

Towards a model of the syntax-discourse interface: a syntactic analysis of *please*¹

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I examine the syntax, semantics and acquisition of *please*. I propose that two principal types of *please* exist in English on the basis of their distribution within the clause, their distribution across clause types, and the obligatory and the cancellable aspects of meanings that they express as part of the clause. Clause-initial *please* meets the criteria for a high functional head and marks the illocutionary force of requests. An analysis of this kind also derives the differences in distribution and interpretation of clause-initial *please* and its clause-medial, vP-initial variant, which has the capacity to force request readings in clause types that do not typically mark requests. In contrast, clause-final *please* meets the criteria for an adverbial and marks politeness; hence its wider distribution and different acquisition trajectory. I argue that distinguishing between these two main types of *please* provides support for syntactic approaches to speech act structure and the claim that illocutionary force is part of narrow syntax rather than a solely pragmatic phenomenon. The paper also provides support for pursuing a model of the syntax-discourse interface in which the position of tense, mood and modality in the clause forms the link point between syntax and discourse.

1 INTRODUCTION

Syntactic speech act theory is undergoing a productive revival. Where illocutionary force was previously claimed by scholars of philosophy and pragmatics, syntacticians such as Speas & Tenny (2003), Hill (2007) and Wiltschko et al. (2015) have advanced convincing claims that syntax includes some limited information about the speaker's intentions as a member of a discourse situation.

Illocutionary force is a notoriously slippery concept to define. For the purposes of this article I follow Krifka (2014) in claiming that illocutionary force expresses information about the member of the discourse situation who commits or is expected to commit to the truth of a proposition, to answering a question, or to enacting some action. I will show that illocutionary force is separate from clause type, though there is an intimate link between the two, because the distribution of syntactically-expressed illocutionary force cross-cuts clause types. Moreover, though it does not affect the truth conditions of an utterance, it impacts upon grammaticality and felicity in context.

If illocutionary force is present in syntax, there should be overt evidence for its presence, at least in limited cases. In this article, I examine a candidate for the overt spell-out of illocutionary force in English, namely *please*. *Please* has been variously analysed as an adverbial (e.g. Sadock 1974), a discourse marker (e.g. Biber et al 1999), and a politeness marker (e.g. Stubbs 1983), but has always been treated as a single lexeme when integrated as part of the clause. However, based on distribution, compatibility with different clause types and the implicatures they give rise to, I propose that there are (minimally) two types of syntactically-integrated *please* and that one of these is an overt realisation of a syntactic illocutionary act² head. I will present a corpus study of *please* and its distribution, data regarding the use of *please* by children acquiring British English, and other syntactic and semantic data.

My primary focus will be on clause-initial *please*, which I will analyse as an illocutionary act head. Such an account will derive its restriction to imperative and interrogative clause-types and the obligatory interpretation of the clause containing it as a request. I will also discuss a clause-medial variant of this *please* that has a slightly different distribution. The other type of *please* will be analysed as a clause-final adverbial politeness marker that can combine not only with interrogatives and

imperatives but with declaratives as well. I will then examine the consequences of this work for syntactic speech act theory before concluding.

For clarity, I lay out here my definition of the illocutionary act of requesting. Requesting illocutionary acts are direct acts made by the speaker. Such an act consists of an utterance through which the speaker expresses a requirement for the addressee to commit to act in a specified way, whether or not that act contains a linguistic component. There is a key difference between this definition and Searle's (1979) class of 'directives'; while Searle includes all types of question in his class of directives, I will show that not all types of questions can be requests. Some questions may only be interpreted as information-seeking questions where others may be interpreted as either information-seeking questions or requests; the difference is modulated by modality and whether the question is a polar or wh-question. Only the polysemous type of question is compatible with *please*. Imperatives also canonically form requesting illocutionary acts. However, indirect requests that make use of context and subtext to form requests, such as the use of "It's cold in here" to mean "Close the window" are not classed as requesting illocutionary acts as the machinery required to interpret them as such is part of the pragmatic, not syntactic, component. However, these kinds of sentences will not be excluded from my data; instead, the data will show that indirect requests are almost never marked with clause-initial *please* precisely because they are statements at the syntactic level before they are interpreted as requests at the pragmatic level.

2 A SYNTACTIC INVESTIGATION OF *PLEASE*

This section will be structured as follows: the distribution of *please* over clause types will be examined using the International Corpus of English – Great Britain edition (ICE-GB) corpus (University College London 1998), other syntactic characteristics of *please* will be outlined, and the acquisition of *please* will be detailed using the Manchester corpus (Theakston et al. 2001) from CHILDES (MacWhinney 2000).

2.1 *Distribution of 'please'*

2.1.1 *Canonical positions of 'please'*

While syntactically-integrated *please* can appear clause-initially, -medially or -finally, there are restrictions on its distribution according to clause type. The paradigm is illustrated in examples (1)-(5).³

(1) Interrogative clauses

- a. Please can I have a beer?
- b. Can I please have a beer?
- c. Can I have a beer please?

(2) Imperative clauses

- a. Please get me a beer.
- b. Get (*please) me (*please) a beer.
- c. Get me a beer please.

(3) Declarative clauses

- a. *Please I'll have a beer.⁴
- b. *I'll please have a beer.
- c. I'll have a beer please.

(4) Declarative clauses outside of question-response contexts

- a. *Please there's a mouse there.⁵
- b. *There please is a mouse there.
- c. *There's a mouse there please.

(5) Exclamative clauses⁶

- a. *Please what a beer this is!
- b. *What a beer this is please!

A study of naturalistic uses of *please* reveals more detail about the distribution of *please*. The ICE-GB corpus contains 199 instances of *please* (excluding uses of the verb to *please*).⁷ The following tables show the distribution of *please* in different clausal

positions and across different clause types. Table 1 shows that clause-initial *please* is more than twice as common as clause-final *please* across the ICE-GB corpus. Clause-final *please* is in turn twice as common as clause-medial *please*.

