Unattainable Duties*

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Abstract

Despite its somewhat marginal occurrence, unattainability has been acknowledged as a genuine problematic element for the semantic analysis of modal constructions, particularly for those expressing desires (Heim 1992, Portner 1997). However, considerably less attention has been given to unattainable duties. In this article, I suggest that just as worlds that are deemed desirable are not necessarily linked to worlds considered candidates for actuality, some circumstantial arrangements allow for obligational expressions the semantics of which evoke worlds that are deemed obligatory yet unattainable. As I will show, a careful examination of unattainable duties constructions reveals some unexplored semantic aspects of obligational ascriptions that are particularly relevant for the development of both X-marking and modal-tense interaction theories. This article provides a philosophical and linguistic account of the meaning and use of such constructions.

Keywords: modality, duties, desires, unattainability, tense.

1 Introduction

Consider the following example. John has promised to take Ana to the zoo on Saturday afternoon. Later in the day, Aunt Polly rings suggesting an afternoon at the theatre. John knows that Aunt Polly has been longing for Shakespeare, so he gets carried away, forgets about his previous commitment and promises to take her to the theatre on Saturday afternoon. On Saturday morning John becomes aware of the situation he is in. Asking for advice, he says to you:

(1) UDuC: Unattainable duties constructions

'I have to be in two places at the same time'.

I will refer to this as the *double promise scenario*. Linguistically speaking, the obligational ascription expressed by (1) is encoded as a strong modal claim about the actual world, not as a weak or counterfactual one. Moreover, UDuC do not come out very well in weak necessity clothing (although *should* is perfectly fine when the complement is attainable, as in (2b)):

(2) a. ?? I should be in two places at the same time.

b. Although not obligatory, I should be at that meeting tomorrow.

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One might speculate that the unacceptability of (2a) stems from the fact that weak necessity *should* tends to have an advisory flavour to it (and one would not recommend doing what is undoable). Not surprisingly, the unacceptability fades away as soon as the advisory element is framed within an attainable context, as in (2b). Be this as it may, what is remarkable is that constructions that express unattainable duties accept strong necessity modals (as in (1)) and reject weak necessity ones (as in (2a)).

Interestingly, this pattern contrasts with the behaviour of (English) bouletic statements, which exhibit a strong resistance to express unattainable desires by bare *want* constructions (favouring, instead, the lexical variant *wish*). Concurrently, the permeability to 'counterfactual morphology' seems especially productive for that purpose in so-called 'transparent-wish languages' (see von Fintel and Iatridou To appear):[1]

(3) UDeC: Unattainable desires constructions

English.
I wish (I could) / ??want to be in two places at the same time

Spanish.
querría / *quisiera* / *??quiero*
want.COND.1S / want.SUBJ.PAST.1S / want.IND.1S
estar en dos lugares al mismo tiempo.
be in two places at same time

Admittedly, the (un)acceptability of UDeC—built alternatively with either indicative *want* or 'transparent' *wish*—seems not to rely on clear-cut edges, and one would naturally be prone to conceive of the acceptability judgements as placed in a cline rather than having a sharp yes/no boundary. As has been suggested by several authors working in the field, both ends of the cline bear different levels of acceptability. In effect, while UDeC construed with *want* have been acknowledged to occur indeed (see Heim 1992: 199; Portner 1997: 176), there is a tacit agreement among semanticists that the intended meaning seems more properly expressed by a *wish*-type construction (Heim: 1992: 202). Thus, instead of taking UDeC as unacceptable *tout court*, it would be more adequate to consider UDeC as (rather) marginal for *want* and (fairly) acceptable for *wish*.[2]

[1] As we shall see, the authors have preferred to refer to this as 'X-morphology', and I will follow their terminological proposal once I sketch the basic elements of their latest contribution (see section 3). For now, the reader should be aware that the desires denoted in (3) are actual, not counterfactual.

[2] The precision of such a diagnosis is of course a matter of debate. What seems undeniable is that the attempt to 'domesticate' UDeC$_{want}$ by means of presuppositional constraints that evoke some notion of attainability contravenes the empirical fact that speakers do, on occasions, say things like 'I want this weekend to last forever'. In effect, Heim considered such an example to be a 'loose end' (1992: 200) that raise 'subtle[r] doubts' on doxastic analyses of desire predicates (1992: 202). Portner, on the other hand, suggests that a modification of the doxastic background, to incorporate *belief-like* states more akin to a 'hypothetical contemplation', would be in place (1997: 179). As far as I know, this remains a pending task for semanticists.

This is somewhat unsurprising, given what we have come to know about transparent wish languages: that a WISH predicate is nothing but the combination of WANT and the special morphology that a language exhibits in its (traditionally called) 'counterfactual' or 'subjunctive' conditional. As is well described (Iatridou 2000, von Fintel and Iatridou To appear), the morphology at issue varies from one language to another in interesting ways. Even English, for instance, will show signs of transparency if we shift the attention from the embedding verb (*wish*) to the unattainable complement. In effect, past morphology surfaces when expressing a desire for something counter-to-facts ('I wish I had a brother'). Alternatively, in so-called future less vivid wishes, what we find is *would*, the past variant of a WOLL predicate ('I wish Mary would come to the party'). Although the authors do not explicitly consider the type of radical impediment I am examining here (being in two places at once), it is interesting to note that when an impossibility of this type is involved, *would* most naturally gives way to *could*, as shown in (3).

Abstracting away from these and other details, the gradient seems clear: as far as the expression of unattainable desires is concerned, the further from actuality, the better (with the indispensable proviso that no matter how unattainable the denoted event is, what is expressed by these marked forms is a desire in the *actual* world, not a counterfactual one).

Against this very general (and admittedly sketchy) diagnosis, the relevant fact that I would like to emphasize at this preliminary stage is that, *in contrast to* UDeC, UDuC do not come disguised in any mild or extra-modalized form. Compare (3) with (4):

(4) *English.* ??*I have to be able to be in two places at the same time.*
Spanish. ??*Tengo que poder estar en dos lugares al mismo tiempo*
have.to.IND.1S that can be in two places at same time

This seems to suggest that UDuC not only can but clearly tend to be construed as bare strong modal claims. Moreover, the rejection of either special morphology or extra-modalized forms indicates that the obligational ascription does not hinge upon the event's realizability (to the extent that the unattainable character of the event does not impose any special morphology either in the main predicate or the complement of the construction).

In this paper, I will provide a closer examination of these facts, highlighting some neglected aspects in the semantic analysis of modality and obligational ascriptions. As I will show, far from being a marginal phenomenon, unattainable duties prove to be a revealing case for current theories of obligational constructions, especially for our understanding of the ways in which the circumstances and facts surrounding the subject relate to the event denoted in the prejacent (and hence, to the temporal relation between them). More concretely, I will suggest that unattainable duties raise a challenge for the analyses of deontic modality that rely too heavily on the idea of event-relativization (favouring instead a view whereby tense indicates the time at which the relevant circumstantial facts are prevailing). A natural consequence of this is that the semantics of unattainable duties, and obligational statements more generally, should assign a prominent role to the subject's circumstantial denouement, rather than to the events themselves. Ultimately, the paper provides a characterization

of how these circumstances relate to the stringent or negotiable ideals in the conversational background.

The paper is organised as follows. In section 2, I address a few philosophical qualms about the alleged acceptability of UDuC's ascriptions. The section will serve to introduce additional examples and show that the constructions at issue are much more common and productive that one might initially think. In section 3, I make a closer inspection of the linguistic facts, introducing some appropriate terminology and recasting the asymmetries between the bouletic and deontic domains in a more precise way. As I will suggest at the end of that section, UDuC can be revealing in determining the precise role of tense in modal propositions (and hence for the assessment of current competing views on the matter). Finally, in section 4 I take on the basic results of the examination and delineate a proposal on how to understand the role of attainability in semantic theories about obligations and circumstantial modality. Section 5 provides conclusions.

2 UDuC's acceptability and the possibility of moral conflicts

Before I draw a more precise description of the linguistic facts, I will examine some philosophical aspects of the obligational ascription exemplified in (1). As we shall see, the example overlays an array of conceptual issues, some of which may raise doubts about the very idea of unattainable duties. To address these concerns, I will show that UDuC are not idle issue as one may superficially think and that a systematic study is worth-pursuing.

In order to flesh out the main issues involved, let me recast our working example in the following inferential form:[3]

(5) John has to be in place$_1$ at time$_1$ and John has to be in place$_2$ at time$_1$.
Therefore, John has to be in two places at the same time.

The inferential chain in (5) is sustained by the assumption that the conjunction of 'being in place$_1$ at time$_1$' and 'being in place$_2$ at time$_1$' entails 'being in two places at the same time'. Two concerns immediately arise at this point—one involves the conjunctive character of the premise and the other the inferential step from the premise to the unattainable duty in the conclusion.

The former concern can be summarized in the claim that an appropriate characterization of the double promise scenario should be spelled out not in conjunctive terms, but as a disjunction of two obligations. That is to say: since the agent has made two incompatible promises, his obligation consists not in complying with one AND the other, but with one OR the other. This view is well known by the name of 'disjunctive account' in the philosophical literature about moral conflicts and it will be examined in section 2.1.

The second concern, meanwhile, is that even if the conjunction in the premise of (5) is validly accepted (as I will show it should be), the agglomeration of the propositions in the premise into an ensuing obligational statement in the

[3]I have modified the statement to a third person subject, so as to align the examples throughout the article. As far as I can see, nothing hinges on this modification.

conclusion should not. This targets the conclusion in (5) on the basis that agglomerating inconsistent propositions (to ultimately adjudicate an unattainable duty) violates the principle that *ought implies can*— a well-respected assumption in deontic logic and philosophical ethics more generally. I will address this particular concern in section 2.2

2.1 The possibility of moral conflicts

In order to address the first of the above-mentioned concerns, let me introduce an important terminological distinction between *prima facie* and *all things considered* duties. In rough terms, while prima facie duties constitute broad moral reasons for action (say, to keep one's promises, to tell the truth, to care for the elderly), an all things considered duty refers to the obligation resulting from a deliberation in a particular situation (in which different prima facie duties can concur). Thus, while prima facie duties can conflict in the rather obvious way in which different reasons for action commonly do, all things considered duties are the result of a deliberation that ponders all the relevant (and possibly conflicting) moral reasons in a given situation.

For concreteness, consider a scenario in which John promises to take Ana to the zoo. The prima facie duty 'keep one's promises' is triggered by the circumstances (while the prima facie duty 'help those in need' does not). If nothing else interferes, the all things considered duty 'take Ana to the zoo' is ascribed to John. Thus, while prima facie duties provide reasons for action (in the form of moral imperatives), all things considered duties describe what one must do in a given situation based on general deliberation.

