‘I (hereby) pour out (my speech)’ (RV II.35.1a; s-aor. inj. not attested, except with *má* in the *Atharvaveda*; cf. (8) below). The *sub-junctive* is also used performatively (or of the impending future), particularly in the first person plural (e.g., *nú ṣtavāma... utá carkirāma* ‘now we shall praise and pay tribute to’, RV IV.39.1ab) or singular (e.g., *stāvā (nú) stavāma* ‘I/we shall praise (now)’, RV II.11.6; *prá nú vocā* ‘I shall now proclaim’, RV VI.59.1a; *śámśā* ‘I shall praise’, RV VII.61.4a; *nú... stoṣāni* ‘now I shall praise’, RV X.88.3ab). It may also show reportive use in the 3rd person (e.g., *nūnám... dhāti* ‘now he distributes’ (RV II.38.1c); cf. Whitney 1889:§836a). The optative can be used semi-performatively as well (e.g., *mántram vocema* ‘We would speak this spell’ (RV II.35.2b; cf. 12b)).

8. EXAMPLES OF PERFORMATIVE/REPORTIVE INJUNCTIVE AORISTS (cf. Hoffmann 1967:251–3): RV I.25.18ab (*dárśam (nú)* ‘(now) I see’), 32.1a (*nú... prá vocam* ‘now I proclaim’), 59.6 (*prá nú... vocam* ‘I now proclaim’), 61.2a (*prá yaṃsi* ‘I hold out’), 136.6b (*vocam* ‘I proclaim’), 141.1a (*dhāyi* ‘is installed’), 150.1a (*voce* ‘I call myself’), 154.1a (*nú kam... prá vocam* ‘right now I proclaim’), 187.1a (*nú stoṣam* ‘now I praise’) II.4.6b (*svānūt* ‘sounds’), 15.1ab (*prá... nú... vocam* ‘I now proclaim’), 18.3a (*nú kam... yojam* ‘right now I (shall?) yoke’), 21.3d (*vocam prá* ‘I proclaim’), 27.2b (*adyā... juṣanta* ‘today... enjoy’), III.1.20b (*prá... vocam* ‘I (shall?) proclaim’), 53.2b (*nú... yakṣi* ‘now I sacrifice’), ?IV.7.1a (*dhāyi* ‘is/?has been installed’), V.25.1b (*áchā... gāsi* ‘here I sing’), ?31.6a (*prá... vocam* ‘I (shall) proclaim’), ?41.13b (*á... vocam* ‘I (shall) call upon’), 70.1c (*vāṃsi* ‘I win’), 85.5b (*prá vocam* ‘I proclaim’), VI.8.1b (*prá nú vocam* ‘I now proclaim’), 16.8a (?*prá... yakṣi* ‘I(?) begin the sacrifice’), 32.1d (*takṣam* ‘I fashion’; contrast the summarizing perfect *evā... takṣuh* ‘have thus fashioned’ at II.19.8b), ?48.16b (*śamśiṣam nú* ‘I (shall) announce now’), 51.3d (*áchā voce* ‘I call here’), VII.15.4ab (*nú... jījanam* ‘now I give birth’), 33.1c (*voce pári* ‘I speak about’), 98.5a (*prá... vocam* ‘I proclaim’), VIII.24.1a (*á śiśāmahi* ‘we direct’), 27.2 (*á... gāsi* ‘here I sing’), 45.28c (*prá śamśiṣam* ‘I laud’), 101.15c (*prá nú vocam* ‘I now proclaim’), IX.92.1b (*pári... sarji* ‘is sent around’), 102.1c (*pári bhuvat* ‘encompasses’), ?105.4c (*ádhi... dīdharam* ‘I fix, ?have fixed’), X.4.1a (*prá... yakṣi* ‘I begin the sacrifice’), ?52.5a (*á... yakṣi* ‘I (shall?) gain through sacrifice’), 69.5d (*prá nú vocam* ‘I now proclaim’), 85.25b (*subaddhām... karam* ‘I (hereby) make her well bound’ (cf. *ibid.*:252 on this example), 96.1a (*prá... śamśiṣam* ‘I proclaim’), 112.8ab (*prá nūnám... vocam* ‘I (shall?) now proclaim’). Possibly also *tám idám huve* ‘I invoke here and now’ (e.g., RV II.37.2a), if it is an inj. aorist.