Table 1
Clausal position of 'please' in the ICE-GB corpus (all texts)

Position	Number of occurrences
Clause-initial	114
Clause-medial (VP edge)	27
Clause-final	50
Other (e.g. standalone)	8
Total	199

Table 2 shows the clausal position of *please* in the corpus's speech texts. Most examples of clause-final *please* appear in these texts and clause-final *please* is more common than any other position.

Table 2:
Clausal position of please in the ICE-GB corpus (speech only)

Position	Number of occurrences
Clause-initial	28
Clause-medial (VP edge)	6
Clause-final	46
Other (e.g. standalone)	6
Total	86

Table 3 shows which types of clause contain *please* in the speech texts. *Please* predominantly occurs with the clause types typically used to perform requests, namely interrogatives and imperatives.

Table 3
Clause types containing 'please' in the ICE-GB corpus (speech)

Clause type	Number of occurrences
Declaratives	4
Fragments (e.g. yes, no, NP)	16
Standalone	2
Interrogatives	28
Imperatives	35

Conditional	1
Total	86

Table 4 shows the clause types that contain *please* in the written part of the corpus. The results are the same as in table 3, though there are fewer interrogatives and no fragments in the written texts.

Table 4
Clause types containing 'please' in the ICE-GB corpus (written)

Clause type	Number of occurrences
Declaratives	3
Standalone	4
Interrogatives	20
Imperatives	86
Total	113

The clause-initial position is the most common position for *please* overall in the corpus and predominates in writing. However, clause-final *please* is the most common realisation in spoken texts and is much more common in speech than in writing. With respect to different clause types, imperatives are the most common clause types to contain *please* in both spoken and written texts, followed by interrogatives. Given that these are the canonical forms for requesting, that may not seem surprising. In contrast, *please* is rare with declaratives in either speech or writing. The fact that *please* occurs in declaratives at all, given that they are not used to express direct requests, deserves scrutiny.

2.1.2 Declarative clauses and 'please'

Please appears in the following declarative sentences in the ICE-GB corpus; (6) shows *please* in declaratives in speech contexts and (7) in written contexts.

- (6) a. I'll have white ice cream please.
 b. I'll have strawberry ice cream please.
 c. So I ask for single questions please.
 d. I want to hear what the witness says. Please.

- (7) a. “Please, he’s my son.”
 b. “Please, Brett...I hate to see you angry like this.”
 c. The policeman said, “I’d like your full name and address, please.”

The examples in (6) and (7c) show utterance-final *please*, meaning that utterance-initial *please* in declaratives in this corpus (7a-b) uniquely appear in written texts. *Please* in these sentences is not integrated into the syntax of the declarative clause. This is indicated by the comma punctuation, though this is not a wholly reliable way of determining whether or not something is syntactically integrated; topics and foci in English, for example, are often separated from the rest of the clause by a prosodic break. However, *please* in these contexts is not directly linked to the statement made but seems to be elliptical; for (7a), for example, we could imagine underlying structures as in (8).

- (8) a. Please [spare him], he’s my son.
 b. Please [listen to my plea], he’s my son.

The analysis of standalone *please* as an elliptical structure also accounts for the possible readings identified in examples (3a) and (4a), reanalysed here in (9).

- (9) a. [Yes I’ll have a drink] please - I’ll have a beer.
 b. Please [help] - there’s a mouse over there.

This kind of ellipsis can be accounted for using an analysis such as that proposed in Weir (2014), in which the antecedent for the ellipsis is the Question Under Discussion (QUD). (9b) is a simple case of clausal ellipsis in which the QUD is something like *What do you need?* (9a) is more complicated. It is compatible with a QUD antecedent such as *Would you like something to drink?* that might be overt, or could be indicated with a gesture such as raising an invisible glass to the mouth. I assume that *please* here is clause-final and is base-generated low in the clause (see section 3.3 for details) and is fronted via focus movement (cf. Weir (2015)), followed by ellipsis of the TP that expresses the QUD. A focus movement analysis is supported by the prosody of *please*

in (9), as clause-initial foci are usually marked with a prosodic break. However, as standalone *please* is not the focus of this article, I will leave the details of this analysis for future work.

Crucially, if the standalone analysis of (7a) and (7b) is correct, then we predict that we will see no examples of clause-initial *please* in indirect requests. This jibes with the lack of data in the corpus and is supported by the ungrammaticality of constructed cases like (10).

- (10) *Context: You are asked what you would like for your 18th birthday.*
- a. *Please I've always wanted a car. (with no intonational break)
- b. ?I've always wanted a car, please.

This suggests that the analysis of clause-initial *please* is truly contingent on structurally-specified illocutionary force, and not pragmatically-determined interpretations of individual sentences in context.

Returning to the corpus data, then, we do not see any examples of syntactically-integrated *please* in clause-initial position in declarative clauses.

To summarise, examples of *please* in written declaratives are all found in literary examples of direct speech and constitute separate acts from the declarative they appear with. Amongst the examples of *please* in spoken declaratives, all four examples of *please* are clause-final. *Please* may also appear before interrogatives and imperatives as well as and declarative clauses if it is a 'standalone' *please* that is distinguished from the following clause both by prosody and in its structure, as standalone *please* is an elliptical structure with its own propositional content. Clause-initial *please*, however, is strongly restricted to imperatives and interrogatives.

2.2 (Other) characteristics of 'please'

In addition to its clausal position and the type of clause it may occur in, the distribution of *please* is restricted in other ways.

2.2.1 Embedded contexts

Please is restricted in embedded contexts: we find examples like (11) where a mental state report is used to make an indirect request and contains clause-medial *please*, but clause-initial *please* is ungrammatical.

- (11) a. I wonder if someone might please check the books. ICE-GB
 b. *I wonder if please someone might check the books.
 c. *I wonder please if someone might check the books.

However, clause-initial *please* is permitted in embedded clauses in which the centre of evaluation (Speas & Tenny 2003), that is, the person from whose perspective the utterance is interpreted, has shifted from the speaker, for example in free indirect discourse examples such as (12). Furthermore, dialects that have independently been shown to embed full illocutionary acts permit *please* in these contexts. An example is the embedded inverted question (EIQ) shown in (13), which is found in a number of English dialects and permits *please*.⁸

- (12) She asked if she might see a hand-mirror please. ICE-GB

- (13) a. He asked me would I go to the dance with him.
 b. He asked me please would I go to the dance with him.
 c. He asked me would I please go to the dance with him.
 d. *He asked me whether please would I go to the dance with him.
 e. *He asked me whether would I please go to the dance with him.

