



# How do non-directive imperatives arise?

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# Two kinds of imperatives

- Imperatives often express directive speech acts – commands, requests etc.
  - *Tell us about your journey to Turkey.*
- But they are also found without directive value:

Dutch

<i>Krijg</i>	<i>maar</i>	<i>eens</i>	<i>een</i>	<i>vijfling!</i>
get.IMPER	PCL	PCL	INDEF	quintuplets

‘Imagine having quintuplets!’

# Semantics and pragmatics

- Some non-directive imperatives are, in a rather obvious way, a problem for pragmatics, e.g., the ironical imperative:

*That's right, break all the furniture in the house!*

- In these cases we don't look for a semantic explanation (semantic change leading from 'break the furniture' to 'refrain from breaking the furniture'): the linguistically encoded meaning is simply cancelled.

# Semantics and pragmatics

- For other non-directive imperatives pragmatic origin does not seem convincing, e.g.,
  - there may be restrictions to one or several languages, e.g. the imperative in *Krijg maar eens een vijfling* is not found in English (whereas ironical and similar pragmatic mechanisms should be recognizable cross-linguistically)
  - there may be no obvious pragmatic explanation whereas a convincing semantic explanation is available, e.g., in conditional use *give me a place to stand (and I'll move the earth)* may be interpreted as a request to imagine a situation (a semantic change from 'do X' to 'imagine doing X')

# Semantics and pragmatics

- In the tradition of language philosophy, formal semantics and pragmatics some attention has been paid to the division of tasks between semantics and pragmatics in imperatives:
  - ‘minimal semantics’ for imperatives, with the directive force left to be accounted for by pragmatics?
  - a general ‘force component’ in semantics, with the details (command, request, recommendation etc., and probably also the non-directive uses) to be sorted out in pragmatics?

# A functional view

- In the functional-typological tradition, it is now customary to recognize (grammatical and lexical) polysemy as a property of natural languages
- This is in opposition to
  - The old structuralist tradition assuming general meanings (semantic invariants)
  - The pervasive monosemy assumption in language philosophy and formal semantics
- The functionalist view accommodates the co-existence of several meanings – partly directive, partly non-directive – in imperatives, with pathways of semantic development leading from one to the other
- The notion of ‘non-directive imperative’ presupposes a shift from directive to non-directive

# Pathways to non-directive function

- The ways in which directive meanings change into non-directive meanings have hardly been investigated.
- Authors sometimes seem to assume that the directive meaning is ‘cancelled’ or ‘backgrounded’, leaving the way open for the rise of other functions.

“the narrative imperative can be seen as an imperative use where the feature of ‘impulse’ or ‘force’ is backgrounded or even cancelled, and where the presupposition that the action breaks the expected course of events is selected as the meaning of the imperative” (Fortuin 2000).

“Impatience and strong assertion conspire to create a strong dramatic effect for imperative forms which no longer have any directive meaning. They always imply control of the subject. And this is reminiscent of the way in which the Russian linguist Nekrasov described the Russian ‘dramatic imperative’: in sentences involving dramatic imperative, the speaker is ‘in charge’ of the action” (Aikhenvald 2010).

# Pathways to non-directive function

- Accounts along these lines might be inspired by:
  - The belief in structuralist *Gesamtbedeutungen* (when directive meaning is cancelled, some other realization of the general meaning comes to the fore)
  - A tendency to mix up semantics and pragmatics (where pragmatics is involved, the directive meaning can indeed be said to be cancelled)
- My proposal: either provide a pragmatic explanation, or explain the non-directive meaning as arising from directive meaning through a process of semantic changes (this development may actually also comprise pragmatically determined shifts, but, at any rate, shifts having the directive meaning of the imperative as their point of departure).