- Regularly expressed in the *RV* by the present injunctive (e.g., *nūnām sṛjat* ‘now he discharges’ (*RV* VII.104.20d)), the present indicative, or sometimes the aorist injunctive.⁹
- 3.1.6 Besides Agni’s ritual installation, other hymns open with a reference to Agni’s *primal* installation, where the injunctive refers to the distant (mythic) past and can be aorist (e.g., *RV* I.148.1a) or present (e.g., *RV* VI.7.1d).
- Here, there is often vagueness—probably deliberate—between Agni’s primal installation and his habitual or current installation (cf. §4 below).
 - Certain figures, such as Manu, occupy both mythic and the ritual space, which simultaneously triggers a vague time reference for the injunctive and motivates its use in such contexts (e.g., *ayám jāyata mānuṣo dhārīmaṇi* ‘This one was/is born here on the foundation of Manu’, *RV* I.128.1a).
- 3.1.7 Soma hymns beginning in injunctives likewise tend to belong to the ritual present, with the aorist (e.g., *RV* IX.74.1a) or perfect (e.g., *RV* I.91.1a) injunctive in resultative meaning, or with a performative/reportive use of the aorist (e.g., *RV* IX.92.1b, 102.1c).
- 3.1.8 Conversely, Indra hymns beginning with injunctives tend to be past referring, again whether aorist (e.g., *RV* I.63.1b) or present (e.g., IV.17.1). Unlike the Agni hymns, ambiguity with non-past interpretation seldom arises, since Indra’s great deeds are essentially confined to mythic time, even when ritually relevant.
- Unlike Agni, Indra had only one birth. Consequently, when the injunctive *jāniṣṭhāḥ* is used of Indra at *RV* X.73.1a, or when other events of his birth are described (e.g., *RV* VIII.77.1b), the gnomic reading is not available as it is in the Agni hymns just discussed.
- 3.1.9 Interestingly, the openings to Dawn hymns almost exclusively employ the aorist and present *indicative*, in addition to imperatives, rather than injunctives.
- This may be explained by the fact that Dawn hymns are invariably concerned with the present moment—*this* dawn happening today. Hence the indicative is used to rule out any ambiguity about which dawn is being referred to.
- 3.1.10 In summary, the injunctive is typically avoided at the beginning of hymns if, for reasons of subject matter and “world knowledge,” its use would result in unwanted temporal or modal ambiguity.
- It is available for use otherwise, in which case it can have either past or present reference, according as is most suited to the expectations or presuppositions assumed to exist between speaker and hearer.
- ## 3.2 Pragmatics: Pressures from the verbal system at large
- 3.2.1 The injunctive and indicative occur at about the same rate hymn initially as in other parts of the hymn (with a ratio of just under two augmented forms to every one injunctive).

9. EXAMPLES OF THE PRESENT INJUNCTIVE IN REPORTIVE OR PROGRESSIVE SENSE: *RV* I.71.1a (*úpa prá jinvan* ‘stimulate’), 173.1ab (*gāyat* ‘he sings, is singing’, *ārcāma* ‘we chant, are chanting’), ?II.13.2b (*prá bharanta* ‘are bringing forth, ?bring forth’), 35.13a (?*janayat tásu* ‘begets in these (waters)’), VI.5.3a (*prađivaḥ sīdaḥ* ‘you have long since been sitting’), VII.1.1ab (*janayanta* ‘give birth to’), 3.2a (*próthat* ‘snorts, ?has snorted’), 42.1 (*prá nakṣanta* . . . *prá navanta* ‘are reaching forth . . . are bellowing forth’), 104.20d (*nūnām sṛjat* ‘now discharges, ?is discharging, ?will discharge’), X.92.1d (*aśāyata* ‘(hereby) reaches’), 172.1b (*sacanta* ‘follow, are following’), 176.1b (*prá navanta* ‘bellow out’).