North West England dialect⁹

Note also that when clause-final *please* occurs with a complex sentence, it is associated with the main, not embedded clause.

- (14) ?I asked you if you would pick up the kids, please.
 → Interpretation: ?“I ask you please...”

- (15) Can you find out when the kids need picking up, please?
 → Interpretation: “Can you find out please...”

2.2.2 Modification

Unlike adverbs but like functional heads, *please* cannot be modified, as (16) shows.

- (16) a. *Very please. (cf. ^{OK}very kindly)
 b. *Hugely please. (cf. ^{OK}hugely grateful)
 c. *Many please. (cf. ^{OK}many thanks)

However, *please* can apparently be modified by a less common intensifier, *pretty*, also exemplified in its more usual usage in (17).

- (17) a. Pretty please!
 b. That’s pretty impressive.

Furthermore, the intensifier *pretty* in *pretty please* does not act exactly like the *pretty* in *that’s pretty impressive*. Where *pretty* attenuates the adjective in the latter, there is no attenuation in *pretty please*. Neither does *pretty please* denote a ‘prettier’ *please* than standalone *please*, though there seems to be more of a sense of charm and persuasion attached to *pretty please* than in *that’s pretty impressive*, presumably from the lexical semantics of the adjective *pretty*. It is also not possible to modify *please* with any other adverbial with similar lexical semantics to *pretty*, as (18) illustrates.

- (18) a. *Beautiful please.
 b. *Charming please.

Pretty please also has a very restricted distribution: in the British National Corpus¹⁰, it appears only three times and always as a standalone utterance.

Although *pretty* is an intensifier and can combine with *please*, the fact that it intensifies *please* differently from adjectives like *impressive*, retains more of its root

meaning and has a restricted distribution suggests that *pretty please* is an idiom, possibly brought about by combining the two meanings of the lexeme *pretty*.

2.2.3 Co-ordination

Adverbs can typically be stacked or co-ordinated, where functional heads in the same projection cannot. This is illustrated using German discourse particles in (19) and in English in (20).

- (19) *gehen Sie doch und mal zum Arzt.
 go you PRT and PRT to.the doctor
 “Go to the doctors!” Coniglio (2005: 30)
- (20) *Please and fine, fetch me the bucket.

Clause-final *please*, in contrast, can be stacked with other similar markers.

- (21) Fetch me the bucket, please, thank you.

2.2.4 Are all interrogatives equal?

Not all interrogative clauses can contain clause-initial *please*. This is shown below in (22), in which information-seeking questions that cannot be construed as requests are incompatible with clause-initial *please*.

- (22) a. Please will you find me a partner?
 b. Please can you persuade him to come?
 c. *Please did you get that dress at Macy’s?
 d. *Please where did you get that dress? Sadock (1974)

Sadock (1974) claims that there is no difference in meaning between examples like (22a), a polar interrogative with a modal auxiliary, and (22c), a polar interrogative with do-support, that should make them more or less appropriate with regards to *please*. He

illustrates what he means by ‘a difference in meaning’ using examples such as (23).

- (23) a. Feed the cat.
 b. Feed the dog.

In the case that you only have a cat, telling me to feed the dog is inappropriate due to the meaning of the constituent parts of the sentence. Sadock argues that this is not the case with (22a) and (22c) because a context could be constructed in which (22c) too is grammatical. However, this is not strictly the case - the structure of the sentence must change to make (22c) grammatical, as (24) illustrates.

- (24) *Context: A really wants to know where B got the dress because owning the dress will make A's life immeasurably happier, but B is refusing to tell A where the dress came from. A resorts to guessing.*
 A: Please - did you get the dress in Macy's?

In (24), the *please* used is the standalone kind that can make requests in and of itself (cf. Sadock (1974: 89) and section 2.1.2). Therefore, while it should be able to combine with the information-seeking question in (22c) if clause-type alone matters, it is already associated with a different type of content that has been elided. Some possible underlying structures for (22c) are shown in (25). The correct structure depends on the context in which (22c) is uttered.

- (25) a. Please [tell me] - did you get the dress in Macy's?
 b. Please [stop teasing me] - did you get the dress in Macy's?
 c. Please [will you tell me the answer] - did you get the dress in Macy's?

The data above show that syntactically-integrated clause-initial *please* is only compatible with polar questions with modal meaning. Given that the interrogatives in (22a-b), but not other kinds such as those in (22c-d), permit syntactically-integrated clause-initial *please*, a simplistic one-to-one correspondence between clause type and illocutionary force cannot be upheld.

2.3 Acquisition of 'please'

Given that *please* has a different distribution depending on whether it is clause-initial or clause-final, it is increasingly attractive to argue that there are two types of syntactically-integrated *please* in English.

Acquisition provides a fruitful testing ground for this argument. If we assume a maturational account like Rizzi's (1993) Truncation Hypothesis for first language acquisition, we predict that one type of *please*, the clause-initial, clause-type sensitive kind, is dependent on the acquisition of higher structure because it interacts with clause-type, which is typically thought to be in C. It will therefore not be used by children until they have acquired the CP projection. Conversely, we predict that the other clause-final politeness marker *please* is not dependent on the acquisition of higher structure and so may be acquired earlier.

This diagnostic is not available for the analysis of other proposed illocutionary heads such as Romanian discourse markers like *hai* (Hill 2007), because *hai* exclusively appears clause-initially or as a standalone marker—there is no clause-final version—so the acquisition of high functional head *hai* cannot be distinguished from any other potential type of *hai*.

Ascertaining whether children have acquired CP is not straightforward, but as the successful acquisition of CP is crucial for the proper formation of questions in English, I will compare the children's use of clause-initial *please* with their use of questions featuring subject auxiliary inversion and a *wh*-pronoun.