A slight change in the scenario will show the utility of the distinction. Consider now that by the time John is disposed to comply with his promise to Ana, his neighbour shows up with a quite serious need to be taken to the hospital. Under this scenario, 'to keep one's promises' and 'to help those in need' represent two incidentally conflicting prima facie duties. Each of these prima facie duties provides an independent but provisory moral reason for action. In other words, prima facie duties are not absolute imperatives, but tentative principles that are subject to particular considerations. In the described scenario, any sensitive agent would most likely deliberate that keeping one's promise is, *on this particular occasion*, not as important as helping those in need, and thus consider that taking John's neighbour to the hospital is just the right thing to do. Typically, once a deliberation is made as to which of the concurrent (=triggered) prima facie duties is more important (=binding), an all things considered duty is endorsed. Based on this distinction, we will say that while other prima facie duties (say, care for the planet) are irrelevant to the situation, the salient circumstances *trigger* two incompatible prima facie duties (keep one's promise and help those in need). After these reasons for action are pondered, only one of them is revealed to be *binding* (helping those in need), from which we can derive the all things considered duty 'take his neighbour to the hospital'. Thus, while the circumstances surrounding the subject can trigger potentially conflicting prima facie duties, a binding duty is triggered and not defeated by any of its competitors. From this binding duty we derive the ascribable all things considered duty.

Illustrations such as the above abound in the philosophical literature about moral reasoning. My focus here will be on one interesting twist: namely, sce-

narios in which one is impeded to deliberate what prima facie duty is more important. A typical case involves *incommensurability*: if our neighbour's needs hadn't been so dramatic, perhaps we would have had no means to compare the triggered prima facie duties 'keep one's promises' and 'help those in need'. The issue of which action is best would be simply undecidable. To see the point more clearly (and going back to our original example (1)) consider cases of *symmetry*: Ana and Aunt Polly's needs are equally important and emerge from one and the same prima facie duty (keep one's promise).

Now, the question that arises regarding a *symmetric* double promise scenario is exactly where the conflict is hosted—if anywhere.[4] For notice that even if we calibrate the prima facie duty 'keep one's promises' into two contextually-sensitive duties, so as to render two equally binding prima facie duties ('keep the promise to Ana', 'keep the promise to Aunt Polly'), it is an open question whether we are allowed to extract two *conflicting all things considered* duties from the assumed set of binding duties. Put this way, the question at issue does not concern the possibility of conflict between two (or more) prima facie duties, but rather the validity of deriving two (or more) conflicting *all things considered* duties from an array of moral reasons that is symmetrically split.

Horty (2003) offers, to my mind, an impeccable examination of the above-described issue. According to the author, we have two independent accounts of the described scenario: one that allows for conflicts between all things considered duties (the conflict account) and one that denies them (the disjunctive account). I will briefly sketch a quite informal version of each of these different views in what follows. Since the main focus of this article is on the semantics of some natural language expressions (for which a Kratzerian framework will be adopted), I will not only skirt a formal presentation, but also substantially modify Horty's notation for representing the underpinnings of moral reasoning. This will keep the discussion of this section on quite a general conceptual level, preparing the ground for the more specific issue of how to implement a formal linguistic analysis of UDuC (in section 4).

Now, it may seem a daunting task to connect a cluster of philosophical ideas on moral reasoning with a linguistic theory about the meaning of modals. But I think the task is greatly simplified once we realize that the theories on both sides of the disciplinary border rely on a similar move: namely, to derive their corresponding unit of analysis (approximately: the logical grounds of a deontic ascription and the meaning of its modal components) from a contextually given set of propositions. In foundational work from Kratzer, this links to context-dependency quite explicitly: 'Modals are context-dependent expressions since their interpretation depends on a conversational background' (Kratzer 1981: 42). A modal clause containing *must*, for instance, can be interpreted in a deontic or epistemic key, depending on what is 'in view' in the utterance situation (whether something related to a rule or to some available evidence). Thus, far from being ambiguous, *must* is thought to possess an intrinsic modal force and a context-dependent flavour, the latter of which is determined by the set of propositions that are salient in the conversational background. Crucially, the relevant set of propositions that determines a deontic interpretation may well gather both normative standards (a moral rule like 'comply with your promises') and

[4]Of course, not all double-promise situations are symmetrical. One can easily conceive of situations in which one promise is more important than the other. Example (1) was built under the (now explicit) symmetry assumption.

the circumstances surrounding the subject (*facts* like 'John has made a promise to Ana'). The meaning of the modal is sensitive to these elements of the context.

On quite different grounds, a special type of context-dependency is also evoked by the very idea of an *all things considered* duty—a duty that is not categorically imposed by an absolute principle of morality, but that ensues from a particular consideration that ponders both competing (prima facie) precepts and the circumstances surrounding the agent. Within this context, Horty's philosophical theory shows how to derive an all things considered duty from a set of binding duties under some given circumstances: 'given a background context including an arbitrary set of prima facie oughts, how do we determine whether a particular all things considered ought holds under some specified set of circumstances?' (Horty 2003: 561).

With these rough sketches in mind, a safe connection can be made: since a Kratzerian conversational background (CB hereafter) comprises what is 'in view' when uttering a deontic expression (whether the salient material is normative or factual), Horty's core idea can be recast by the claim that an all things considered duty follows from a CB containing both the set of binding prima facie duties and the triggering circumstances. To make things even simpler at this preliminary stage, I will abbreviate an all things considered duty to P by the notation O(P). Thus, in the scenario in which John has promised to take Ana to the zoo (and nothing else intervenes), we will say that O(John takes Ana to the zoo) follows from the CB. In English, this all things considered duty can be ascribed by an expression such as 'John has to/must take Ana to the zoo'.[5] On the other hand, in a situation in which helping those in need seems more important than keeping a promise, the former prima facie duty will defeat the latter and we will say that the all things considered duty O(John helps his neighbour) follows from the CB.

With this informal sketch in mind, the question arises as to how to represent the symmetry of the double promise scenario in (1). What all things considered duty can be derived, given the fact that we are facing two incompatible but symmetrical binding duties?[6]

At this point, Horty recommends introducing maximal consistent subsets of binding duties to represent the conflicting (or not conflicting) character of the situation (2003: 568). As is generally understood, a maximal consistent subset M is given when, from a set of formulas L, (i) $M \subseteq L$, (ii) M is consistent, and (iii) there is no consistent set N such that $M \subset N$ and $N \subseteq L$. The two plausible accounts of what is to be derived from a conflicting scenario can be summarized as follows (where the turnstile $\vdash$ represents consequence).

[5]Philosophers tend to illustrate an all things considered statement with English *ought to*. This is not an unproblematic choice for linguists. I will not address this issue in this paper (which is not about English modals) and simply build examples with the other two lexical variants: *have to* and *must*.

[6]Horty's original formulation of this question varies considerably from the one offered above: "how do we define a consequence relation determining whether a particular all things considered ought of the form O(B/A) [...] follows from a context of prima facie oughts?" (2003:561). In Horty's notation, O(B/A) represents an all things considered duty to B under the circumstances A. Since I have assumed that the circumstances A and the context of binding prima facie duties are contextually salient in the Kratzerian conversational background, I am also (perhaps over) simplifying the question as to what determines that an all things considered duty holds under a given CB. It is an interesting question what is at stake when a semanticist of natural language calibrates these interacting elements under a formal notation. The discussion here will, however, remain conceptual.

(6) *Conflict account*

O(P) follows from CB if and only if M $\vdash$ P for **some** maximal consistent subset M of CB.

(7) *Disjunctive account*

O(P) follows from CB if and only if M $\vdash$ P for **each** maximal consistent subset M of CB.

Note that according to the conflict account, an all things considered duty can be drawn from a conflicting CB whenever a coherent perspective on the issue (a maximal consistent subset of binding prima facie duties) supports it. In other words, if there is some coherent perspective in virtue of which a prima facie duty is binding, then that duty is all things considered ascribable. Thus, if John has promised Ana to be in place_1 at time_1 (and, as things stand, Aunt Polly's needs are equal in importance and do not overturn John's promise to Ana), then John has to take Ana to place_1 at time_1. By the same rationale, that John has to take Aunt Polly to place_2 at time_1 also becomes an all things considered duty. Since the two resulting obligations are incompatible, we end up with a moral conflict—one in which John has to take Ana to place_1 at time_1 AND John has to take Aunt Polly to place_2 at time_1 (roughly, our conjunctive premise in example (5)).

Alternatively, the disjunctive account denies the possibility of a moral conflict. The technical point of constraining the derivation to *each* (instead of *some*) maximal consistent subset (say, M and N) requires that neither of the putative obligational conjuncts ('John has to take Ana to place_1 at time_1', 'John has to take Aunt Polly to place_2 at time $_1$') is supported by M and N. Rather, both maximal consistent subsets M and N entail the statement 'John has to be in place_1 at time_1 OR John has to be in place_2 at time_1'. To illustrate, Horty uses an example that also involves social commitments undertaken in a symmetric context: having arranged dinner with each of two identical twins. It is worth quoting Horty's description of the disjunctive view in contrast to the conflict account:

> Rather than telling me, if I have arranged to dine with each twin but cannot in fact dine with both, that I nevertheless ought to dine with both and so face a moral conflict, the disjunctive account tells me only that what I ought to do, all things considered, is dine with one twin or the other. And this particular example indicates the general pattern: where the conflict account sees moral conflicts, the disjunctive account sees only disjunctive obligations (Horty 2003:569).

Now that the two accounts have been generally described, the crucial question arises: is there an argument of any kind that proves that the disjunctive account is correct in claiming that there are no moral conflicts? The answer is that there is not. In effect, Horty's article assesses the issue in every of its logical and conceptual corners to eventually conclude, in quite definite terms, that "there is no logical or conceptual reason to reject the possibility of moral conflict" (2003: 560).

Space prevents me from a detailed revision of Horty's diagnosis. But I will touch upon one of the conceptual arguments that the author presents to defend

the validity of the conflict account, which I think is particularly important for a pragmatic characterization of the relevant modal statements. Horty counterargues philosophical insights (such as Thomson 1990) which put the case in point into question: namely, that one must do P and must do Q despite the fact that one cannot do both P and Q (Thomson 1990:83). As Horty shows, Thomson's attempt to depict such an idea as odd and unhelpful as a reply to the question 'what I ought to do?' (in a given symmetrical situation) does not prove the conflict account incorrect. In effect, the author concedes that a reply of the type 'You ought to do P and you ought to do Q' is indeed trivially unhelpful, but sensibly observes that this is only the case when we take the question in its *resolutive* sense.[7] However, the question 'what I ought to do?' can also be understood as inquiring about the moral facts, in which case the statement that one ought to do P and also ought to do Q is perfectly acceptable: "the fact that such a response would be unhelpful, however, does not mean that it would be incorrect as a statement of the moral facts, only that I am not asking to be reminded of the moral facts" (Horty 2003: 588).