# Pathways to non-directive function

- In this talk I will discuss a number of ways in which non-directive imperatives arise from directive ones
- I cannot pretend to give an exhaustive catalogue. The usual procedures in typology (compose a representative sample of languages and investigate these languages with regard to the relevant parameter) do not apply here, because
  - One needs some historical information, which is not available for many languages
  - One needs detailed information about the language, because non-directive imperatives usually do not belong to the core grammar and usually don't make it to the language descriptions available to typologists.

# Narrative (descriptive) imperatives

- Narrative/descriptive/dramatic imperatives replace a past tense in vivid narratives, to refer to unexpected events:

Russian

*Nakuri-l-i*                      *na zasedani-i,*                      *a*                      *ja*  
smoke.up-PST-PL    at meeting-LOC                      and    I.NOM  
*da*                      *i*                      ***voz'mi***                      *i*                      ***raskroj***  
PCL                      PCL    take.IMP.2SG                      and    open.IMP.2SG  
*potom*    *okno*                      *naprotiv*    *moego*    *stola...*  
then    window.ACC.SG                      opposite    my.GEN    table.GEN

“They smoked the room up during the meeting and I took it into my head to open the window opposite my table.”

(Said by a person explaining how he caught a cold)

# Narrative (descriptive) imperatives

- The oldest explanation is by Delbrück (1897: 397), who considers Russian

<i>Izdali</i>	<i>uvidit</i>	<i>lešča</i>	<i>da</i>	<i>i</i>
from.afar	see.FUT.3SG	bream.ACC	PCL	PCL
<i>xvat'</i>	<i>ego</i>	<i>zub-ami.</i>		
seize.EVENT	it	tooth-INS.PL		

‘Aus der Ferne sieht er einen Braschen und nun packt er ihn mit den Zähnen.’ (Here *xvat'* is rather a verbal interjection or ‘eventive’.)

- “Die ursprüngliche Auffassung war natürlich die: ‘und nun hiess es (sagte er sich): pack ihn mit den Zähnen’”
- **Source: inner monologue**

# Narrative (descriptive) imperatives

- Another possibility is apostrophe (first suggested by Spitzer 1918), somewhat more probable in the case of an inanimate subject:

...*ma il naso, appena fatto, cominciò a crescere:*  
but the nose hardly made started to grow.INF  
*e **cresci,** **cresci,** **cresci,***  
and grow.IMP.2SG grow.IMP.2SG grow.IMP.2SG  
[*diventò in pochi minuti un nasone che non finiva mai.*]

“... but no sooner had he made [the nose] than it began to grow. And **it grew, and grew, and grew**, until in a few minutes it had become an immense nose that seemed as if it would never end.”  
(*Collodi, Le avventure di Pinocchio*)

# Monologic and apostrophic imperatives

- Monologic and apostrophic imperatives have the syntactic properties of canonical imperatives; in the lack of formal differences, it is impossible to keep the two apart.
- To the extent that these explanations are correct, they would involve reference to an event by means of echoic reproduction of imputed inner monologue, or apostrophe
- This process is basically pragmatic; it is an instance of interpretive use (Sperber & Wilson 1986)
- At a later stage this echoic imperative becomes conventionalized as a narrative form.

# Other sources for narrative imperatives

- But not all narrative imperatives can be explained as being monologic or apostrophic in origin
- For Russian I have argued (Holvoet 1018) that the monologic account is false. The features of the Russian narrative imperative are almost in complementary distribution with those of the regular imperative: nearly always 3rd person, nearly always with overt subject.

*Prožili oni god duša v dušu*  
live.PST.PL they year.ACC soul.NOM in soul.ACC  
*a na drugoj god ona voz'm-i*  
and in next.ACC.SG.M year.ACC she take-IMP.2SG  
*da i pomr-i.*  
PCL PCL die-IMP.2SG

(Chrakovskij & Volodin 245, from Gleb Uspenskij)

‘They lived together as soul mates for a year, and then she suddenly died.’