Please occurs very early on in children's speech; in the Manchester corpus, it occurs right from the earliest recordings made when the children are one year and ten months (1;10) old. There is a lot of support for the use of *please* as a politeness strategy by caregivers as illustrated in (26).

- (26) Aran (2;3)
 MOT: well if you want somebody to do something what do you say ?
 CHI: please

MOT: oh good

MOT: I'm glad you know that

In the Manchester corpus there are 1007 instances of children using *please*. Early use of *please* is often prompted by the caregiver, either as a standalone fragment or with other fragments like *yes* or pronouns such as *that*.¹¹ These uses of *please* are almost exclusively¹² utterance-final. Clause-initial integrated uses of *please* emerge later and always contain (at least) a verb, as illustrated in table 5.

Table 5
First uses of utterance-initial 'please'

Child	Age	Utterance
Anne	2;2	please [can I] have some
Aran	2;4	please race it mummy
Becky	2;6	please take the card off please
Carl	2;3	please I wanna talk
Dominic	2;5	please get that out
Gail	2;4	please get in ¹³
Joel	2;6	please can we get go in the car ¹⁴
John	2;1	please bring the box
Liz	—	— ¹⁵
Nicole	2;11	please cut nails
Ruth	2;5	please stand [on] me chair
Warren	2;2	please make a ramp

At no point in the corpora are there any examples of utterance-initial *please* with fragments (other than names like “Mummy”, see footnote 12), NPs or declarative clauses in any of the children’s speech. Furthermore, utterance-initial *please* occurs after or around the same time as the child has acquired CP, as demonstrated by their use of adult-like question structures. I have taken a particularly strict approach, noting the age at which the child analyses wh-questions with inversion of a full auxiliary; all utterances were checked in context to ensure they are not imitations or repetitions.¹⁶ The ages of use of first inverted wh-question and first use of utterance-initial *please* are detailed in table 6.¹⁷

Table 6
Children's first inverted wh-question compared with age of first use of utterance-initial 'please'

Child	Age of first use of U-I <i>please</i>	Age of use of first inverted wh-Q	First inverted wh-Q
Anne	2;2	1;11	what did you do/ where are moneys please
Aran	2;4	1;11	what is it
Becky	2;6	2;1	what's is this
Carl	2;3	1;8	what is a this
Dominic	2;5	2;7	what is that
Gail	2;4	1;11	what did you do
Joel	2;6	2;4	what have you got
John	2;1	2;3	what is it
Nicole	2;11	2;8	what is it
Ruth	2;5	2;8	what do it
Warren	2;2	2;4	what is doing

8 out of 11 children first use non-clause-final *please* after producing a wh-question with inversion. Of the other three, Dominic produces a range of polar questions with target-like inversion before his first non-clause-final *please*, including use of dummy *do* in examples like *do you want one?* at 2;1; John inverts lexical *do* in *what doing the cat?* at 2;2, which is only one recording session later than his first use of non-clause-final *please* and could be put down to a sampling effect; Ruth also uses target-like inversion in polar questions before her first non-clause-final *please*, for example *Did Anna put it down?* at 2;3.

The data shows that children must have acquired CP before they can use *please* in non-clause-final positions, suggesting that the specific functional position for this kind of *please* is also not acquired until this point. It also seems that the children are aware of the restricted use of clause-initial *please* as there is only one example in the corpus in which it is used with a non-direct request (see Carl's earliest clause-initial *please* in table 5).

3 IS PLEASE AN ILLOCUTIONARY ACT HEAD?

The evidence presented so far suggests that there are two clear types of syntactically-integrated *please*: clause-initial *please*, whose distribution is restricted to clauses that

prototypically express requests and is acquired later; and clause-final *please*, which has a wider distribution—it may be used in clauses that do not typically express requests—and is acquired earlier. Clause-medial *please* is a more complex case that will be shown to be a variant of clause-initial *please*. The next challenge is to determine how each type of *please* fits into the structure and integrates with the rest of the clause.

3.1 *Clause-initial ‘please’*

The evidence above suggests that clause-initial *please* is a head marking illocutionary force. It occupies a high position in the clause as it obligatorily precedes everything else in the clause and is incompatible with overt complementisers when it may be embedded as in (13). Clause-initial *please* also fits many other criteria for high functional heads as proposed by Cardinaletti (2011) and Haegeman (2014). *Please* is derived from a verbal root (though it itself does not inflect). It may not be modified or coordinated with other similar elements. It is not truth-conditional but does contribute to the interpretation of the sentence. Its contribution is to communicate the intentions and commitments of the speaker in making that utterance and, as will shortly be shown, it restricts the clause containing it to a request interpretation, even if another or several other types of force are usually compatible with the structure and truth-conditional content of that clause.

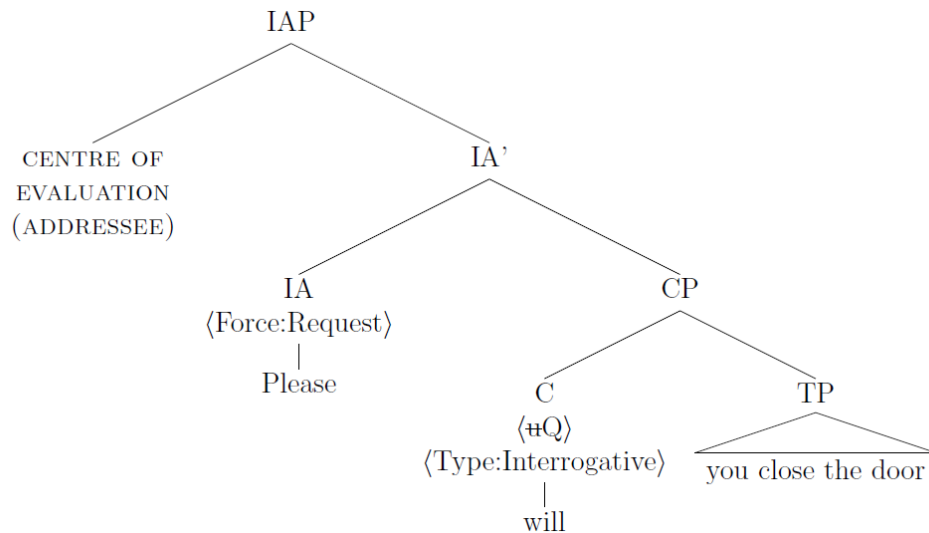
Moreover, the type of clause that *please* may appear with is directly related to the commitment it places on the addressee. It has been shown that clause-initial *please* is restricted to polar interrogatives and imperatives; that is, forms used to express direct requests. Furthermore, in his discussion of the three main clause types, Portner (2004) proposes that interrogatives and imperatives differ from declaratives in that the ‘centre of evaluation’, the person whose knowledge or situation in the world is at issue, is the addressee, not the speaker.