The point is only briefly developed by Horty, but it seems especially suggestive for a linguistic enterprise that aims for a semantic and pragmatic characterization of the modal statements involved. In effect, to distinguish between deontic statements that describe the moral facts from those that dictate what to do allows us to see the shortcomings of the disjunctive account in some crucial respects. Consider the ascribability of obligations. The distinction at issue suggests that obligations can be ascribed both when an asserter wants to describe a moral situation and when she wants to declare what to do in such a situation. Against this possibility, the disjunctive account seems to rely quite heavily on the idea that obligations are only ascribed in situations that need to be resolved or deliberated by an agent that is well aware of all the relevant facts. To see the point, let me manipulate the double promise scenario slightly and split the holder of the obligation into two different (and equally unaware) agents:

(8) John promises Ana to take her to place_1 at time_1
Mary promises Ana to take her to place_2 at time_1

Although the context has been modified slightly, we are still considering two promises with incompatible contents. The relevant factor—that the prejacents cannot be brought into existence in one and the same world— is open to view for us. Notice, however, that there will be no disjunctive constraint imposed on asserters. The conjunctive premise that was tentatively put into question regarding (1) makes perfect sense as a description of the moral facts above:

(9) John has to take Ana to place_1 at time_1 AND Mary has to take Ana to place_2 at time_1

[7] The notion that Horty uses at this point is *deliberative*, which in Bernard Williams original sense opposes *moral* (see Horty 2003, p.588 and references therein). I have opted for *resolutive* here, given the use of *deliberative* (as opposed to *objective*) in recent literature (see Cariani et al. 2013 and references therein). As far as I can see, the aspect of the modalities that these pairs of oppositions intend to illuminate might not fully coincide, and hence neither the original sense of the notions involved. That said, it is of course a valid question whether what I will opposed to *resolutive* (namely, *descriptive*) has any relevant connection to *objective*. The connection, if there is one, might be of interest.

The above constitutes, beyond doubt, a potentially conflicting scenario. Yet nothing forces a disjunctive account. The only way that we can be forced into a disjunctive representation of the facts is by assuming that the agents must *resolve* the situation somehow—say, that John and Mary are Ana's parents, that they have become aware of the confusing situation they have created, that they discuss a practical way out (each of them assuming that the duties involved are equally important). Only under such resolutive background would it make sense to say that either John or Mary have to take Ana out at time_1 (or something along those lines).

The crucial point here is that the disjunctive story is forced upon us only under the assumption that the putative agent(s) is about to resolve a moral dilemma. This pretty much implicates that the agent(s) is (are) fully aware of the conflicting situation. But this seems too strong, as one may certainly conceive of scenarios in which Mary and John are unrelated, uncommunicative, omissive, etc. One can certainly conceive of a scenario in which the agents do not know about each other's commitments. And surely one would not want to exclude all such cases from the spectrum of truly ascribed duties.

Moreover, once we have made the case for the agents' partial view of the facts (by splitting the agency into two unrelated, uncommunicative parts), we can take a step further and make space for a single (and epistemically modest) subject as well. In effect, there is nothing unconceivable of a situation whereby John has undertaken two independent commitments, the incompatibility of which remains beyond his knowledge (at speech time). The resulting context of speech would be one in which an informed external viewer ascribes two incompatible duties to an epistemically modest agent—again, a precise characterization of the moral facts. To make the case more vivid, assume that the subject will never become aware of the incompatibility.

(10) *John has had a wonderful start of the year. From being unemployed, he has now accepted two compatible part-time jobs in two different companies, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The contract that he signed with Rosencrantz strictly obliges him to attend an induction session at 11 am on the Saturday before he starts working. The contract that he signed for Guildenstern, in turn, strictly obliges him to attend induction that same Saturday at 11 am. With all the thrills and spills, John missed the small print in both contracts and mistakenly believes that both inductions are scheduled for the week after at different days/times. To make things worse, John has decided to spend (what he thinks is) his last free weekend in the mountains, in some sort of spiritual retreat. His girlfriend Mary spends Friday night reading the contracts. Talking with her sister, she says:*

'John is in trouble. He has to attend an induction in Rosencrantz tomorrow at 11 am. What is worse, he also has to attend an induction in Guildenstern at that same time. And he doesn't even know these facts!'

The above situation can be described by Mary as one in which John has to be in place_1 at time_1 AND also in place_2 at time_1. What seems less intelligible is to say that John has to be in place_1 at time_1 OR in place_2 at time_1. How can we make sense of the disjunctive claim if John is unaware of his duties? Retreated as he is, however, both obligations are inescapable and fully ascribable to him. They are on the contracts he signed.

This seems to suggest that the disjunctive storyline overlooks one general fact: that an obligational ascription can be justified even if the agent is unaware of the situation she is in. This fact has some relevance given one potential outcome: if those scenarios are indeed conceivable, as they seem to be, we need to distinguish between moral dilemmas from the overall situation we call conflicting duties scenarios. The former calls for deliberation, the latter are not necessarily processed through a resolutive tract.

The 'deflated-agent' case that I have depicted above has some interesting consequences. One that I would like to highlight at this stage is that the asserter might be quite insensitive to the subject's perspective. One can (truly) ascribe an obligation to someone who ignores she is under the said obligation. One can ascribe an obligation to someone who (falsely) disagrees about one's ascription. One can even ascribe an obligation to someone who does not understand the very content of the ascription. If these cases are conceivable, then a semantic account of obligational statements must make space for epistemically modest subjects.

I would like to suggest that the disjunctive account does poorly in providing such a space. The reason is that the examined view relies too heavily on the resolutive rationale described above. In effect, the view is built on the unproven assumption that situations involving incompatible duties entail moral dilemmas, which are in turn assessed disjunctively by a well-aware agent. But if we behold a 'modest agent scenario', the moral dilemma never arises, and the disjunctive approach loses its appeal.

In fairness, the considerations above do not prove that the disjunctive approach is incorrect. It only suggests that it might not be generalizable. The specific aim of this subsection was to show that, with respect to the double promise scenario, the view only provides one way of looking at the moral facts. A conflict account, expressible by the disjunctive premise in (5), is just as valid.

2.2 The description of the moral facts

Let me now address the second of the concerns pointed out at the beginning of this section, which is related to the inferential step from the premise to the conclusion in (5). To recall: even if we accept the conjunctive premise 'John has to be in place_1 at time_1 and John has to be in place_2 at time_1' (a valid description of the moral facts, as I have shown), the derivation of 'John has to be in two places at the same time' may be objected on the face of some well-reputed normative principles, such as *consistent agglomeration* and *ought implies can*.

Agglomeration refers to the principle according to which any conjunction of enjoined formulas (such as $\text{O(P)} \wedge \text{O(Q)}$), must be enjoined as well ($\text{O(P} \wedge \text{Q)}$). The principle seems harmless in our normative thinking about non-conflicting scenarios. Indeed, when there is no conflict between two all things considered duties, it seems perfectly adequate to recognize the all thing considered duty to do both as well as the all things considered duties to do each. The problem arises when agglomeration allows for the derivation of an inconsistent obligation—say, when one derives $\text{O(P} \wedge \neg\text{P)}$ from $\text{O(P)} \wedge \text{O}(\neg\text{P})$.

A move to prevent this kind of result would be to tackle the conjunction of inconsistent duties in the first place (as the disjunctive account does). However, as pointed out in the previous section, there is no conceptual or logical argument

that imposes this move to a formal theory of moral reasoning (Horty 2003). Insofar as moral conflicts are possible (insofar as $O(P) \wedge O(\neg P)$ is an acceptable string in some consistent version of the formalism, namely the conflict account), it seems that is agglomeration itself that needs to be tackled. Brink (1994) suggests that this comes at little cost since agglomeration is unnecessary for normative thinking. The point seems to rely on the fact that in a situation in which a conflict between two all things considered duties arises, "an obligation to do each seems adequate to explain the moral situation" (Brink 1994:229). Nothing, on the other hand, seems to be advanced by the recognition of an obligation to do both.

Horty has questioned this diagnosis (2003:578–579). According to his view on the matter, agglomeration does seem necessary for a comprehensive description of the moral facts, especially when one extracts a normative conclusion from a given set of non-conflicting premises. The author illustrates with the following example: an agent is under the obligation to do either P or Q, and also under the obligation not to do P. Against this background, by agglomerating the enjoined formulas $O(P \vee Q)$ and $O(\neg P)$ into $O((P \vee Q) \wedge \neg P)$, one can naturally conclude $O(Q)$: "once we reach the conclusions that the agent ought either to fight in the army or perform alternative service, but also that he ought not to fight in the army, we are then committed to the further conclusion that the agent ought to perform alternative service" (2003: 579). Neglecting agglomeration, on the other hand, does not lead to this natural conclusion, although of course the primary facts will not be distorted (namely, that the agent ought, all things considered, to fight in the army or perform service, and that he also ought, all things considered, not to fight in the army). Horty's essential point is that agglomeration enables a complete description of the moral situation. This links in interesting ways to the point made in the previous section regarding the resolutive/descriptive split among deontic statements, only on this occasion the descriptive character is ascribed to the role of the formalism itself. It is worth quoting Horty on this particular point:

> Since this ought [to perform alternative service] will be satisfied in any case, why, then, is it necessary for it to be explicitly derived? To argue in this way, however, would be to limit the scope of deontic logic to a narrowly action-guiding enterprise, rather than one that is supposed to be more fully descriptive of the moral situation. If the formalism is to serve simply as a guide to action, it may be sufficient for it to enjoin a set of formulas which, as long as the formulas are satisfied, will lead to the achievement of a proper state of affairs. If the aim is descriptive, on the other hand, it is natural to expect deontic logic to provide a more complete characterization of the moral situation (Horty 2003: 579).

How can linguists, especially semanticists of natural language, assimilate this idea? My own thought is that if exiling agglomeration from the realm of normative reasoning diminishes the descriptive power of the formalism, all the more agglomeration should keep its place in the realm of natural language semantics. If we take as an empirical fact that, in describing all sorts of moral situations, speakers do agglomerate enjoined propositions into obligational statements (some of them resulting in unattainable duties statements), the task for

the semanticist should not be reduced to discarding these statements as non-sensical, so as to keep the formalism antiseptically packed. Rather, the challenge consists of working out the adopted technology to provide an explanatory view of both the intended meaning of these expressions and their role in their immediate semantic and pragmatic surroundings.

Admittedly, the task is not simple. On the one hand, even a philosophical view that allows for some degree of agglomeration (such as Horty's) will be tempted to hedge such a principle to some extent. A measured degree of agglomeration should prevent (or so it is argued) an inconsistent result and thus preserve the normative principle of *ought implies can*. This principle is well-reputed in the philosophical literature, although it has not gone undisputed (see King 2019 for a recent critical revision). In relation to our core example, one may even challenge the claim that (1) represents a case of inconsistency. Perhaps a type of material inconsistency (pigs that can fly, weekends that last forever, being in two places at the same time) should be distinguished from strictly logical ones (pigs that are not pigs, finite weekends that last forever and being and not being in a place at a certain time). That speakers do, on occasions, express things like 'I have to be in two places at the same time', 'I want this weekend to last forever' and 'Imagine a pig that can fly' (while 'I have to be and not be in the meeting next week', 'I want a two- day weekend that last forever', 'Imagine a pig that is not a pig' are naturally rejected), is a clear indication that the distinction is not vacuous.

On the other hand, how much or what style of agglomeration should be allowed is a difficult question. Horty is well aware of this problem and claims that "formulating a principle allowing for exactly the right amount of agglomeration raises delicate issues that have generally been ignored in the literature" (Horty 203:580). Regardless of the shape this discussion may take, I would like to suggest that the question can be genuinely extended into the field of natural language semantics. And in this sense, it seems to me that while one may behold good reasons to support only a hedged type of agglomeration in building a formal representation of normative thinking, it seems reasonable to accommodate a more permeable version of the principle when building a representation of natural language expressions such as UDuC. Insofar as the resulting account conforms to the coherent use of the formalism adopted for such purposes, there is no reason to relegate these expressions to the non-sensical. On the contrary, in the next sections I will show that UDuC are theoretically interesting in three particular regards: (i) what they can tell us about (the presence or absence of) some relevant morphological ingredients (section 3.1), (ii) what they can tell us about the interaction between tense, circumstances and events (section 3.2), and (iii) their pragmatic role within a community of speakers (sections 4.2 and 4.3).