- 3.2.2 Surprisingly, all readings otherwise known to be available to the injunctive are attested hymn initially, such that no firm restrictions on its usage can be identified.
- 3.2.3 Despite Kiparsky 2005:221–2, modal uses of the injunctive are in fact of extremely limited occurrence (Hoffmann 1967:236–64, 268–9), being lexically restricted (e.g., *dāḥ* ‘give!’) and regularly dis-preferred to the marked modals wherever possible.¹⁰
- Interestingly, in parts of the paradigm where the inj. and imperative coincide formally, imperative is the preferred semantic value (e.g., *karta* ‘make!’). To distinguish the injunctive from the imperative, primary endings are sometimes added to root or thematic Aorists in the 2pl., and 2/3du. in generic or characterizing contexts, as in *kr̥tha* ‘you make’ (e.g., *RV* X.97.9d) (*ibid.*:111, Narten 1964:124). In such cases, the grammar is going out of its way, as it were, to disambiguate modal and injunctive forms, even going so far as to put primary endings on aorist stems. This speaks to the injunctive’s distinctive meaning, which arises by virtue of it *not* being any other category, even where it has to use primary endings in order to set itself apart from those other categories.¹¹
- 3.2.4 The principal observation to be made from a pragmatic point-of-view is that there is blocking on two fronts:
- (i) Non-injunctive modal categories tend to apply wherever they can.
 - (ii) The indicative is used to avoid ambiguity that is liable to arise from the inherent vagueness of the injunctive, particularly its gnomic, performative/reportive, and modal uses.
- 3.2.5 In a robustly narrative context, or when referring to an event plainly belonging to the mythic past, the indicative is strictly unnecessary, such that the injunctive (aorist or present) can often be used instead, since no ambiguity can arise with the other readings of the injunctive.
- 3.2.6 This is because the other injunctive readings only apply to the present time: There are no past modal readings of the injunctive (of the type ‘should have done’, vel sim.), nor do we typically find modal uses of the injunctive in subordinate clauses. As for performatives/reportives, these are definitionally presential, and gnomics are likewise always non-past referring.
- 3.2.7 So it is only from the point-of-view of the present that the meaning of the injunctive is vague.
- From the point-of-view of the present moment, if a speaker chooses *not* to use the indicative of the aorist or present and instead uses a corresponding injunctive, then two possibilities emerge:
 - (i) The context is so clearly presential that no mistake can be made about what is meant (as in the ritual installation of Agni).
 - (ii) The injunctive has been selected to express some special meaning to which the indicative is ill-suited.

10. The injunctive “fills in” for the marked modals when they are lacking for one reason or another (Hoffmann 1967:255–64), so its semantics must be broad enough to allow such readings, but in pragmatic terms it is categorically blocked under normal circumstances. Examples of this “filling in” include the use of the injunctive for the generally absent imperative and subjunctive to reduplicated Aorists (Whitney 1889:284, §869 ff.) and imperative to *s*- and *iṣ*-aorists (Hoffmann 1967:264; Whitney 1889:290, 293), as well as individual lexical items that lack one form or another in their paradigms (cf. n.1 above and n.11 below).

11. This is not limited to the imperative; a similar phenomenon applies to the subjunctive, observable in the creation of the root aor. inj. *dabhúḥ* to replace the originally subjunctive root aor. *dabhan* (e.g., *RV* I.148.5c), which coincides formally with the injunctive after *mā* (avoiding what would otherwise come out as **dbhan*) (Hoffmann 1967:242–3). The form *dabhúḥ* is found only in generic/characterizing contexts, beside present indicatives (*RV* III.16.2cd, VI.46.10ab).

3.2.8 In the latter case, by deductive reasoning, the hearer will interpret the injunctive as either performative/reportive, gnomic, or (rarely) modal—depending on a number of factors, such as context, text type, and lexical item.

3.2.9 For example, verbs having to do with singing or praising are strongly associated with the performative use in the first person singular of the aorist injunctive. This reading is virtually unavailable to the aorist indicative but arises *in contrast* with it.