3.1.1 *The structure and semantics of clause-initial ‘please’*

Following an amended version of the speech act phrase structure proposed by Hill (2007), the proposed structure for a sentence like (27a) is shown in (27b). Note that I label the projection that *please* is the head of as the Illocutionary Act Phrase (IAP) in

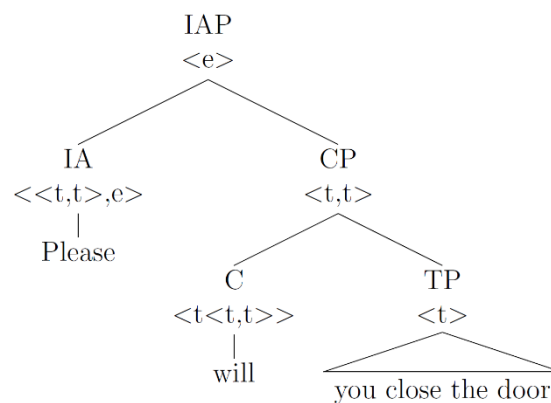
line with Krifka (2014) to avoid confusion of this syntactic structure with pragmatically-determined speech acts (see also Woods (2016a)).

- (27) a. Please will you close the door?
b.



Abstracting away from the role of the centre of evaluation, which is to apply the relevant context to the content of the CP, I propose that the semantic types of the elements in (27b) are as shown in (28).

- (28)



The logic of this is as follows: the type for questions is a set of truth values $\langle t,t \rangle$ ¹⁸, which is taken by the IA head *please* as input to return an entity; a discourse entity which is the utterance *Please will you close the door*. There are several reasons to

suppose that the utterance (question plus overt illocutionary force) is an entity: utterances—whether information-seeking questions, statements, requests, or something else—are referred to using demonstrative pronouns, as noted by Davidson (1979) and demonstrated in (29)-(30).

- (29) That is not what I requested.
 a. “Please would you close the door” is what I requested.
 b. That you would close the door is what I requested.
- (30) I requested that.
 a. I requested, “Please would you close the door.”
 b. I requested that you close the door.
 c. %I requested would you please close the door.

In addition, Roberts (2012: 15) considers utterances to be semantic entities that constitute conversational moves. These semantic entities retain the information conveyed in the utterance without arguing that their internal structure is maintained in working memory, commensurate with recent psycholinguistic work. Lahiri (2002) also notes that there is a distinction to be made between an embedded question and an embedded question-utterance in Spanish; the latter has its own illocutionary force (evidence being the presence of the quotative complementiser *que*) and is more restricted in its distribution than ‘typical’ embedded questions. In fact, the proposal made in (28) is very similar to that made by Lahiri (2002) for the Spanish question-utterances: he proposes that there is a type coercion rule that lifts expressions of type $\langle s, t \rangle$, that is propositions, to utterances (a type of entity). I do not think that the role of *please* is to coerce a question into an utterance entity because this is simply the canonical, not some ancillary or secondary, use of clause-initial *please*. However, I suggest that the same kind of logic applies, whereby the input to the function denoted by the IA head *please* can be either a question of type $\langle t, t \rangle$ or an imperative of type $\langle e, t \rangle$ ¹⁹ and the output is of type $\langle e \rangle$.

The mechanism is as follows: assuming flexible types, *please* takes an argument S of a complex type $\langle \sigma, t \rangle$. It then returns the unique utterance u such that u is mapped onto S , where the propositional content of u and S are identical.²⁰ The utterance that

3.1.2 Clause-initial 'please' is not a politeness marker

Having established that *please* is a marker of requesting force, the question of its relationship to politeness cannot be ignored. Sadock (1974) noted that syntactically-integrated *please* in clause-initial position has the effect of softening a request. This is particularly clear in (32); clause-initial *please* can be used in non-polite contexts and seems to attenuate the non-polite utterance; it is possible to interpret *please* in (32a) and (32b) as expressing emotions such as exasperation and resignation rather than just intent to insult—a corollary of this is that (32b) sounds better with another attenuation marker such as *just*. In contrast, clause-final *please* in the same contexts is degraded because it is more directly associated with politeness.

- (32) a. Please fuck off.
 b. Please can you (just) fuck off?
 c. ?Fuck off please.
 d. ??Can you fuck off please?

I propose that clause-initial *please* introduces a conversational implicature²² of attenuation precisely because of its main role as a request marker. The use of *please* in (32a) means that this form of the utterance is in competition with the bare form of the utterance, given that there is no antonym for *please*. Following Gricean reasoning, the result of the competition between the bare form and the form in (32a) is not that the imperative *fuck off* loses its basic meaning that the speaker wishes the addressee to leave and wishes to insult the addressee; in fact, a sense of obligation is imposed on the addressee to fulfil the former wish that s/he leave. The choice by the speaker to use *please* results in a sense of attenuation of the impolite force of the imperative *fuck off* precisely because the wish of the speaker that the addressee leave is foregrounded by the presence of *please*. This is a result of applying the maxim of manner; on the assumption that the speaker does not wish to contradict herself by being both rude and polite, she must wish to overtly mark her utterance as a request rather than as a simply insulting remark.

As this implicature is proposed to be a conversational implicature, it should be both reinforceable and cancellable:²³ this is shown in (33) and (34) respectively.