2.3 Beyond moral conflicts

Having made the case for the possibility of moral conflicts (and, consequently, for the use of UDuC to describe the relevant moral facts in some of those situations), it is worth concluding this section by pointing out that UDuC are also attested in non-conflicting scenarios. Here is an example:

(11) Context: *John is applying for a drawing contest that only accepts appli-*

cants under 18. John is 19, but he believes that regulations are loose and that the required age is just an approximate standard (what is relevant, he thinks, is the quality of the work). John's drawings are indeed exceptional and eventually he is pre-selected for the final. However, he is sent an email stating that to participate in the next stage of the contest, he must present a birth certificate that proves he is under 18. After he tells Mary, she informs Max:

'John is in trouble. He has to prove that he is younger than he actually is.'

?? 'John is in trouble. He should prove that he is younger than he actually is.'

As with the double promise scenario, (11) depicts an obligation that derives from some normative standard (the regulations of a drawing contest). As with the previous scenario, the whole situation imposes an unattainable course of action on John (prove he is younger than he actually is). In contrast to our core example, however, there are no incompatible duties involved (and hence neither a conflicting nor disjunctive perspective on the matter). In simple terms, John is involved in a situation that dictates that he must do something he is unable to.

The example may deserve further consideration and discussion, but I will leave it here.[8] This section aimed to support the view that UDuC bear a genuine interpretable meaning, preparing the conceptual ground for a proper description of the linguistic facts, to which I now turn.

3 A Closer Inspection of the Facts

There are two issues that bear a particular significance for a linguistically driven examination of UDuC: (i) how do the morphosemantic components of the construction relate to unattainability, and (ii) what can unattainable prejacents tell us about the modal-tense interaction. In subsections 3.1 and 3.2, I will provide a brief examination of each of these issues.

3.1 Obligational ascriptions and their grammatical forms

The facts presented in the introduction of this paper highlighted an important aspect of UDuC: the ascription of an unattainable duty is, perhaps unexpectedly, better expressed with a bare strong necessity clause than with a marked or extra-modalized form. This is illustrated by the fact that, despite the unattainability of its embedded event, UDuC dispense with so-called X-morphology, that is, with the morphology that appears in what is more traditionally known as 'counterfactual' or 'subjunctive' conditionals (see von Fintel and Iatridou To appear). Since the 'X' terminology adopted in this article has been proposed to depict a quite vast morphosemantic landscape (regions of which are directly related to modal necessity and unattainability), I will succinctly describe the

[8] An anonymous reviewer has pointed out that (11) is ambiguous, one reading meaning 'younger than 19' and the other meaning something plainly contradictory. As far as I can see, *should* is unacceptable in both readings.

original research framework that motivates such proposal (see von Fintel and Iatridou To appear for a complete view).

The change in terminology from 'subjunctive' or 'counterfactual' to the rather unexciting 'X' is motivated by two main factors. First, the morphology that tells apart marked conditionals from bare conditionals (= O-marked, for ordinary) does not always result in counterfactual meanings. So-called future less vivid and Anderson conditionals are well-known examples. Second, conditionals are not the only environment where such morphology surfaces. In so called 'transparent OUGHT/WISH languages', the X-morphology tends to appear in the expression of (actual) weak necessity and (actual) unattainable desires (in addition to expressions that convey the core standard meaning of the morpheme(s)).[9]

The semantic patterns that X-morphology imprints in the deontic and bouletic domains are well described and can be traced back to Iatridou (2000) and von Fintel and Iatridou (2008), so I will not be thorough here. A so-called transparent OUGHT language is one that uses X-morphology to mark a strong necessity statement and express, by these means, weak necessity. On the other hand, a transparent WISH language is one that uses X-morphology to turn the expression of an attainable desire into the expression of an unattainable one. As is well known, English lexicalizes these shifts with *ought/should* and *wish* respectively. This can help to freeze the scene in one candid (or perhaps brutal) snapshot: transparent languages X-mark HAVE TO/WANT to yield OUGHT/WISH.[10]

Spanish is a transparent language in both respects. As shown in (12), its X-morphology consists of subjunctive and conditional mood, which are distributed in the antecedent and the consequent of its X-conditional. It is precisely this morphology that effects the shift from strong to weak necessity (13) and from attainable to unattainable desires (14).

(12) Spanish X-conditional

si tuviera *tierra,* *cultivar-ía* *tomates*
if have.PAST.SUBJ.1S land grow-COND.1S tomatoes
'If I had land, I would grow tomatoes'.

(13) Spanish *strong to weak necessity shift*

a. *O-mark: actual strong necessity*

tengo *que* *ayudar a* *María con* *el* *ceviche*
have.to.IND.1S that help PREP María with the ceviche

[9]Needless to say, the 'standard' semantics of X-morphemes can vary considerably from language to language: past tense in English, conditional and subjunctive mood in Spanish, habitual in Hindi, frustrative in Mapudungun, etc. This variation also supports the need to refrain from using the 'subjunctive' terminology.

[10]The authors warn against simplifications such as the one I am laying out here. As they stress, transparency is not a language-level parameter, and "even English has corners where it is a "transparent language"". See von Fintel and Iatridou To appear for clarifications.

'I have to help María with the ceviche' (as I promised)

b. *X-mark: actual weak necessity*

tendría que ayudar a María con el ceviche
have.to.COND.1S that help PREP María with the ceviche
'I should help María with the ceviche' (but I don't have to)

(14) Spanish *attainable to unattainable desire shift*

a. *O-mark: actual attainable desire*

Juan quiere tener un hermano
Juan want.IND.1S have a brother
'Juan wants to have a brother' (his parents are also keen on the idea).

b. *X-mark: actual unattainable desire*

Juan querría / quisiera tener un hermano.
Juan want.cond.3s / want.subj.past.3s have a brother
'Juan wishes he had a brother' (he is the only son of his late parents).

The question as to what is the precise semantic contribution of X in non-conditional environments such as (13b) and (14b) has proved difficult to answer. For one, note that the common semantic component cannot be simply reduced to the counterfactual meaning that is (commonly, but not unexceptionally) conveyed in X-conditionals. In effect, both the necessity in (13b) and the desire in (14b) are *actual*. On the other hand, this fact does not imply that the X-morphology cannot convey a counterfactual meaning in modal environments. Predictably, it does—every time the intended denotation consists of a *counterfactual* duty or desire (as in 'if..., I would have to/want to...'). In effect, a well-known fact about transparent languages is that the mentioned counterfactual meanings are conveyed with the same morphological means that are used for the expression of weak necessity and unattainable desires. These ambiguities are well described, so I will skirt the display of further data here (see von Fintel and Iatridou (2008, To appear) for these and other morphosemantic generalizations).

The following summarizes the facts so far:

(15) X-morphology interaction with modals

a. *from strong to weak necessity*
strong necessity: HAVE TO
weak necessity: HAVE TO + X-marking (=OUGHT)

b. *from attainable to unattainable desires*
attainable desire: WANT
unattainable desire: WANT + X-marking (=WISH)

c. *from actual to counterfactual necessities and desires*
actual necessity: HAVE TO
actual desire: WANT
counterfactual necessity: HAVE TO + X-marking (=WOULD HAVE TO)
counterfactual desire: WANT + X-marking (=WOULD WANT)

One of the main theoretical challenges for researchers exploring this morphosemantic landscape consists of determining whether there is a single semantic component contributed by X in both the conditional environment in (15c) and the non-conditional environments in (15a-b). Building on philosophical ideas of Stalnaker (1979, 1984), von Fintel and Iatridou (To appear) suggest that an overarching view (common to many X-marking theories) is that the putative component allows the semantics of the clause to access worlds that lie beyond the contextual presuppositions. The central claim is that X-marking signals a departure from a default setting, and that the default setting will vary according to the different parameters that X-marking targets. As for conditionals and bouletic clauses, the default setting will be a domain (the epistemic and doxastic set correspondingly). For necessity clauses, the default content may be thought to be a given normative standard that is undergoing secondary considerations. Thus, while the semantic contribution of X in conditional and bouletic environments consists of widening the relevant default domain, in the case of necessity it is all about the inclusion of a secondary priority (namely, the ordering source).

I will not dispute these abstract bits of theorizing in this paper. Rather, I will take the 'away-from-default-setting' idea as a plausible working hypothesis and only speculate on how unattainability would have to be accommodated within such analytical framework. I take this to be equivalent to the rather general task of determining how unattainability relates to X-marking. As I will show, even this seemingly simple task raises intricate and challenging questions that are worthy of consideration.

Take for example this: while X-marking a bouletic statement provides a space beyond a default setting for unattainability to fill in, such effect is not mirrored in the case of modal necessity (where a weak attainable necessity is expressed). In effect, while a statement like 'I wish she would go to Paris on Sunday' entails a (fairly) unattainable prejacent, nothing in 'she should go to Paris on Sunday' suggests that the prejacent event is unattainable. This might all well fit in a handy pack if unattainability were precluded from the deontic domain all throughout. But here is where unattainable duties have something to tell us: unattainability is not so precluded. Moreover, an interesting point emerges: while X-marking does not provide the space for unattainability to fill in (as it does in the bouletic domain), unattainable duties are naturally expressed by O-marking instead. This is shown in the examples below. Even though X-marked desires/duties are 'hidden' behind the lexicalized verbs *wish* and *ought/should*, the pattern is also confirmed in English.

(16) UDuC / UDeC X-marking

a. UDeC: *unattainable desires favour X-morphology*

English
?? *I want to be in two places at the same time*
I wish I could be in two places at the same time

Spanish
?? *quiero* / *querría* / *quisiera*
want.IND.1S / want.COND.1S / want.SUBJ.PAST.1S
estar en dos lugares al mismo tiempo.
be in two places at same time

b. UDuC: *unattainable duties resist X-morphology*

English
I have to be in two places at the same time
?? *I should be in two places at the same time*

Spanish
tengo / ?? *tendría*
have.to.IND.1S / have.to.COND.1S
estar en dos lugares al mismo tiempo.
be in two places at same time

Circumscribing our examination to the domain of *actual* duties/desires, then, the facts shown above can be summarized along the following lines.[11] In the domain of actual *desires*, while an attainable wish tends to be naturally expressed by means of O-marking; either less attainable or unattainable desires are better suited for X-marking clothing. Moreover: unattainable desires render an odd outcome when O-marked. This sharply contrasts with what is observed in the domain of actual *duties*: while an attainable duty is naturally expressed by O-marking (and a weak one by X-marking), an unattainable duty not only can be expressed by means of O-marking, but quite sharply resists X-marking.