- So we find examples of performative injunctives like *prá vocam* ‘I shall/hereby proclaim’ (RV I.32.1a) in hymn-initial position but the indicative *prá avocam* ‘I have proclaimed’ (RV IV.45.7a) in hymn-final summary verses.¹²
- Faced with the injunctive *prá vocam* the hearer reasons that, because the speaker has made the move not to say *prá avocam*, some special meaning not typical of the indicative is meant.
- Compare also the summarizing aor. ind. *ahve* ‘I have called’ at RV II.32.8c beside the performative aor. inj. (or Pres. ind.?) *huve* ‘I call’ at (e.g.) RV II.29.1d, and note especially the contrast at RV II.37.2a: *yám u púrvam áhuve tám idám huve* ‘Which one I **have invoked** previously, him I **invoke** here and now’.

3.2.10 Both the performative/reportive injunctive and the summarizing indicative aorist are found in a single hymn in (5) (cf. IV.39.1ab/6a, with subjunctives in 1; I.187.1/11b, with a perfect in 11).

(5) INJUNCTIVE (a) AND INDICATIVE (b) AORIST WITH CONTRASTIVE MEANINGS IN A SINGLE HYMN

a. *bál itthá tát vápuṣe dhāyi_[INJ.] darśatám devásya bhárgaḥ sáhaso yáto jáni* (RV I.141.1ab)

‘Yes, indeed! It is just so: the luster of the god, lovely to see, **is (hereby) installed**_[INJ.] for wonder, after he has been born of strength’ (tr. adapted from Jamison and Brereton 2014:316).

b. *ástāvy_[IND.] agníḥ śímīvadbhir arkaīḥ* (RV I.141.13a).

‘Agni **has been praised**_[IND.] with our energetic chants [with his ardent flames]’ (tr. *ibid.*:318).

3.2.11 Thus, by purely pragmatic (rather than contextual) means, distinctive readings of the injunctive arise, most commonly performative/reportive or gnomic/“timeless.”

3.2.12 Of the pragmatic nature of the gnomic/“timeless” reading (6) is an instructive example.

- The eight injunctives in verses 1–3 (6a) establish what typically happens, and so what should happen today. By contrast, the four indicatives in verse 10 (6b) mark today’s sunrise as accomplished.

(6) GNOMIC INJUNCTIVE BY PRAGMATIC CONTRAST TO PAST INDICATIVE

a. *vidá divó viṣiyánn ádrim ukthaír āyatiyá uśáso arcíno guḥ_[INJ.]*

ápāvṛta_[INJ.] vrajínīr út súvar gād_[INJ.] ví dúro mánuṣīr devá āvah_[IND.]

12. EXAMPLES OF “SUMMARIZING” INDICATIVE AORISTS: RV I.141.13a, II.19.7a, 31.7b, 32.8c, 35.15ab, 39.8b, IV.39.6a, 45.7a, V.1.12a, VII.58.6a, 61.7b, X.64.17a, 115.9b. Summarizing *injunctive* aorists, by contrast, are rarely attested (e.g., *śamsi* ‘has been proclaimed’, RV II.4.8b). The Pf. is sometimes found in summary verses, though its distinction from the aorist in this use, if any, is difficult to see: e.g., *evá... takṣuḥ* ‘thus (the Gr̥tsamadas) have fashioned’ (RV II.19.8b; but cf. aor. ind. *akran* ‘have made’ with the same subject at II.39.8b; contrast the summarizing aor. ind. in the preceding verse (II.19.7a): *evá... ahema* ‘thus we have sent (our recitation)’; cf. also the performative aor. inj. *takṣam* ‘I fashion’ at VI.32.1d (3) and summarizing aor. ind. *átakṣan* ‘have fashioned’ at II.31.7b (them. aor. not ipf., see Narten 1964:124–5)).