- (33) Please fuck off - look, I don't mean to be rude, but I just can't deal with your presence right now. *Reinforcement*
- (34) Please fuck off, and don't you dare show your ugly face around here again. *Cancellability*

Where the bare form *fuck off* may not necessarily be used in a situation in which the speaker wants to addressee to physically leave, (32a) requires such a situation. It is this shift in prominence accorded to each part of the meaning of *fuck off* triggered by *please* that results in the attenuation of the impoliteness of the bare form.

3.1.3 Summary

The analysis in this section concludes that clause-initial *please* is the head of the Illocutionary Act Phrase, the highest projection in the clausal spine. It encodes requesting force and takes clauses of complex types as input and returns an utterance of type <e>. As a result it is incompatible with declarative clauses, which are of the simplex type <t>. This also accounts for the unembeddability of clause-initial *please*, except in those dialects that permit the embedding of illocutionary acts, such as North West England English.

Illocutionary act head *please* is acceptable in non-polite contexts and as such is not a marker of politeness, but its inclusion in non-polite contexts gives rise to an implicature of attenuation because it foregrounds the obligations it places on the addressee regarding the request it marks over any impolite content.

3.2 Clause-medial 'please'

Although clause-medial *please* still restricts clauses containing it to request interpretations, it has a different distribution from clause-initial *please*; it cannot occur in imperatives but can occur in declaratives with deontic modal force expressing

necessity: the examples in (35) are attested, if considered awkward by some native speakers.²⁴

- (35) a. %Persons anxious to write their names will please do so on this stone only.²⁵
 b. %Ladies must please remain fully dressed while bathing.²⁶

There are almost no examples of clause-medial *please* with a modal force expressing possibility: no examples were found in which modal verb *may* co-occurs with *please* in a declarative clause and constructed examples based on (35) are degraded:

- (36) a. ??Persons anxious to write their names may please do so on this stone only.
 b. ??Ladies may please remain fully dressed while bathing.

We have already seen, however, one example with *might*—(11a) is repeated here as (37).

- (37) I wonder if someone might please check the books. ICE-GB

In (37), there is a tension between *might*, which usually expresses possibility, and *please* which expresses a commitment on the part of the addressee. Imke Driemel (p.c.) notes that when the German *bitte* ('please') is inserted into a sentence with a deontic possibility modal, that modal must then be interpreted as a deontic necessity modal and requesting force holds. The same appears to be true of (37), given the differences in felicity shown in (38).

- (38) a. I wonder if someone might check the books, but they might not.
 b. I wonder if someone might please check the books, #but they might not.

It is hard to show using this example that *might* under *please* patterns with other deontic modals because the whole clause is embedded under *wonder*. The non-embedded examples in (39), however, show that it does, *modulo* the uncertain acceptability status of (39c) as a requesting declarative.

- (39)
- a. You might take the new Physics teacher job, #or we'll struggle for money next year.
 - b. You should take the new Physics teacher job, or we'll struggle for money next year.
 - c. % You might please take the new Physics teacher job, or we'll struggle for money next year.

This is an interesting restriction on the use of clause-medial *please* that does not apply to clause-final *please* (see (12), amongst other examples), nor to clause-initial and -medial *please* in other non-declarative clause types. Note however that clause-medial *please* can be embedded, as in (37). The analysis of clause-medial *please* given below will account for this.

However, clause-medial *please* shares its interpretive properties with clause-initial *please*. As in (35), it may occur in typically impolite situations as in (40).

- (40) I've told you several times to see a doctor - will you please stop being so pig-headed and just make an appointment?

Clause-medial *please*, like clause-initial *please*, also restricts its clause to a request interpretation. This is illustrated for interrogatives in (41) and for declaratives in (42).

- (41)
- a. Can you open the window? *Request or information-seeking question*
 - b. Can you please open the window? *Request only*
- (42)
- a. Visitors will leave shoes at the door. *Statement or indirect request*
 - b. Visitors will please leave shoes at the door. *Request only*

Although (41a) is likely to be read as a request given that the reader must comply with the request for the proposition in the statement to be true, the presence of *please* in (41b) makes it clear that the sentence is to be read as a request and comes with the kind of attenuating effect explained at the end of section 3.1.

Syntactically, the position of clause-medial *please* is fixed in the same position as non-clause-initial items that express discourse relations in other languages. Clause-medial *please* is located on the edge of the vP above vP-edge adverbs like *always*, as in (43), or negation, as in (44).

- (43) a. Parents should please always refrain from congregating inside the front entrance or on the benches in front of the office area during arrival and dismissal times.²⁷
 b. *Parents please should always refrain from congregating. . .
 c. *?Parents should always please refrain from congregating. . .
 d. *Parents should always refrain please from congregating. . .

- (44) a. Tell him that you're sorry, but he will have to wait in line like everyone else, and he should please not ask for special treatment.

Schaar (1981: 169)

- b. * . . . and he please should not ask for special treatment
 c. * . . . and he should not please ask for special treatment
 d. * . . . and he should not ask please for special treatment

Clause-medial *please* is therefore a functional head like clause-initial *please*. Its position above vP is fixed in the clause. Struckmeier (2014) analyses German Mittelfeld particles as occupying heads of discourse projections above vP analogous to the IAP above CP. Following Struckmeier (2014), analysing clause-medial *please* in the same way captures both the discourse-related properties and the wider distribution of clause-medial *please* with respect to the clause types in which it can appear. Clause-medial *please* is compatible with a wider range of clause types because only a subset of features on the IA and Force heads are spelled out in the Mittelfeld. It is proposed that in English, only the features of the IA head, and not those of the clause-typing Force head, are spelled out in the positions above vP. This may be different from the German

crash will occur, as clause-initial *please*'s output is of type $\langle e \rangle$ where the required output to compose the VP plus *please* with the remaining structure will be type $\langle e, t \rangle$.

