The research project arises out of a puzzle, which is this: 'ought' is our workaday normative word but we do not know what is the meaning of normative 'ought' sentences. Suppose you encounter the 'ought' sentence 'Alice ought to eat a mango'. Now, because the sentence contains the word 'ought', which is indexed to the subject – Alice, the grammar navigates you onto the normative interpretation of that sentence on which Alice is required to eat a mango, or is called upon to eat a mango. So far so good. But what exactly is the meaning of "required of" or "called upon"? Does the proper interpretation of the requirement in question is that Alice ought to be the only person responsible for making it the case that she will eat a mango? Or perhaps, the proper interpretation is the one, according to which it is only required of Alice to bring it about that the state of affairs including her eating a mango will obtain, regardless of whether occurrence of the respective state of affairs will be mediated by activity of another person(s) or not. Still, maybe the proper interpretation is not to be given in the descriptive language but in the prescriptive, and 'Alice ought to eat a mango' means the same as 'Alice, eat a mango!'? But what if Alice is the name of a fictional hero from Carroll's novel? If Alice does not exist, would you still be inclined to say that Alice is required of anything? Probably not, but you will still insist that the sentence 'Alice ought to eat a mango' makes sense. But if it makes sense to you, it must have meaning, presumably normative meaning. So what is the normative meaning of the sentence about the nonexistent Alice who stands in 'ought' relation to eating a mango? Does existence or non-existence of the agent inform the normative sense of the sentence? If yes, how? If not, why?

Normative agential 'ought' sentences are tricky. If the standard idea in philosophical semantics is that a well-formed natural language sentence expresses a proposition, then agential 'ought' sentences are three ways tricky: as to the meaning, or the proposition expressed, as to the normative sense of the content borne by the sentence, and as to the most accurate logical and grammatical interpretation of the very normative content expressed by the sentence. The question that drives the research project is simple: what is the nature of the trickery? Is it semantic, connected with the meaning of 'normative ought', pragmatic and eliminable by context, or perhaps doxastic: our beliefs about meaning of normative words make us inscribe into them the substantive sense uncaptured by lexical semantics of normative words? The tentative hypothesis to be examined is that the vague sense of agential 'ought' sentences has to do with differences in doxastic beliefs about the exact meaning of 'ought to do'. Specifically, the issue to be explored is whether the alleged unclarity about the normative meaning of sentences like 'Alice ought to eat a mango' is due to differences in possible interpretations of the general concept of practical ought, or a matter of contextual underspecification. If the initial hypothesis shows tenable and the semantic meaning of "practical ought" has doxastic background, then an 'old' idea in philosophical semantics needs to be reconsidered anew. The 'odd' idea in question is that *meaning* is not a neutral business. The overarching aim of the project is to answer the fundamental question, which is what makes agentive 'ought to do' sentence mean what they do in ordinary speech and language.