*ví súriyo amátiṃ ná śríyaṃ sād_[INJ.] á ūrvád gávām mātá jānatí gāt_[INJ.]
dhánvarṇaso nadíyaḥ khádoarṇāḥ sthūṇā iva súmitā dṛṃhata_[INJ.] dyaúḥ
asmá uktháya párvatasya gárbho mahínāṃ janúṣe pūrviyáya
ví párvato jhīta_[INJ.] sád_[INJ.]hata_[INJ.] dyaúr āvívāsanto dasayanta_[INJ.] bhūma (RV V.45.1–3).*

‘Through knowledge unloosing the stone of heaven with hymns—the shining (beacons) of the approaching dawn **come**_[INJ.] (out of it)—he **uncloses**_[INJ.] (the doors) to the enclosures: the Sun **comes up**_[INJ.]. The god **has opened up**_[IND.] the doors belonging to the sons of Manu.

The Sun **unlooses**_[INJ.] his beauty like an ensign; the mother of the cows [=Dawn], recognizing (the way), **comes here**_[INJ.] from the pen. The rivers (of light) have floods (broad and high) like plains, have floods that chew (their banks). Heaven **becomes firm**_[INJ.] like a well-fixed pillar.

In response to this hymn here the womb of the mountain (gapes open) for the primordial birth of the great ones [=dawns].

The mountain **gapes open**_[INJ.]; heaven **achieves success**_[INJ.]; desiring to win the earth, they [=poets/Aṅgirasas] **exhaust themselves**_[INJ.]’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:719).

- b. *á súriyo aruhac_[IND.] chukráṃ árṇo áyukta_[IND.] yád dharíto vītápr̥sthāḥ
udná ná návam anayanta_[IND.] dhírā āśṛṇvatír ápo arvág atīṣṭhan_[IND.] (RV V.45.10).*

‘The Sun **has mounted**_[IND.] the gleaming flood, now that he **has yoked**_[IND.] his golden, straight-backed (horses).

Like a boat through the water the wise ones **guided**_[IND.] him; the waters, giving heed, **stood still**_[IND.] nearby’ (tr. ibid.:720).

3.2.13 The interpretation of the injunctive as performative/reportive or gnomic/“timeless” thus depends on one’s awareness that it is *not* the indicative.

3.2.14 Using a form underspecified for tense and mood pragmatically invites alternative, non-indicative interpretations, even if it does not *require* them.

3.3 Contextual neutralizations

3.3.1 Avery (1885:330) observes that, when the injunctive is used “in a historical sense” (= past narrative) the distinction “between imperfect and aorist” tends to be “obliterate[d].”

- This is seen, e.g., by the co-occurrence of aorist and present injunctives in the narrative in (7).

(7) NEUTRALIZATION OF ASPECT FOR INJUNCTIVE IN PAST NARRATION

- a. *tán nú satyám pávamānasyāstu yátra víśve kāravaḥ saṃnāsanta
jyótir yád áhne ákr̥ṇod_[IPE.] ulokám právan_[IPE.] mánuṃ dásyave kar_[INJ.AOR.] abhīkam
(RV IX.92.5).*

‘Now, let this be true of the self-purifying one, this on which all the bards concur: that he **made**_[IPE.] light for the day and wide space; he **furthered**_[IPE.] Manu but **made**_[INJ.AOR.] close quarters for the Dasyu.’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:1331).

- b. *ádardar_[IPE.] útsam ásr̥jo ví_[IPE.] khāni tvám arṇaván badbadhānām aramṇāḥ_[IPE.]
mahántam indra párvataṃ ví yád váḥ_[INJ.AOR.] s̥j̥ó ví_[INJ.PRES.] dhārā áva dānavāṃ
han_[INJ.PRES.] (RV V.32.1).*

'You **violently split**_[IPF.] the wellspring; you **reamed out**_[IPF.] its apertures. You **brought to peace**_[IPF.] the floods, which had been hard pressed. When, Indra, you **pried apart**_[INJ.AOR.] the great mountain, you **set loose**_[INJ.PRES.] the streams; you **smashed down**_[INJ.PRES.] the Dānava.' (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:697).