I claim here that clause-medial *please* is a slightly different function from clause-final *please*: it is not a sentence-level function that takes a clause and returns an utterance, but that it is a predicate-level function that modifies only the predicate, taking the predicate as its input and returning another modified predicate. This explains clause-medial *please*'s unavailability with imperatives—the semantic types do not compose. It is clear that predicate-level functions of this kind exist; the German discourse predicates examined by Struckmeier (2014), for instance, may only occur clause-medially but are under the same kind of restrictions as clause-initial elements. This approach also accounts for the unavailability of clause-medial *please* with modal forces that cannot be interpreted as expressing necessity. Clause-medial *please* marks the predicate as being a request, so combining a predicate with requesting force with a modal that expresses a force other than obligation causes a crash in interpretation—in short, contradictory modal forces cannot combine.

On the account proposed here, clause-medial *please* is a predicate-level version of the clause-level *please* outlined in the previous section 3.1. It modifies predicates to mark them as the core of a request, meaning that it can occur in only those declaratives that have the same modal force as a request; namely, declaratives that impose an obligation on their addressee.

3.3 Clause-final 'please'

As noted above, clause-final *please* behaves very differently from clause-initial and clause-medial *please*. Clause-final *please* has a much wider distribution than clause-initial *please*. It may occur with polar interrogatives and imperatives, but also with fragments such as *yes* or standalone NPs, with declaratives such as those uttered as responses to questions, and with overt performative requests. It is also possible in *wh*-questions, as in (48).

- (48) Johnny, who discovered the Bronx, please? Sadock (1974: 121)

Clause-final *please* differs interpretively too. Examples like (32) have already illustrated that clause-final *please* is much more closely linked with politeness contexts. This is noted by Sato (2008) in her analysis of *please* in American and New Zealand English corpora. It is also exemplified by the kinds of contexts in which only clause-final *please* can appear: responses to (overt) questions and indirect requests are much more heavily dependent on context and subtext. Furthermore, the ICE-GB corpus data also show that clause-final *please* is less common with requesting strategies that tend to imply obligation, such as imperatives. Finally, it is not only politeness that regulates the acceptability for *please*; its distribution in fragments suggests that some other factor is also at play.

While *Yes please* is a common locution, *No please* as a single intonational phrase is odd to native-speaker ears.²⁸ This is clearly not due to politeness; there are many contexts in which a polite refusal may be required, contexts that are usually satisfied by “No thank you”. Nor is it a direct result of refusal *per se*; it is possible to refuse while still using *please*, as in (49).

- (49) A: Would you like a new fountain pen?
 B: I think I’ll just stick to my old one, please/thanks.

Please is perfectly acceptable in B’s refusal and is most likely to occur in a situation where B is subordinate to A or has less authority than B. What is more, it appears to be interchangeable with *thanks* in (49) but not in (50).

- (50) a. I don’t want a drink, *please.
 b. No, *please.
 c. Won’t you leave the door open, *please.
 d. Patrons will (please) not walk on the grass (*please).

A tentative proposal that *please* is a positive polarity item (PPI) that is incompatible with negation. Note that if *please* is above the scope of negation it is available (as in the first *please* in (50d)) but not if it is scoped over by negation (as the second *please* in (50d) is). This fact helps us determine where clause-final *please* enters the derivation

compared with the predicate-level clause-medial *please*. Compare (50c) with the well-known example in (51).

(51) Won't you please, please help me? Lennon & McCartney (1965)

Unlike (50c), clause-medial *please* is acceptable with the negated modal verb. I propose that this is because clause-medial *please* is generated above negation and is not c-commanded by it in its original position, though negation is later moved with the auxiliary verb into a position above clause-medial *please*. In contrast, clause-final *please* must be generated inside VP. As a result, it is always c-commanded by negation, leading to ungrammaticality.

For the reasons given in this section, clause-final *please* behaves much more like an adverb-like particle in the sense of Cardinaletti (2011). Adverb-like particles do not enter into Agree relationships with any other element in the clause, they are not merged at phase boundaries but much earlier in the derivation—here within VP—and they may appear in a wider range of contexts than particles analysed as functional heads.²⁹

The proposal that there are two different types of syntactically-integrated *please*, one that encodes requesting force and one that is an adverbial marking politeness, is neither a stipulative nor a superfluous move. It not only explains different distributions of the different types of *please* but also explains different interpretive effects, which are unlikely to derive simply from a different surface position in the sentence.

4 CONSEQUENCES FOR SPEECH ACT THEORY

Having provided syntactic and interpretive reasons for the analysis of *please* as a speech act head, it is worth taking a closer look at whether *please* can add anything to the current understanding of what the illocutionary act projection looks like.

This analysis of *please* adds weight to Hill's (2007) observation that illocutionary force is syntactically marked in a position above the clause. A method of testing this using *please* takes the paradigm in (31) and applies it to a different clause type. The postulation of *please* as an overt marker of requesting force predicts that when *please* appears in imperatives, that the clause will only be interpretable with requesting

and imperatives. However, clause-medial *please* also requires overt T; examples without overt T are out:

- (54) *Ladies please have to remain fully dressed while bathing.

These empirical facts fit with a recent body of literature that claims that T and C (and the elements that fill them) are the loci of the crucial link between syntax and discourse. Klein (1998, 2006), Truckenbrodt (2006), Lohnstein (2016, submitted) and Woods and Roeper (submitted), amongst others, claim that illocutionary force in West Germanic languages is marked in clauses that have a tensed or mood-bearing element in C, making them ‘transparent’ in traditional terms and at-issue in more modern, QUD-approach terms and therefore enter directly into the discourse for discussion. In contrast, English clauses whose tensed element remains low are only interpreted as having illocutionary force through pragmatic or prosodic means, or by insertion of an auxiliary verb such as dummy *do* or a speaker-oriented modal into T. To this point, such literature has mostly focused on understanding simple matrix clauses and the classical embedded root phenomenon, embedded verb second clauses. The present work on *please* could, with further work, support this research programme from a much less well-studied perspective that nonetheless is based on clear intuitions and judgements and provides a fertile ground for experimental work.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The distributional, interpretive and acquisition data in this paper suggest that there are minimally two types of syntactically-integrated *please*, in addition to standalone *please*, in English: they are the request-marking functional head *please* and the politeness-marking adverbial marker *please* respectively. Request-marking head *please* has the following key characteristics: it is clause-initial (with a clause-medial variant) and it only occurs with imperatives and a restricted subset of interrogatives (and declaratives, in the case of clause-medial *please*). It overtly marks the requesting force of the sentence in which it appears and it is usually prosodically part of the clause it gives force to. In contrast, politeness marker *please* is merged clause-finally. It combines with

a wider range of clause types, including fragments and declaratives and crucially, rather than marking requesting force, it marks politeness.