# Other sources for narrative imperatives

- Alternative explanation: in Common Slavonic there was a common form for the 2nd and 3rd person imperative
- In its basic hortative function the 3rd-person form was replaced with a periphrastic form (*pust' pridet* 'let him/her come'), but the original form was retained in its peripheral functions, notably in narrative function.
- To lend plausibility to this hypothesis we must find 3rd person hortatives in narrative function.
- These are found, for instance, in Dutch.

# The Dutch narrative/mirative imperative

*En laat er nu eens zo'n wondermiddel*  
and let.PRS.3 there PCL PCL such.a miracle.cure  
*op de markt gekomen zijn!*  
on the market come.PP be.INF

[*Althans, daar lijkt het op.*]

[www.trendystyle.nl/.../creme-tegen-haargroei.html](http://www.trendystyle.nl/.../creme-tegen-haargroei.html) -

'Now imagine such a miracle cure having suddenly appeared on the market. [At least that is what it looks like.]'

- The Dutch construction has never been called narrative; it is characterized as referring to unexpected events.
- But actually most narrative imperatives refer to unexpected events, so that we can speak of mirative and narrative imperatives as one diffuse gram, with cross-linguistic differences as to the extent to which this form is put to use as a narrative device.

# Mirative imperatives

- Mirative 3rd-person hortatives probably have the same origin as conditional imperatives: the addressee is requested to make an imaginative effort
  - in order to examine what would follow from the state of affairs (s)he is requested to imagine
  - in order to be able to assimilate the unexpected information the speaker is conveying

Cf. English *imagine* with a hypothetical effect:

*Imagine you are in a sinking boat and surrounded by sharks. How do you survive?*

And with a mirative effect:

*She had a very sheltered childhood. And then suddenly – imagine the most rebellious teenager suddenly being given a throne.*

# Mirative imperatives (and hortatives)

- The Dutch 3rd person hortative with *laten* also has the two functions:

*Laat ABC een driehoek zijn...* (hypothetic)  
let a triangle be.INF

‘Let ABC be a triangle so that...’

*Laat daar nu een schandaal uitbreken...* (mirative)  
let there now a scandal break.out.INF

‘Imagine a scandal breaking out...’

# Mirative imperatives (and hortatives)

- 2nd person imperatives may also have mirative function:

*Mag*                      *maar eens*   *niet*   *naar*   *buiten*  
be.allowed.IMP   PCL   PCL   not   to   outdoors

*bij*            *zulk*   *prachtig*   *weer!*  
during   such   splendid   weather

‘Imagine not being allowed to go out when the weather is so splendid!’

- However, such mirative imperatives do not always become narrative imperatives, that is, they are not always used to introduce new (unexpected) events in a narrative.

# Another source for mirative imperatives

- Lithuanian has a mirative 2nd-person imperative:

*Ir gimk tu man taip*  
and **be.born.IMP.2SG** **you.NOM** **me.DAT** like.that  
*per patį viduržiemį!*  
during very.ACC.SG midwinter.ACC.SG  
'Imagine being born like that in the middle of the winter!'

# Another source for mirative imperatives

- Unlike the Dutch mirative imperative it also has narrative function, i.e. it can introduce new events in a narrative:

*Gyveno Plungėje du kaimynai ir  
live.PST.3 PLN.LOC two neighbour.NOM.PL and  
atsitik tu man taip, kad pas  
happen.IMP.2SG 2SG.NOM me.DAT so that at  
abudu kaimynus tą pačią dieną gimė  
both.ACC neighbour.ACC.PL the same day be.born.PST.3  
sūnūs [ir dar, per pačias Petrinės ir Povilinės].  
son.NOM.PL*

‘There lived two neighbours in Plungė and chance would have it that in both households sons were born on the same day [and, what is more, on the very day of St. Peter and Paul].’



# Origin of the Lithuanian mirative imperative

- Ultimately the construction can probably be traced back to the rhetorical imperative, a device used to express impossibility in many languages (cf. Donne's *Go and catch a falling star*):

<i>Aha,</i>	<i>rask</i>	<i>tu</i>	<i>man</i>
INTERJ	find.IMP.2SG	you.NOM	me.DAT
<i>vald-išk-q</i>		<i>įstaig-q,</i>	
government-ADJ-ACC.SG		office-ACC.SG	

[*kurioje nebūtų laiko pro langus paspoksot*].