I will refer to this as the UDuC/UDeC *acceptability asymmetry*. The cline is represented in Fig. 1 and stated immediately below:[12]

[11] I have omitted the case of counterfactual duties and desires (expressed in English with the combined expressions *would have to* and *would want*) from the data above. The reason is that in 'pure' counterfactual scenarios attainability and unattainability seem to be uniformly accepted. We can attest this in our core example: 'If John gets himself involved in a double promise scenario, he would have to be in two places at the same time'. Bouletic conditionals of this type are also fairly easily construable—I will bypass this region and follow a straighter path here.

[12] Again, it should be stressed that I conceive of the acceptability variation as a cline. von

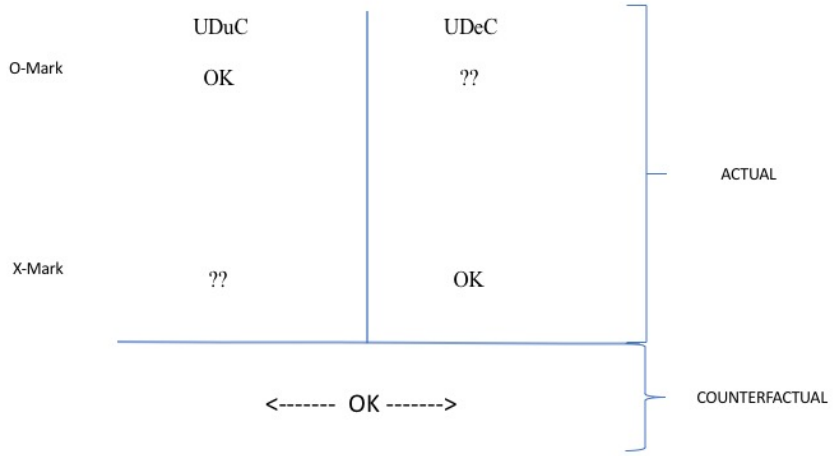

Figure 1: UDuC/UDeC *acceptability asymmetry*

(17) UDuC/UDeC *acceptability asymmetry*

> As for the domain of *actual* desires/duties, whereas the linguistic constructions that express unattainable *desires* resist O-marking and favour X-marking, constructions that express unattainable *duties* resist X-marking and favour O-marking.

What do these morphosemantic facts show? One point that seems particularly interesting is that unattainability is not inherently linked to X-marking. This may seem a rather obvious claim since X-marking a strong necessity does not lead to an unattainable duty statement. However, the issue gains considerable depth once we acknowledge the fact that unattainability is not precluded from the domain of obligations, especially of the strong type. If this is a truthful description, then the fact that the beyond-default space provided by X-marking necessity clauses is not fulfilled with unattainable content cannot be accounted for by simply claiming that there are no such things as unattainable duties. On the contrary, if the case for unattainable duties is made, the question as to why UDuC statements are not expressed by X-marking gains considerable theoretical interest.

In slightly more technical terms, if X-marking makes worlds that lie beyond a default setting accessible, unattainable worlds should be naturally accommodated in such a space. That this is not the case for necessity clauses indicates that there are other elements that control the distribution of the unattainable content in UDuC and UDeC. What constrains the fulfilling of the default and beyond-default space is a question I will discuss in section 4. As I will show, there are other conversational components beyond the basic morphosemantics

Fintel and Iatridou (2020) report that both forms 'I want/wish this weekend to last forever' are acceptable in a transparent language like Greek. I have tested the corresponding forms with several native speakers of Spanish and the WISH variant (either marked for conditional or subjunctive) is widely preferred. As a native speaker of Spanish, I support that judgement.

that determine how the distribution of unattainability is brought about. The constraints are built into the ordering source and how speakers evoke normative ideals. As we will see, the view can be worked out so as to confirm the philosophical intuitions defended in section 2.

3.2 The modal-tense interaction

UDuC also raises some issues for the modal-tense interaction theories currently offered in the field of natural language semantics. I will showcase one particular concern in what follows.

As previously mentioned, under a Kratzerian account modals are not ambiguous but context-dependent, in the sense that their flavour are contextually provided by the salient set of propositions in a conversational background. More precisely, Kratzer distinguishes two elements in the CB: a modal base (containing the subject's circumstantial facts) and an ordering source (invoking the relevant normative ideals). Formally, these parameters are represented by a pair of functions (f, g) that factor the realistic and normative propositional material into a ranked set of quantifiable worlds. For epistemic modals, the circumstantial facts correspond to what is known by the speaker at the actual world w; for circumstantial modals, they are typically related to the subject's inner states and contextual surroundings (preferences, commitments, goals, etc.) at the actual world w. We can represent these parametric interpretations by the following schema:

(18) *Overt CB Schema*

In view of x, $M\alpha$

where x stands for the relevant facts and ideals in the conversational background, and $M\alpha$ for a modalised proposition. This simple scheme provides the general form of a good range of modal clauses, such as 'In view of what I know, the butler must be the murderer' (for an epistemic interpretation) and 'In view of what he promised, John must try harder' (for a root one).

Now, one challenging task for the semanticists working in the field of modality has been to determine what role does tense play in the above schema. A formal and uncontroversial answer to this question is that tense indicates the time of the evaluation of the modal. From here, a more concrete (and equally uncontroversial) assumption is that the material factored in the evaluation corresponds to the relevant facts and circumstances in the modal base. For the case of necessity clauses expressing obligations, this leads to the widely shared assumption that tense indicates the time of the circumstantial facts that enforce the subject to bring into existence the event in α.[13]

[13]It is important to bear in mind that this assumption does not deny a parametric role to the other elements potentially invoked by x in (18). In effect, x can in principle stand for different facts in the overt CB schema. For example, one can construct an overt clause by invoking either a moral rule or the particular circumstances that trigger the obligation: 'in view of our moral codes, John must...'; 'in view of John having made a promise, he must...'. Both the normative and the realistic can play a parametric role in the interpretation of the modal. However, the crucial question for a specific theory of the modal-tense interaction is what time is indicated by tense. And insofar as moral rules (and normative standards in general), tend to be relatively atemporal, the natural suggestion is that tense indicates the time of the more material circumstances surrounding the subject.

But here is where complications arise. One undeniable fact about circumstances is that they extend over a certain period of time. There is a point when such-and-such circumstances are triggered (interestingly, the time at which an obligational state becomes ascribable), an overarching interval in which those circumstances prevail as a significant fact for whatever the normative standards, and a time at which those circumstances are somehow resolved in one way or another (the time of the event referred to in α). Which of these temporal intervals is indicated by tense?

The answers that we find in the literature reveal a somewhat understated split: either the circumstances at issue are the salient ones *at* the VP event, or such event is future-oriented with respect to the circumstances. Thus, from the common assumption that tense indicates the time of evaluation of the modal (and hence, that the time of evaluation corresponds to the time of the relevant circumstances), two differing views on the modal-tense interaction emerge as soon as different authors equate the time of evaluation with either one of these elements in the CB schema:

(i) the time of α (i.e, the time of the embedded VP event), or
(ii) the time of x (granted that α is future-oriented with respect to x).

Valentine Hacquard's event-relativization theory (Hacquard 2006, 2010) represents alternative (i) (I have referred to this as the 'pulling-to-the-right' view elsewhere, see Fuentes 2020), whereas Lisa Matthewson's (2012) view of the future orientation of circumstantial modals represents alternative (ii) (the 'pulling-to-the-left' view). Thus, while the pulling to the right view claims that tense indicates the time of the circumstances that are salient at the event time; the pulling to the left view establishes a subsequent temporal relation between the relevant circumstances and the event time.

Now, what can UDuC tell us about these competing views? One crucial aspect of unattainable duties is that the denoted event is not realizable. This seems to challenge the very idea of a time at which the event occurs. According to the pulling-to-the-right view, however, it is the event that provides the material circumstances that are factored in the modal's evaluation. Thus, conflating the time of the VP event with the time of the relevant circumstances seems at odds with the case made for unattainable duties.

It seems to me that a proper representation of the obligational ascription in (1) should assume that the elements factored in the modal's evaluation are circumscribed to the subject's current circumstances (namely, John's undertaken commitments). As far as I can see, those circumstantial elements seem perfectly distinguishable from the ones surrounding the unattainable event expressed by the prejacent. Moreover, it is unclear how such an event can provide the 'immediate material circumstances' that Hacquard hypothesizes in her event-relativization theory (see Hacquard 2010: 109-110). From a slightly more pragmatic point of view, when John describes the moral situation in which he is immersed, the present simple tense of *have to* (in 'I have to be in two places at the same time') is indicating the time of his current conflicting circumstances (having made two incompatible promises), not the (future) time of the circumstances surrounding the unattainable event in which he splits in two.

The case of unattainable duties brings to the fore a more general concern about event-relativization. And that is that Hacquard's view suggests a rather

condensed picture of obligational states. In effect, by equating the time of the relevant circumstances with the time of the VP event, Hacquard bears too close to the idea that the necessity expressed by an obligational statement is strictly circumscribed *at* the event time. In effect, reflecting on 'John had to flee the scene', Hacquard explicitly states that "*have to* [...] describes a circumstantial necessity for *John* at the *fleeing time*" (Hacquard 2011: 1503). However, it seems to me that the example misrepresents what being under an obligation amounts to. For it might be the case that John's unexpected circumstances triggered an immediate necessity for him to flee the scene. But most obligations are not as immediate. Typically, the temporal range of an obligation may be initiated by circumstances that precede the event's occurrence. This basically means that the time of x, in our CB schema, might precede α. In effect, talk about obligations typically describes scenarios in which subjects that undertook a commitment in the past see to the event's realization in a subsequent point in the future: I have to take Ana to the zoo next Saturday because I promised her to do so last week.

A more coherent picture emerges, then, if we assume that tense indicates the time of the relevant circumstances and make the prejacent event future-oriented to them. This is basically the pulling-to-the-left alternative, represented by Matthewson's work on the temporal orientation of modals (2012). For Matthewson, the temporal point at which the relevant circumstances of the modal base hold constitutes the TEMPORAL PERSPECTIVE (see Condoravdi 2002 for the original influential idea). Crucially, the future TEMPORAL ORIENTATION of root modals establishes a subsequent relation between the temporal perspective and the event's time (Matthewson 2012). This seems to provide the necessary temporal distance: even though tense provides the time of the modal's evaluation, it pulls to the left, that is, to the time at which x in our CB overt schema obtains ("the time at which the relevant facts hold" (Matthewson 2012: 432)).

Crucially, the pulling-to-the-left view can account for the interpretable character of UDuC, already defended in Section 2. In effect, since the enforcing circumstances can be temporarily detachable from the future-oriented event, an obligational ascription can be justified by the prevailingness of the former element regardless of the latter's unattainability. More generally, this analytical perspective reveals a telling fact about circumstantial modality and its interaction with tense: namely, that tense indicates the time at which the relevant enforcing circumstances of the subject hold, not (necessarily) the time at which the temporal range of the obligation is resolved (or even initiated).[14]

4 Analysis

In this section, I offer a semantic and pragmatic characterization of UDuC and other related constructions. Since the proposal intends to integrate several points made in the previous sections, I begin by relocating some of the philosophical notions introduced in section 2 within a linguistic framework (section

[14]In effect, as shown elsewhere for future obligations (Author 2020), the temporal location of the *initial* far left boundary of an obligation is semantically underspecified by the grammar. Crucially, the underspecification concerns the temporal point at which the relevant facts are triggered (hence, the time at which the obligational state becomes ascribable).