The existence of functional head *please* both supports and poses questions for syntactic speech act theory. It supports the proposal that illocutionary force, narrowly defined, is marked in syntax and has a clear impact on the interpretation of the clause if not on truth-conditional meaning. It also supports arguments for an Illocutionary Act Phrase above ForceP, as its single force interpretation cross-cuts clause types and its acquisition has been shown to be dependent on the acquisition of CP. However, it questions whether the head of IA is entirely abstract, proposing instead that it may be overtly spelled out, and raises further questions about how the position of tense, mood and modality in the clause is crucial to understanding more about the interface between syntax and discourse.

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FOOTNOTES

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² I use Krifka's (2014) terminology rather than Speas & Tenny's (2003) speech act terminology because there are elements of the interpretation of speech acts that are outside of syntax. See Krifka (2014) for more details.

³ Imke Driemel (p.c.) notes that the paradigm is strikingly similar in German, with the exceptions of (2b), as illustrated in (i), and (3b), as illustrated in (ii):

(i) Gib mir bitte ein Bier.

(ii) Ich möchte bitte ein Bier.

Given that clause-initial *please* is also blocked in declaratives in German, perhaps the medial *bitte* in (ii) is an adverbial rather than a force marker. Driemel (p.c.) also suggests that this is so as (ii) only receives a polite, not a requesting, reading.

⁴ Note that this linear string is possible with a prosodic break between *please* and the rest of the clause:

(iii) Please - I'll have a beer.

In this case *please* is a standalone item, a request in and of itself and is not part of the same clause as *I'll have a beer*, and as such is not clause-initial in the same way as (1a), for example. Standalone *please* is discussed briefly in section 2.1.2.

⁵ See the previous footnote.

⁶ The standalone utterance "Please!" expressed with a sense of exasperation or disbelief (which might also be transcribed as "Puh-lease!") may seem to be exclamative, but I propose that this use of standalone *please* is an imperative in which a structure such as "spare me" or "stop now" has been elided.

⁷ The corpus was not annotated for clause type so this annotation was done by hand. Clause type was determined by classical diagnostics such as verb position, verb mood

and so on. Punctuation was not used as a reliable diagnostic particularly because of variation in its use with respect to embedded clauses.

⁸ See McCloskey (2006), Krifka (2014), Woods (2016a,b) for more information on this phenomenon.

⁹ Thanks to six informants from Cheshire, Liverpool and Manchester for their judgements.

¹⁰ Examples of usage taken from the British National Corpus (BNC) were obtained under the terms of the BNC End User Licence. Copyright in the individual texts cited resides with the original IPR holders. For information and licensing conditions relating to the BNC, please see the web site at <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk>.

¹¹ The corpus I have used is coded for prosody insofar as separate prosodic utterances are recorded on separate lines. This includes successive utterances by one speaker that are considered to be separate but that are not separated by utterances by another speaker, for example the mother's utterances (MOT) in (26). I have therefore assumed that utterance-initial *please* is integrated with the clause following it if it appears on the same line in the transcript. If it appears on a different line, I have considered it to be a case of standalone *please*.

¹² There are 23 counterexamples of fragment-initial *please* (2% of the total) that precede the child's first use of utterance-initial integrated *please*. Carl uses *please fishie* once and *please mummy* once. Dominic uses *please mummy/daddy* 16 times; Joel uses *please mummy/grandma* twice; Nicole uses *please mummy* once and Warren uses *please mummy* twice. All these cases involve *please* and a vocative, suggesting that this is a frozen structure that children pick up early.

¹³ Gail also says *please help* at 2;1. It is hard to know whether this is integrated *please* or not given the short length of the utterance so for conservatism I exclude this example.

¹⁴ An earlier production of *please mind the door* is an imitation.

¹⁵ Liz uses no utterance-initial tokens of *please* in any of her recording sessions.

¹⁶ As a result, structures like *what's that* have been ignored.

¹⁷ As Liz produced no tokens of clause-initial *please*, she is excluded from table 6.

¹⁸ See Cable (2007, section 2.7) for an in-detail examination of the compositional extensional semantics of questions.

¹⁹ Here I follow Portner's (2004) proposal that imperatives are properties.

²⁰ Thanks to Norman Yeo for making me clarify my thinking here.

²¹ Such an utterance might be interpreted as pedantic or picky, but the contrast between this example and (31c) is clear.

²² Thanks to Eric McCready and George Tsoulas for help with refining this point.

²³ Thanks again to Imke Driemel for reminding me of this.

²⁴ Based on informal judgments from four native British-English speaking non-linguists as well as comments from the native US English speaker who sent me the British English example in (35a).

²⁵ Taken from www.reddit.com/r/funny/comments/2gr9ol/a_very_british_response_to_graffiti/ - thanks to Jason Overfelt for sharing this.

²⁶ Taken from http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g297637-i21453673-ThiruvananthapuramTrivandrum_Kerala.html.

²⁷ Taken from http://www.framingham.k12.ma.us/mccarthy/documents/Student_Handbook2013.pdf.

²⁸ Thanks to Jon Ander Mendia for this observation.

²⁹ An anonymous colleague (p.c.) asks if this analysis of clause-final *please* predicts that it should be able to be modified, unlike clause-initial *please*. I argue that it does not, as not all adverbial elements are modifiable—not only the particles Cardinaletti identifies, but also clausal adverbials, for example. However, the sentence-final distribution of *pretty please*, as detailed in section 2.2.2, is suggestive of the fact that clause-final *please* is adverbial in a way that clause-initial *please* is not.

³⁰ Thanks to Imke Driemel for this observation.