‘Ah, just try to find a government office where one doesn’t have time enough to stare out of the windows.’

(Andrė Eivaitė: *Kontora. Tarnybinis detektyvas*. DLKT)

# Rhetorical imperatives

- Mirative imperatives may originate as rhetorical imperatives (cf. Lithuanian), but where do rhetorical imperatives come from?
- Bravo (2018): related to the conditional imperative (in the sense of an imperative expressing condition)
- But perhaps the explanation is to be sought in pragmatics.
- Perhaps rhetorical imperatives could be viewed as an epistemic variety of a usage type of imperatives usually referred to as 'threats and dares':

*Go ahead! Throw the stone!*

# Rhetorical imperatives

- ‘Dares’ are a way of challenging the addressee’s deontic stance, which can be made explicit (and often is):  
*Go ahead, throw the stone if you dare.*
- Rhetorical imperatives could be viewed as deriving from a subtype of ‘dares’ challenging the addressee’s epistemic stance (which can also be made explicit):  
*Go ahead, draw that sword from the rock if you think it’s so easy!*
- The imperative is then ‘rhetorical’ in the sense that there is no assumption that the addressee could actually hold such an epistemic attitude
- In this way we could argue that rhetorical imperatives are still imperatives (i.e., directives), just as it has been claimed that rhetorical questions are still questions.

# Rhetorical imperatives

- If this reasoning is correct, the meaning of the rhetorical imperative ceases to be directive at the stage when it is conventionalized as an expression of impossibility (and then becomes available for further semantic development)
- Perhaps this is also the origin of the Dutch mirative imperative; this is suggested by the occurrence of similar particles in both constructions (*maar eens*)

# Deontic echoic imperatives

- Apart from the monologic and apostrophic imperatives, other non-directive imperatives also seem to rest on interpretive (echoic) use.
- The Russian ‘necessitive’ imperative, which expresses resented necessity (the speaker expresses resentment at an obligation imposed on her/him) is an echoic rendering of an imputed directive utterance:

*Vse otdyxajut, a ja rabotaj.*  
all.NOM.PL rest.PRS.3PL but I work.IMP.2SG  
‘Everybody is resting but I have to work!’

# Deontic echoic imperatives

- The deontic origin of the ‘necessitive’ imperative of Russian can be seen in what is probably its oldest type, where the echoic imperative is not syntactically integrated in a declarative sentence but appears as a non-integrated quasi-quotation:

*I*        *ševelitsja*        *èpigramma*  
and    stir.PRS.3SG    epigram.NOM.SG  
*vo glubine*                *moej*                *duši,*  
in depth.LOC.SG    my.GEN.SG.F        soul.GEN.SG  
*a*        *madrigaly*                *im*                *piši!*  
and    madrigal.ACC.PL    3.DAT.PL    write.IMP.2SG  
‘I feel an epigram stirring in the depths of my soul and then I’m  
expected to write madrigals to them!’ (Pushkin)

# Deontic echoic imperatives

- A further semantic development leads from ‘resented necessity’ (unreasonable demand) to negative epistemic evaluation.
- Deontic:

Slovenian

[*Sem slišal, da je jemal antidepresive...*]

*in k njemu naj bi šel v terapij-o?*  
and to him HORT IRR go.LFORM in therapy-ACC  
‘[I’ve heard he has been on antidepressives] and to such a person you would have me go for treatment?’

# Deontic echoic imperatives

- Epistemic:

Slovenian

*On naj bi se bori-l proti*  
3.NOM.SG.M HORT IRR RFL fight-LFORM against

*bogatašem?*

rich.person.DAT.PL

[*Poglejte si njegov dvorec*].

'He is supposed to fight the rich? – Just look at his mansion!'