4.1). Once this broad terminological arrangement is laid out, I turn to the more technical task of presenting a linguistic analysis of UDuC. The examination will be centred on the question as to why UDuC resist X-marking (section 4.2) and favour O-marking (section 4.3).

4.1 Duties, negotiability, weak and strong

As pointed out in section 2, there is a distinction found in the philosophical literature between prima facie and all things considered duties. Roughly speaking, prima facie duties provide provisory moral reasons for action and can conflict with each other. If not defeated, a prima facie duty becomes a binding duty. All things considered duties, in turn, follow from the set of binding duties in a given situation. In one of the examples used for illustration, the prima facie duty of keeping one's promises was defeated by the binding duty of helping those in need, from which we derive the all things considered duty of taking one's neighbour to the hospital. As argued in section 2, all things considered duties can also conflict with each other, as in the example of the double promise scenario.

As expected, an all things considered duty is commonly endorsed by a modal statement which can be built (in English) with an array of lexical variants, such as *must*, *have to*, *ought* and *should*. Philosophers' comments on these lexical choices are rather marginal, although *ought* seems to hold prevalence when exemplifying an all things considered duty ascription. Interestingly, linguists seem to resist this tendency, and there is a good amount of literature that describes contexts of speech in which *ought* is appropriate but *must* and *have to* are not.[15] I will not address this particular issue in this paper. Rather, as in previous sections, I will set aside the semantic specificity of English *ought* and build examples with the other three lexical variants: *must*, *have to* and *should*.

In building a terminological setup, I will assume the following division of labour: while the inferential chain from prima facie to all things considered duties constitutes one main focus of interest in deontic logic, semanticists of natural language attempt to explain how the grammatical ingredients of an all things considered duty statement determine its intended meaning. As already mentioned, the latter task can be accomplished by an intensional semantics framework that invokes conversational backgrounds containing both the triggering circumstances and the normative ideals that are relevant in a given moral situation. Moreover, in section 2 I have already equated the normative ideals of the CB with the set of salient *binding duties* (that is, with the prima facie duties not defeated by competitors). Under this arrangement, a semantic analysis will process these ideals and circumstances by means of functions from (set of) propositions to (set of) worlds, which results in the domain that the modal component quantifies over. Thus, the inferential chain that takes us from prima facie to all things considered duties constitutes the rational backbone of the set of binding duties in a given conversational background. The suggested division of labour is one according to which philosophers inquire about the valid forms of

[15] In effect, a test of common use in crosslinguistic fieldwork is based on the claim that weak necessity (built with *should* and *ought* in English) can be conjoined with the negation of a strong necessity clause ('You ought to/should do the dishes but you don't have to'; see von Fintel and Iatridou 2008).

moral reasoning, while semanticists explain how to compose (across languages) the meaningful sentences that endorse an all things considered duty.

A slight complication arises when one considers, under this somewhat condensed picture, how philosophers and linguists use the strong/weak terminology. In effect, the philosophical literature shows a tendency to conceive of prima facie duties as weak obligations and of all things considered duties as the strong counterpart (see Horty 2003: 586 and references therein). In our example, the weak duty to keep one's promises is defeated by another triggered duty (help those in need), which in turn becomes the binding duty from which the strong all things considered duty to help my neighbour is derived. Crucially, this is NOT how linguists have implemented the strong/weak distinction. In the linguistic study of modality, the distinction at issue targets two types of endorsed necessities: weak necessity (which in English is commonly expressed with *should*) and strong necessity (commonly expressed with *must* and *have to*). According to a relatively standard characterization (which I will presently disclose), weak necessity involves a secondary normative standard from which a speaker derives and promote one course of action over other competing possibilities (von Fintel and Iatridou 2008, Rubinstein 2014, among many others).

For concreteness, consider a scenario in which (i) John has promised to take Ana to the zoo, and (ii) the prima facie duty of keeping his promise can be satisfied by two alternative means: making Ana's journey comfortable (say, going by car) or giving Ana a moral example (say, using the combustion-free line of public transport). The described alternatives are (given the described situation) competing normative standards (or *ideals*). Now, if participants in the salient context disagree over which of these normative standards is more important, speakers will most likely use a *weak* statement, such as 'John should go by car' or 'John should use the green line'. By doing this, a speaker promotes one ideal among a set of competing ones within an opinionated conversational background. Note that the all things considered duty is derived from the secondary ideal in the CB (giving Ana a moral example) and endorsed by the statement 'John should use the green line'.

Admittedly, the weakness of the promoted ideal in our opinionated setting somewhat resembles the provisory (non-conclusive) character of prima facie duties—hence the coincident *weak* terminology. But it is important to bear in mind that the distinctions made do not fully overlap. This surely requires a more refined revision of the literature than what I can offer here, but the general point should be clear: while the philosophical distinction tends not to apply to the endorsing statement and rather to the inferential power of the background ideals (*weak* being provisory, *strong* being all things considered conclusive), the distinction used by linguists seems more pragmatically driven and applies to the statements (that is to say, to that aspect of the endorsement in virtue of which a speaker acknowledges other participants' convergent or dissenting opinions on the stringency of the background ideal).[16]

In this paper, 'weak' and 'strong' will characterize the ascribed necessities, not the background ideals. Ideals, and binding duties more specifically, will come in two forms: negotiable and non-negotiable (more on this below). Since binding duties set up a conversational background, I will incidentally talk about

[16]I suspect that this is the reason why English *ought* is interpreted differently in the two disciplines, a point that I cannot address here.

negotiable and non-negotiable CBs. Thus, according to the proposed terminological arrangement, the weak/strong distinction relates to the way in which participants recognize disagreements with respect to normative and moral standards; whereas the distinction between prima facie and all things considered duties refers to the inferential stage of ascribable obligations (prima facie duties being provisory moral reasons for action, all things considered duties being endorsed obligations). Contrary to philosophical stipulations, then, 'weak' and 'strong' will be attributed to the statements that express all things considered duties. Duties (=ideals) themselves, are either negotiable or non-negotiable (in the way I will presently define below).

Notice that, according to this use of the terminology, an all things considered duty may derive from either a negotiable or a non-negotiable CB, depending on how the opinionated asserters think of the relevant ideals. Hence, all things considered duty statements can come in different lexical variants (either with a strong *have to* and *must* or with a weak *should*). When the former occurs ('John must/has to take his neighbour to the hospital'), the binding duty (help those in need) is taken to be non-negotiable by the relevant universe of participants. When the latter occurs ('John should take his neighbour to the hospital'), other equally competing duties are invoked (keeping one's promises) and the speaker is being sensitive to the dissenting opinion of other participants. The prime idea is that by uttering 'John should take his neighbour to the hospital' (instead of 'John must/has to...'), the speaker is promoting a binding duty against a background of divergent opinions (that is, against a background in which some participants think that he should keep his promise).[17]

4.2 UDuC: why not X-marking?

With these terminological clarifications in place, I now turn to the central issue addressed in this paper: the morphological variation in the acceptability cline of unattainable duties and desires statements. To recall, figure 1 shows an asymmetry between the morphological build-up of these statements: whereas unattainable desires constructions resist O-marking and favour X-marking, constructions that express unattainable duties resist X-marking and favour O-marking. Given that unattainability is naturally expressed by X-marking in one of the domains, the natural question arises as to why this does not occur in the other.

[17]It is worth pointing out that there are other notions in classic and recent literature that may connect with the discussion here. Take for instance the *ought-to-do/ought-to-be* distinction drawn by Feldman 1986 (taken up in linguistics by Brennan 1993 and Hacquard 2006) and the *deliberative/objective* distinction made by Cariani et al 2013 (already mentioned in section 2, see footnote 7, p. 8). I will not integrate these notions into the main discussion, but only mention that the referred distinctions tend to describe possible interpretations of endorsed duties (that is to say, possible interpretations of what I have referred to as all things considered duty statements). This may be a rather simplistic picture. Things are surely more complicated due to the fact that the use of the prima facie/all things considered duties distinction vary considerably from author to author, and some variation might also be expected with respect to the other two pairs of notions. This means that the listed notions may be used to illuminate different aspects of either the endorsing statements, the underlying moral reasoning or even the circumstances involved in the situation under discussion (moral conflicts, unattainable duties, epistemic uncertainty or what have you). Since this brief subsection was not meant as a terminological regimentation, but only as an instrumental line-up for the specific discussion in the next two subsections, I have not attempted to make any substantial connection between these notions.

The task ahead, then, is not only to determine why unattainable duties are expressed by O-marking, but also why this is not acceptable for X-marking. In fact, I will start with the latter question in what follows. Building on a relatively recent proposal by Rubinstein (2014), I will suggest that the ordering element in the comparative semantics of weak X-marked necessity constructions introduces an attainability requirement that is not met by UDuC. The requirement is an essential ingredient of a broader picture of how speakers promote binding duties (*priorities* in Rubinsten's terminology) by means of the strong/weak lexical and morphological variants.

Rubinstein's view on the semantics of modality is framed in well-known Kratzerian principles but adds on some interesting innovations. As shown in the previous sections, Kratzerian analyses relativize the meaning of deontic modals to a conversational background that involves both facts and ideals. Technically, this content comes in the form of propositions (set of premises) that are factored by functions: a modal base f for the premises that represent the circumstantial facts in the actual world w that are relevant for the modal ascription (e.g. a promise being made in w), and an ordering source g that gathers the relevant norms in the situation (Comply with one's promises). These accessibility functions select the domain of worlds a modal quantifies over. Intersecting the set of propositions in the modal base f will render the set of worlds in which the relevant circumstances in w obtain, while the ordering source g will rank those worlds according to their proximity to the relevant ideal. To deal with some technical problems, some semanticists working under this framework have added a Limit Assumption by means of a third function that identifies the *best* worlds: the worlds that among $\cap f(w)$ are closest to the ideals gathered in g(w). Rubinstein's definition of the *BEST* function is given in (19a).[18] The formula in (19b) represents strong necessity according to standard Kratzerian analyses.

(19) (a) $BEST(\cap f(w),\ g(w)) = \{u \in \cap f(w)\colon \neg\exists v \in \cap f(w).\ v <_{g(w)} u\}$

(b) Strong Necessity $= \lambda p \forall w'(w' \in BEST(\cap f(w),\ g(w)) \rightarrow w' \in p)$

Thus, standard Kratzerian analyses confer some degree of a comparative semantics to modal predicates. This applies to strong modals (*must*, *have to*) and weak ones (*ought*, *should*), the only difference being that weak modals add additional secondary ideals into their ordering sources (see von Fintel and Iatridou 2008, von Fintel and Heim 2011, among many others).