- As a case example, the aorist injunctive *kāḥ* is used almost exclusively in “historical” meaning (‘made’), whereas its indicative counterpart *ākāḥ* almost always means ‘has made’.
- This is typical of aorists in general: The indicative is regularly avoided in sequential narrative contexts, where the injunctive is preferred, occurring alongside narrative imperfects (or present injunctives). Other examples include: *RV* II.15.7, 19.3, 20.5, and 24.14.¹³

3.3.2 This can be explained by the fact that it is precisely in “historical” contexts that the aorist injunctive does not compete with modal, gnomic, or performative readings, so of course a large portion of its occurrences are in contexts in which no ambiguity could arise as to what is meant.

- This gives the *appearance* that the aorist injunctive has lost its (aspectual) distinction from the imperfect or present injunctive in “historical” function.

3.3.3 From the perspective of the present moment, on the other hand, the aorist injunctive is ambiguous and typically its augmented counterpart is called for to clarify “indicative,” recent past/resultative meaning (type ‘has done X’).

3.3.4 I would add that the aspectual distinction between the present and aorist stems is ‘obliterated’ also in gnomic contexts, as seen in (6a) above (cf. Hoffmann 1967:119–45).

- A similar explanation applies here: The injunctive aorist acquires a special reading (gnomic) in contrast to the aorist indicative (resultative), which happens to coincide with one of the uses of the present indicative or injunctive (viz. gnomic).

3.3.5 Aspectual contrast is also essentially collapsed in performative/reportive use.

(8) NEUTRALIZATION OF ASPECT FOR PERFORMATIVE AOR. INJ. AND PRES. IND.

*prá te yakṣi*_[INJ.AOR.] *prá te iyarmi*_[IND.PRES.] *mánma* (*RV* X.4.1a).

‘I **begin the sacrifice**_[INJ.AOR.] to you and I **propel**_[IND.PRES.] my thought to you’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:1371).¹⁴

3.3.6 However, there is a strong tendency for the aorist injunctive and present indicative to be truly *performative*, whereas the present injunctive is typically *reportive*.

- As a matter of fact, this turns out to be one of the most robust contrasts observable between the aorist and present injunctive (compare fn.8 with fn.9 above).

4 Vagueness

4.1 In addition, contexts or text types that permit viewing the event from both the past and the present at once result in ambiguity between gnomic/presential and narrative past interpretations, often

13. Indicative aorists do occur in plain narrative contexts (e.g., *RV* II.15.4b) but are far less common than the injunctive. In addition, there are often ulterior reasons for their occurrence, such as being built to a root that lacks a present stem altogether or one that lacks injunctive forms for metrical/prosodic reasons, as in the case of *āśata* ‘they obtained’ (e.g., *RV* II.21.5d) or *ví...airat* ‘he broke apart’ (e.g., *RV* II.15.8b; cf. Hoffmann 1967:209–10).

14. Cf. X.85.25ab, with the opposite order of indicative present (*prá...muñcāmi* ‘I release (her)’) and injunctive aorist (*subaddhām...karam* ‘I make (her) well bound’).

deliberately so, as in (9) (cf. similarly I.128.1a, II.19.4–5, 34.2ab, and V.29.1b). This may additionally be reflected in *formal* ambiguity between the indicative and injunctive, as in (9b).

(9) VAGUE TIME REFERENCE OF THE INJUNCTIVE

a. *nū ca purā ca sādanaṃ rayīṅṅaṃ jātāsya ca jāyamānasya ca kṣām*

satās ca gopām bhāvataś ca bhūrer devā agnīm dhārayan_[INJ.] draviṇodām (RV I.96.7)

‘Both now and before the seat of riches, the ground of what has been born and is being born,

the herdsman of what is and of much coming into being—Agni, the wealth-giver, **do/did** the gods **uphold_[INJ.]**’ (tr. adapted from Jamison and Brereton 2014:235).

b. *imāṃ vidhānto apāṃ sadhāsthe dviṭādadhur_{[PF.? INJ.? IND.?)} bhṛgavo vikṣv āyóḥ* (RV II.4.2ab).