- This shift is based on the assumption that the speaker always sees things as they are while those disagreeing with her/him see things as they perversely want to see them.

# Deontic echoic imperatives

- In a final shift echoic deontics acquire evidential (hearsay) function. This is an extension from the epistemic-evaluation function (the implication of disbelief is dropped):

Slovenian

*Za požar naj bi bila kriva*  
for fire.ACC.SG HORT IRR be.LFORM guilty.NOM.SG.F  
*lastnik-ov-a nečakinja.*  
owner-ADJ-NOM.SG.F niece.NOM.SG

‘It was allegedly the owner’s niece who was responsible for the fire.’

# Concessive imperatives

- Imperatives may be concessive:

Latin (Horace, *Odes* i, 22)

<i>Pone</i>	<i>sub</i>	<i>curro</i>	<i>nimum</i>	<i>propinqui</i>
put.IMP.2SG	under	chariot.ABL.SG	too	near.GEN.SG.M
<i>solis</i> [...]	<i>dulce</i>	<i>ridentem</i>		<i>Lalagen</i>
sun.GEN.SG	sweetly	laughing.ACC.SG		PN.ACC
<i>amabo</i>				
love.FUT.1SG				

‘Put me under the chariot of the too hot Sun [...] I will still love my sweetly laughing Lalage.’

- The concessive imperative is identical with the conditional imperative (the speaker requests the addressee to imagine  $p$  and states his claim holds even if  $p$  is true)

# Absolute concessive imperatives

- In several Slavic and Baltic languages such concessive imperatives also have an absolute use (i.e., they are not followed by a concessive apodosis) as a means of stressing the validity of a preceding claim regardless of any circumstances:
- Proper concessive:

*Xot' pomiraj, a bez zapisi*  
though die.IMP.2SG but without appointment.GEN.SG  
*vrači ne primut.*  
doctor.NOM.PL NEG receive.FUT.3PL

'Even if you're dying, doctors won't see you without an appointment.'

# Absolute concessive imperatives

- Absolute concessive:

[*Takaja ran' – posetoval staršina – a*]

*žara uže – xot' pomiraj.*

heat.NOM already PCL die.IMP.2SG

'Such an early hour, the sergeant complained, and you could already die from the heat.' (NKRJa, V. Vojnovič)

- The clause now expresses result rather than concession but retains the original concessive subordinator (the construction has become non-compositional)
- The construction is clearly non-directional, as can be seen from the use of non-volitional verbs that normally don't derive imperatives.

# Non-directive imperatives without directive source

- The idea that non-directive imperatives could arise without a preceding directive stage seems self-contradictory: such a form would probably have no chance to be described as an imperative.
- Still, such a process seems to have taken place in Dutch, cf. the so-called “pluperfect imperative”:

*Had maar liever gezwegen!*  
have.PST.IMP PCL better keep.silent.PP  
'You'd better have kept silent.'

- There is no distinctive inflectional form here, but *had gezwegen* can be recognized as an imperative on the basis of the syntax

# Non-directive imperatives without directive source

- Historically, this is not an imperative but a pluperfect in a conditional protasis with inversion:

*Had je maar gezwegen dan was er  
had.PST you PCL be.silent.PP then was EXPL  
niets gebeurd.  
nothing happen.PP*

- The process occurred in two stages: (i) omission of the apodosis, (ii) omission of the personal pronoun
- A further stage was the creation of simple past imperatives:

*Ging liever wat eerder naar bed.  
go.PST.IMP better a.bit earlier to bed  
'You'd better go to bed a bit earlier.'*

# In conclusion

- Most non-directive meanings of imperatives are derived from directive meanings
- Non-pragmatic developments starting out from the directive imperative seem to be closely related to the 'conditional' imperative (i.e., the imperative expressing a condition): they are based on an appeal to an imaginative effort of the addressee (through metaphor or subjectification), with several applications (conditiona, concessive, mirative)
- All other developments seem to involve combinations of pragmatic and semantic mechanisms.