Against this general background, Rubinstein's proposal consists of drawing the strong/weak distinction according to the ways in which necessity modals factor different types of binding duties into their accessibility functions. The theoretical outcome is interesting: since different types of duties trigger comparative and non-comparative interpretations, Rubinstein's understanding of the weak/strong distinction contravenes some key assumptions in standard Kratzerian analyses. More specifically, Rubinstein recommends an analysis of *strong* necessity modals that factors ideals, *on a par with* circumstances, as the content of modal bases. The comparative character that is commonly attributed to ideals across the strong/weak cline is only selectively assigned by Rubinstein to the weak bond of the distinction (2014: 534–537). In other words, it is only with

[18] In comparative renditions such as (19), '$\alpha <_g \beta$' means that α is closer than β to the ideal set up by g.

respect to weak necessity that ideals rank worlds and thereby enable a comparative semantics. Thus, strong necessity modals express statements of what follows from a single set of non-negotiable duties and relevant circumstances, weak statements express "necessities relative to *negotiable* priorities – raised and promoted by an opinionated individual" (2014: 537).

To be more precise, let us unfold Rubinstein's proposal in more technical terms, to then see how it can be implemented for the specific case of unattainable duties. Rubinstein's thesis that strong necessity modals do not possess a comparative semantics basically means that they do not motivate ordering sources. In Rubinstein's view, the set of binding duties linked to a strong necessity statement is factored on a par with the facts and circumstances that narrow the space of possibility for the quantification, creating thus an unordered set of worlds (Rubinstein refers to these as the *favoured worlds*). Kratzerian ordering sources are only motivated by modals that express weak necessities. As expressed in the formulas below, strong necessity universally quantifies over a set of favoured worlds provided by a modal base (Fav) consisting of functions that factor facts (f) and ideals (h). Weak necessity modals, on the other hand, universally quantify over a subset of the unordered set (namely, the subset resulting from a rank according to an ordering source (g)):

(20) (a) $[[P_{StrongN}]]^{f,h} = \lambda p \forall w'(w' \in Fav(f,h,w) \rightarrow w' \in p)$

(b) $[[P_{WeakN}]]^{f,h,g} = \lambda p \forall w'(w' \in BEST(Fav(f,h,w), g(w)) \rightarrow w' \in p)$

(Rubinstein 2014: 535, slightly modified)[19]

In the author's view, then, the ideals that are alternatively factored into the modal base and the ordering source determine the quantification domain in two different ways: (i) the ones in the modal base delimit a set of live possibilities (on a par with facts), (ii) the ones in the ordering source rank such possibilities in one way or another.

The natural question arises as to what determines the (ordering or unordering) accessibility function that corresponds to a particular ideal. Interestingly, for Rubinstein this is linked to the role played by opinionated speakers. In effect, Rubinstein offers a pragmatic picture of obligational statements according to which ideals do not come 'tagged' as stringent or relaxed. Rather, the strength of ideals may vary from context to context in virtue of the participants' degree of commitment. More concretely, the strong and weak variants in the grammar (however they are encoded) are used by speakers to assign either a non-negotiable or negotiable character to a salient duty in the conversational background.

Central to this conception is the notion of NEGOTIABILITY. What exactly is a negotiable duty or ideal? Rubinstein introduces the notion when reflecting on scenarios whereby not all relevant members in a conversational setting are committed to a duty's endorsement. This simply means that, of the relevant universe of participants in conversation, at least one is not disposed to defend the duty at issue. Rubinstein provides an illuminating example: a manager of

[19] Following Hacquard 2010, Rubinstein introduces events in the evaluation. For the reasons adduced in Section 3.2, I have preserved worlds instead of events in this and the following renditions.

a company discusses with an accountant the upcoming tax report. The accountant says: 'We should report international revenues'. According to Rubinstein, such a situation involves an accountant that is promoting the duty of reporting all revenues against a background of other competing duties (Reporting only domestic revenues). By doing so, the accountant also acknowledges that her ideal is negotiable and subject to the opinions of others. In effect, in the alternative scenario where the accountant and the manager agree with what the law says, we would have no opinionated perspectives and the general judgement would be 'We have to report international revenues'.

The notion of negotiability that underpins this and related examples is (approximately) defined by Rubinstein as follows, where $g(w)$ stands for the set of premises provided by the conversational background in the actual world w:

(21) *Negotiability*

A premise set $g(w)$ is *negotiable* iff not all relevant individuals are committed to g in w.

(Rubinstein 2014: 539, modified).

With this definition in view, we are only a step away from formalizing the connection between comparison and negotiability. Crucially, Rubinstein takes this step by making negotiability a presupposition on the content of ordering sources:

(22) $BEST(A\ g(w))$ is only defined if $g(w)$ is negotiable.
If defined, $\text{BEST}(A\ g(w)) = \{u \in A\text{: } \neg\exists v \in A.\ v <_{g(w)} u\}$
(Rubinstein 2014: 539, modified).

How can the previous formulations illuminate our inquiry about unattainable duties (and more specifically, about UDuC's resistance to X-marking)? With Rubinstein's analytical layout in view, my aim is to reach an intuitive picture of how negotiability is linked to our core example in (1), and hence to the general case of UDuC's interpretability.

An important claim at this point is that binding duties come in two forms, negotiable and non-negotiable. In our symmetry example, the non-negotiable binding duty 'Keep one's promises' entails the all things considered statement 'John must be at two places at the same time', and no special consideration of dissenting opinions arises. If we consider a slightly different scenario, though, one in which asserters want to break the apparent symmetry and make the situation decidable in one way or another, a different kind of background takes shape. In effect, by calibrating the binding duty of keeping one's promises with a secondary standard that competes with further reasons for action (Give moral examples to the young, Respect the elderly), a speaker can acknowledge their competitiveness, conclude that one of them is preferable, and derive the weak all things considered duty statement 'John should take Ana to the zoo'. Insofar as the speaker's interest is to invoke the ideal of keeping one's promises in a more stringent (non-negotiable) or relative (negotiable) way, she will choose different (strong or weak) statements to express her moral view.

Now, how does the specific issue of the unattainability of (1) fit into this picture? My aim is to enrich the notion of negotiability so as to make it account

for the UDuC's acceptability variance within the strong/weak cline. This is very simple: all we need to do is to make the attainability ingredient a condition of negotiability, in the sense that a negotiable (and hence, promotable) ideal must be attainable per definition. This would allow us to conceive of non-negotiable duties as unrestricted by circumstantial unattainability and of negotiable duties as essentially attainable (and hence, promotable). This is fairly straightforward:

(23) A premise set $g(w)$ is *negotiable* iff, of the universe of relevant participants in conversation in w:

(i) all of them agree that the material means that would satisfy $g(w)$ in the given circumstances are attainable,

(ii) at least one is not committed to $g(w)$.

The material means that would satisfy the relevant ideal can involve both states (such as the zoo being opened on Saturdays), dispositions (John having the mental and physical capabilities to take Ana to the zoo), and events (the actual taking Ana to the zoo). Other ideals in other circumstances can demand more complex conditions of satisfaction. What is important is that the definition of ordering sources offered in (22) would have as a presupposition that the relevant binding duties are attainable in the given circumstances. The central claim is that if opinionated participants are disposed to promote an ideal, it has to be an attainable one. Crucially, strong necessities, which do not come with ordering sources, do not have any constraint in this respect.

Let us now have a closer look at how the above works for the double promise scenario. My proposal relies on the fact that different moral sensitivities can incline a speaker to behave in two different ways when confronted with such situations. She can either invoke the non-negotiable character of the duty (by uttering 'John has to be in two places at the same time') or (granted that she contemplates additional moral reasons to do so) promote a negotiable ideal over the other ('John should take Ana to the zoo').

How are the modal bases and ordering sources configured in each of these alternatives? Let us begin with the strong UDuC claim: 'John has to be in two places at the same time'. One plausible representation is the following:

(24) Non-negotiable conversational background

CB = f(w) + h(w) = {[[John promised Ana to P]], [[John promised Aunt Polly to Q]], [[Keep one's promises]]}

While f factors the referred circumstantial facts, h does the same with the stringent ideal of keeping one's promises. An issue that immediately arises with the exemplified non-negotiable CB is inconsistency. Is it not the case that the relevant unattainable duty gives rise to an empty quantification domain under the intensional system adopted? In effect, since facts are not inconsistent but ideals can be, we can assume that the stringent duty to keep one's promises is calibrated for the relevant situation into two incompatible duties, rendering an inconsistency of the following type:

(25) CB = f(w) + h(w) = {[[John promised Ana to P]], [[John promised Aunt Polly to Q]], [[Keep promise to Ana]], [[Keep promise to Aunt Polly]]}

Treating ideals as propositions will derive in an empty domain, so we need an alternative way of factoring them into a modal base. Building on Frank (1996), Rubinstein (2014) provides a formal tool to do this: an operation called *compatibility restricted union* (2014:534–535). Consider the following version of Rubinstein's adaptation of Frank (Rubinstein 2014:535; Frank 1996:42).

(26) For (possibly conflicting) modal bases f(w) and h(w), f(w) + h(w) = {f(w) ∪ X : X ⊆ h(w) ∧ f(w) ∪ X *is consistent* ∧ ∀Y ⊆ h(w) if X ⊂ Y then f(w) ∪ Y is inconsistent}

Applying (26) to (25), we take the maximal subsets of ideals in h(w) that are consistent with the propositions that express the fact that some promises were made, to then extract a unioned set of premises for each one. Thus, the resulting set is composed of maximal consistent sets of ideals and facts, as in the following (where [[R]] represents the conjunctive factual proposition 'John promised Ana to be in place_1 at time_1 and John promised Aunt Polly to be in place_2 at time_1'):

(27) CB = f(w) + h(w) = {{[[R]], [[Keep promise to Ana]]},{[[R]], [[Keep promise to Aunt Polly]]}}

Rubinstein describes the *favoured worlds* in the definition of strong necessity in (20a) as the retrieved "unordered set of worlds that represent all the different ways of fulfilling as many priorities [...] as possible" and define it thus:

(28) *Fav*(f, h, w) = ∪ { ∩M: M ∈ f(w) + h(w)}

This formal representation of all the different ways of fulfilling a conflicting situation allows us to deal with the empty quantification domain problem. Additionally, since non-negotiable CBs do not give rise to a secondary ordering, no attainability requirement is inoculated—and hence, no impediment for the expression of UDuC emerges.

Things do not run as smooth for the negotiable CBs, though. In effect, as soon as one attempts to factor the binding duty 'Keep one's promises' into the ordering source (g), the first of its definedness conditions in (23) impedes it.

(29) Negotiable conversational background (infelicitous)
$f(w)$ = {[[R]]}
$g(w)$ = {[[Keep one's promises]]}

The attempt to express weak necessity fails because of presupposition failure: the material means that satisfy $g(w)$ are not attainable. No promotion can be effected because no sense of attainability can be made.

It is worth bearing in mind that promotion is possible under other scenarios in which two incompatible promises have been made. Let us consider now a slightly different context—one in which the issue of which of two binding duties is more important is discernible, although different speakers hold divergent opinions about the resolution. That is, some speakers entertain reasons that favour the compliance of one of the binding duties, while other speakers do the same regarding the other duty. Arguably, the supporting reasons that speakers may entertain can be modelled in the same way. One reason for keeping

the promise made to Aunt Polly can be that one must show respect for elders. Reasons for keeping the promise to Ana can be that giving moral examples to the young is constructive. Any of these can be factored directly in the ordering source. Here is the representation of the CB for 'John should take Ana to the zoo':

(30) Negotiable conversational background (felicitous)

$f(w)$ = {[[John promised Ana to P]], [[John promised Aunt Polly to Q]],[[Keep one's promises]]}

$g(w)$ = {[[Give moral examples to the young]]}

The introduced secondary standard gives content to the speaker's opinion on how to better satisfy the ideal of keeping one's promises in the particular situation at hand. Other speakers will have a different opinion. Sensitive to this divergence, the secondary standard in (30) is promoted against a negotiable conversational background. Attainability is a condition of negotiability. In English, this will be expressed by the lexical choice *should* (instead of *must*). In transparent languages where X-morphology plays a relevant role, the construction will be X-marked.