‘This one here—having done honor (to him) in the seat of the waters—once again the Bhrigus (**have**) **installed/install_{[PF.? INJ.? IND.?)}** among the clans of Āyu.’ (tr. adapted from *ibid.*:406).

c. *ahám dām_[INJ.] grṇatē pūrvyaṃ vāsu ahám bráhma kṛṇavam_[INJ.] máhyaṃ vārdhanam ahám bhuvam_[INJ.] yājamānasya coditā áyajvanah_[INJ.] sāksi_[INJ.] vísvasmin bhāre* (RV X.49.1; cf. similarly X.48.1a).

‘I **gave/give_[INJ.]** the foremost good to the singer. I **made/make_[INJ.]** the sacred formula-tion a strengthener for me.

I **became/become/am regularly_[INJ.]** the inciter of the sacrificer. I **have vanquished/vanquish_[INJ.]** the non-sacrificers in every contest.’ (tr. adapted from *ibid.*:1456).

4.2 However, even though the injunctive is often exploited by Ṛgvedic poets in order to convey multiple meanings at once (a favorite poetic device in the *Ṛgveda*), this does not mean that the injunctive was a wholly anti-Gricean category.

4.3 Vagueness cannot explain the performative, *prá vocam* type discussed above, for example, since these typically only have one viable interpretation (i.e., as performative).

4.4 In addition, there are many injunctives that are difficult to read in more than one way in their context or hymn type. These are practically limited to a single, logical reading of the injunctive, whether past or present (or, in some cases, modal).

- I give examples in (10), where (10a) is difficult to read as past referring (similarly RV I.71.1, 173.1ab, (1c) above, and cf. fn.8–9), while (10b) is difficult to read as non-past (similarly RV II.19.5-6, 34.2, VII.87.1a, VIII.77.1b, IX.93.1, X.59.1a, 73.1).

(10) NON-VAGUE TIME REFERENCE OF INJ., DETERMINED BY CONTEXT OR SUBJECT MATTER

a. *yuvó rájāṃsi suyámāso áśvāḥ rátho yád vām páry árṇāṃsi dīyat_[INJ.]*

hiraṇyáya vām paváyaḥ prusāyan_[INJ.] mádhvaḥ pibantā uśásaḥ sacethe_[IND.PRES.] (RV I.180.1).

‘Your [= Áśvins’] easily controlled horses (fly around) the airy realms, when your chariot **flies around_[INJ.]** the floods.

Your golden wheel-rims **spray_[INJ.]** (honey); drinking of the honey you **accompany_[IND.PRES.]** the dawns.’ (tr. *ibid.*:382).

- b. *yásya tyác chámbaram máde dívodāsāya randháyah*_[INJ.]
ayám sá sóma indra te sutáh píba (RV VI.43.1).

‘In whose exhilaration you **subdued**_[INJ.] Śambara for Divodāsa—
 here is that soma, Indra, pressed for you. Drink!’ (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014:826).

- 4.5 While from a linguistic perspective the vagueness of the injunctive is incidental and generally subject to known Gricean communicative tendencies, the Ṛgvedic poets’ exploitation of this vagueness for poetic effect is a literary device that relies on the hearer’s pragmatically driven expectations in order to defy them (as is the case with many poetic devices).

5 Conclusion

- 5.1 This all boils down to three distinct but related motivations for using the injunctive:

1. PRAGMATIC CONTRAST: To convey special meanings by means of a contrastive association with more marked verb forms (of the type *prá vocam* ‘I proclaim’ vs. *prá avocam* ‘I have proclaimed’).
2. ANAPHORIC DETERMINATION of temporal and modal interpretation: Syntactic and discourse-level contextual specification or specification based on shared presuppositions and common ground (text type, subject matter, etc.), all of which render the indicative strictly unnecessary and often undesirable (essentially Kiparsky’s (2005) conclusion, with some elaboration).
3. WORDPLAY: Presumably deliberate vagueness on the part of the Ṛgvedic poet, whereby a single injunctive form ranges over multiple time references. This presupposes and relies on items 1. and 2. in order to operate.

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