This rough sketch suffices to give an idea of why UDuC resists X-marking. Crucially, the precise element that can be signalled as responsible for the non-acceptability of unattainable prejacents in weak X-marked constructions is the attainability requirement introduced by the ordering source. In other words, by invoking negotiable duties, *weak* necessity statements open a gap for a comparative element that in turn introduces the attainability requirement in view of some secondary standard. In contrast, *strong* necessity statements invoke stringent duties, which combined with some circumstantial arrangements in the modal base enable assertions that hinge on the duty's strict character and thereby reinforce its non-negotiable strength.

4.3 UDuC: why O-marking?

In the previous section, I offered an examination of UDuC focusing on the issue of the unacceptability of X-marking. In this section, I turn to the question as to why UDuC are rendered acceptable when O-marked.

As a first step towards answering this question, it is worth recalling the pragmatic roles that X and O marked constructions play when expressing necessity. According to the view defended in the previous section, while the role of X-marked statements is to promote negotiable ideals, O-marked constructions are used when non-negotiable ideals are salient. Linked to this view is the idea that duties do not come tagged once and for all as negotiable or non-negotiable. Rather, their status is built and sustained from statement to statement by the individual members of a community of speakers. Thus, every time a speaker utters 'NP *must* VP' as an inference from an undisputed binding duty, the duty is reassured in its non-negotiable status. If at a certain point in time different speakers show signs of disagreement about the stringency of the relevant ideal, (at least some) members of the community will acknowledge the dissenting perspectives on the issue and, as a matter of good linguistic practice, will promote the ideal only as a negotiable standard ('NP *should* VP').

How does (un)attainability fit into this picture? Since negotiability is linked to attainability in the way described in the previous section, O-marking becomes the default strategy to endorse unattainable duties (on a par with non-negotiable but attainable ones). This confers a particular property on the expression of duties: speakers can dispense with a special morphology for indicating the attainable/unattainable split. In effect, while O-marked necessity serves to express both attainable and unattainable non-negotiable duties, the X-morphology only surfaces when a negotiable ideal is promoted. As highlighted throughout this paper, this pattern contrasts with what occurs in the domain of desires, where the O/X marking signals the attainable/unattainable split.

The observations summarized above suggest that, regardless of how X's contribution is defined, the role of X-marked constructions in each of the desires/duties domains may be stipulated by pragmatic means. This seems a reasonable assumption to make, on the grounds that duty and desire statements play a particularly relevant role in the domestication of human desires and actions. Parents who teach their children to say 'I wish there was ice cream' (instead of 'I want ice cream') every wretched time there is no ice cream available, are well aware of how gradual and consenting this process can be. A bad-tempered child that furiously utters 'But I want ice cream!' may not be the most adorable creature in the queue, but he is certainly not making a non-sensical statement. Likewise, stiff characters that do not acknowledge normative standards other than their own will stick to 'John must not consider cannabis as a medical treatment for his pain', even when there is reasonable space for divergence of opinions on the matter (simply acknowledged by 'John *should* not...').

Much remains to be done to fully understand the interplay between the two aspects involved here—the semantic contribution of X (across domains) and the role and use that speakers assign to the resulting constructions (across languages). One modest conclusion that can be extracted from the preceding discussion is that there is no analytic link between unattainability and the semantic space provided by the X-morphology. The latter can serve the purpose either to reach unattainable possibilities (worlds in which ice cream is available) or to acknowledge other participants' perspectives (cannabis is a medical option to treat pain). The content that fulfils the provided semantic space seems to be controlled by factors other than the morphosemantics. That the away-from-default move is effected by different morphosemantic units across languages seems a clear indication of this.

The natural question arises, then, as to what factors are involved in fulfilling the away-from-default space provided by X. I would like to suggest an initial hypothesis, if only as a starting speculative point: the factors that control the fulfilling of the away-from-default content provided by X are related to the linguistic practices in virtue of which a community of speakers domesticate self-centred individuals. In the case of desires, the individuals at issue are those strongly disposed to attain (or demand) what is unattainable. These individuals are trained to contemplate the desired object from a reasoned distance while still expressing their actual desires (uttering 'I wish there was ice cream' instead of 'I want ice cream'). In the case of duties, individuals who are prone to impose their own normative perspectives are trained to acknowledge other participants' points of view (saying 'in my opinion, John should not consider cannabis as a medical treatment for his pain' instead of 'John must not consider...'). A

clear indication that there is a domestication process involved (rather than an analytical link between these contents and the morphosemantics) is that when a participant runs against these regulatory practices, no semantic monstrosity arises ('but I want ice cream!')—perhaps only a refusal to participate in our shared linguistic lifeforms.

Although the sketchy view presented here is only a working hypothesis for future work, I would like to point out some further supporting evidence. Consider, for instance, what happens when necessity modals have bouletic interpretations (in Spanish, a transparent language):

(31) Context: *Talking Heads, Nico's favourite band, is coming to town. Luisa rings to tell him the news. She says:*

a. Nico, ¡debes comprar los boletos hoy!
   Nico must.2S buy the tickets today
   'Nico, you must buy the tickets today!

b. Nico, ¡deberías comprar los boletos hoy!
   Nico must.COND.2S buy the tickets today
   'Nico, you should buy the tickets today!'

Both (31a) and (31b) have (sym)bouletic goal-oriented readings.[20] The variance in meaning is subtle, but one noticeable difference is related to the speaker's sensitivity to the agent's perspective. Arguably, (31a) is a more self-centered statement than (31b), which seems more permeable to other goal-oriented standards that the agent may possibly behold. Consider the acceptability of subsequent speech to the relevant statements in English:

(32) Nico, you must buy the tickets today...
   a. no matter what!
   b. ?? unless you have something else in mind for Saturday night.

(33) Nico, you should buy the tickets today...
   a. ?? no matter what!
   b. unless you have something else in mind for Saturday night.

Another crucial feature that deserves comment is that X and *should* (in (31b) and (33), correspondingly) do not signal unattainability: buying the tickets is an *attainable* goal in the given context. In effect, if the context were such that Luisa knew that the tickets sold out, any of the statements above would be infelicitous.

What exactly does this tell us? On the one hand, the above facts suggest that what determines the occurrence of O/X marking is not the bouletic element salient in the context and expressed by the necessity constructions. In effect, although (31) describes a *bouletic* and *attainable* context (one that would make

[20] The precise taxonomy of these statements is not important here but see Yanovich 2014 for an interesting proposal on symbouletic modality.

O-marking the appropriate choice if crosslinguistic predicates expressing WANT were in play), the X/*should* variants in (31b) and (33) are perfectly acceptable (at least as much as their O/*must* counterparts). This not only suggests that the link between X-marking and unattainability is not analytic (not even in bouletic scenarios), but also that the interaction between X and necessity modals is pragmatically driven by the away-from-the-ego rationale (regardless of whether the relevant statement renders a deontic or a bouletic interpretation).

This should not surprise us: in the same way that individuals are trained to contemplate their unattainable desires from a distance ('I wish there was ice cream'), in the same way that individuals are trained to acknowledge other participants' standards ('John should not consider cannabis as a medical treatment for his pain'), individuals are also trained to give advice in a collaborative sensitive way. In doing so, the speaker will acknowledge the possibility that the addressee has a different perspective on how to deal with the relevant goals, desires and surrounding circumstances involved in the situation ('You should buy the tickets today (but you might also have in mind other priorities)'). If, for whatever reason, the speaker does not want to acknowledge such alternatives (say, to emphasize that a Talking Heads concert is a once-in-a-lifetime experience), a strong necessity construction would be her natural choice.[21]

How does this basic rationale apply to the case of O-marked unattainable duties? To recall, in imposing a course of action to an agent (that is, in making that course of action compulsory rather than advisory), an O-marked necessity statement also restates the binding ideal in the conversational background. The reason why a speaker would want to impose an unattainable course of action upon an agent by means of an O-marked statement should now be clear: by doing so, the speaker reinforces the non-negotiable character of such ideal. The thought is that UDuC statements such as (1) are not meant in a resolutive sense (as merely dictating what to do) but come with the higher-order intention of reassuring the stringency of the relevant duty. In the specific case of (1), the statement makes evident that the non-negotiable duty of keeping one's promises has collided with the agent's unfortunate circumstances, leading him into an undesirable absurd situation. A situation that is *described* by the UDuC statement. According to this view, (1) is a valid move in the language not in virtue of its alleged resolutive character, but because it describes a moral situation in which an undisputed moral standard (keep one's promises) conflicts with some avertable circumstances (the double promise scenario).

One can easily imagine the utility of such a move for the normative negotiations within a community of speakers. Consider what Ruth Barcan Marcus said about moral dilemmas four decades ago:

> The point to be made is that, although dilemmas are not settled without residue, the recognition of their reality has a dynamic force. It motivates us to arrange our lives and institutions with a view to avoiding such conflicts. It is the underpinning for a second-order regulative principle: that as rational agents with some control of

[21] Note the potential that this working hypothesis may have for the analysis of a somewhat overlooked subclass of X-marked statements: polite expressions with bouletic *like*, such as 'John, I would really like to go home now' (instead of 'John, I want to go home now'). Pragmatically speaking, the X-marking in this expression does not signal an unattainable desire to go home, but a pragmatic move away-from-the-ego—exactly what is missing in the (rather unpolite) *want* variant.

> our lives and institutions, we ought to conduct our lives and arrange our institutions so as to minimize predicaments of moral conflict. (Barcan Marcus 1980: 121).

The aim of this paper was to show that a subclass of such predicaments (namely, UDuC) is not only acceptable but of genuine theoretical interest for the semantic study of modal expressions in natural language.

5 Conclusion

This article aimed to account for a fairly unexplored set of facts related to UDuC's acceptability and interpretative potential. After justifying the obligational ascription attained by its different uses on conceptual grounds (Section 2), I presented a set of linguistic facts in light of some recent proposals within the natural language semantics of obligations and desires (Section 3). Section 4 built a proposal according to which the UDuC's acceptability variance along the morphological cline is derived by independent pragmatic factors in each of the mentioned domains. In the case of weak necessity clauses, the ordering source inherent to their semantics impedes unattainable duties to play a competing role. The restriction is not imposed in strong necessity claims, due to the absence of ordering sources. Thus, UDuC can be understood as expressing a residual demand which results from both, the indisputable character of the binding duty and the agent's particular circumstances. No course of action is promoted. The examination ultimately suggests that an asserter can invoke the background duties in a strict or more relaxed way, and that this difference is reflected in the morphosemantics of the relevant clauses. An across-domain examination suggests, however, that these effects are brought about not by pure analytic means, but rather by the pragmatic regulatory attitudes of a community of speakers towards self-centred individuals.

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