Why imperatives can(not) embed

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## 1. Introduction

### Notion of ‘Imperative’

•verbal forms that can be individuated within the respective language via certain morphosyntactic properties (prototypically morphologically meagre, lack of tense marking, special syntactic position, etc.)

•Imperative matrix clauses lack a truth value.

•correspondence to prototypical functions as ordering, wishing, recommending

•do not freely occur in any type of subordination structure, e.g. consecutive clauses, final clauses (vs. subjunctives)

### Ubiquitous observation:

many languages do not allow imperatives to embed, e.g. English:

(1) a. John said to Mary: „**Go** home!“

b. \*John said to Mary **that** **go** home.

### Positions:

•universally blocked (e.g. Saddock & Zwicky 1985, Platzack & Rosengren 1998, Han 1998, Palmer 2001)

•only language specific (syntactic) properties block embedding (Rögnvaldsson 1998, Portner 2003)

### Goals:

(i) have a closer look at the precise nature of putative imperative embeddings

(ii) see how far the analysis proposed recently by Portner (2003) can get us and explore an alternative

## 2. Portner (2003) in a nutshell

• force of a clause is determined by properties of its ‘semantic meaning’

• imperatives contain a **covert modal** which serves to derive the following property:

**||Leave!|| = [wx.x = H & x leaves in w]**

If the hearer leaves in w, it describes the hearer; otherwise it denotes the empty set.

only sensible use: writing it into the **to do-list** of the hearer.

• prediction: embeddable as a control structure, evidence e.g. Korean.

## 3. Evidence in favour of imperative embedding?

### 3.1.Korean

claim: no embedding of true imperatives (vs. Portner 2003)

(i)embedding of ‘imperatives’ causes morphological differences (cf. Han (1998:131),

Shin-Sook Kim p.c.)

(2) a. Ppalli o-**ala**/o-**a**/\*o-**la**

quickly come-IMP

‘Come quickly!’

b. Na-nun Mary-eykey ppalli \*o-**ala**-ko/\*o-**a**-ko/o-la-ko myenglyengha-yess-ta.

I-TOP Mary-DAT quickly come-IMP-COMP order-PAST-DEC

  ‘I told Mary to come quickly.’

(ii) overt subjects for emphasis are acceptable only in matrix clauses (p.c. Shin-Sook Kim)

(3) a. **ney-ka**  changmwun-ul tat-ala!

**you-Nom** window-Acc close-Imp

‘You close the window!’

b. Na-nun Hans-eykey (**\*ku-ka/\*ney-ka**) changmwun-ul tat-ula-ko malha-ess-ta

I-TOP Hans-DAT (**he-NOM/you-NOM**) window-ACC close-ula-COMP tellPAST-DEC

‘I told Hans that HE should close the window.’

### 3. 2. Data from Germanic and Classical Greek

**Modern German, Modern Icelandic:** co-ocurrence of imperative and complementizer syntactically blocked due to position conflict in C° (cf. Rivero & Terzi 1995)

**Older stages:** V-to-C movement of the imperative not yet obligatory no position conflict:

(4) in herzen harto thir **gibint**. (OHG, Otfried.I, 24,8)

in heart-ACC hard you.DAT imprint.IMP ‚locate it firmly in your heart‘

Rögnvaldsson (1998) gives 14 examples of Old Icelandic embedded imperatives. They fall into two classes (cf. 5):

(5) A: I order/reccomend/... you **that** ... **IMP** .... (e.g. 6a)

B: IMP … **that** ... **IMP** (e.g. 6b)

(6) a. “Verða kann það," segir Arnkell, "en það vil eg við þig mæla,

happen.INF can that says A. but that want I with you.ACC speak.INF

Þórarinn frændi, **að** þú **ver** með mér þar til er lýkur málum

Þórarinn relative **that** you **be.IMP** with me there until is ended affair

þessum á nokkurn hátt." *(Eyrbyggja saga, p. 557)*

this in some mode

 ‘That may be’, said Arnkell, ‘ but this I want to arrange with you, cousin Þórarinn, that you stay with me until this affair is in some way ended.’

b. Nú **ger** þú svo mannlega **að** þú **rek** þá brottu svo að við

now **act.IMP** you so manly **that** you **drive.IMP** them away so that we

þörfnumst eigi allra góðra hluta.

lack not all good things

  ‘Now act so manly that you drive them away, so that we don’t lack all good things.’ *(Þorvalds þáttur víðförla, p. 2326)*

Instances of case A are attested for Old High German as well (cf. Erdmann 1886):

(7) ik bimuniun dih, ... **daz** du niewedar ni **gituo**.

I.NOM implore you.ACC **that** you never not **do.IMP**

‚I implore you never to do this again.‘

**Both Case A, B: The situation described by the matrix clause does not shift away from the utterance situation (speaker, hearer, time and place stay the same).**

**Middle High German and Classical Greek:** embedded imperatives exclusively of the verbs for ‘do’ (MHG *tuon*, Greek /) in one fossilized construction (cf. Grimm 1884):

(8) a. Ich sage dir, was du tuo b. oisth’ ho drason/poieson

I.NOM tell you.DAT what you do.IMP know.IMP what do.AORIST.IMP

‘I tell you, what you should do.” ‘Know then, what you should do.’

## 4. Problems for Portner‘s analysis

• **no evidence for productive embedding of imperatives**; but: systematic restrictions on the instances to be found.

• The property derived by the imperative might well be added to any **other list** associated with the imperative, e.g. ‚what he should do under no circumstances‘ (p.c. Ede Zimmermann)

• objects with putatively the **same semantics** need **not** be **used as imperatives** (cf. Bierwisch 1980). German (9a) is used in motherese or when talking to strangers. It can assume any clausal force, depending on intonation. (9b) can at best be used to express a desire:

(9) a. %Du gehen.

you go.INF

b. Du sein und gehen!

you be.INF and go.INF

• **contradictory imperatives** uttered by **different speakers** need not result in an inconsistent to do-list:

  (10) a. A: Turn left!

B: Turn right!

  b. According to A, H should turn left, according to B, H should turn right.

## 5. An alternative idea

Assimilate imperatives to the **performative usages of modal verbs**. Both alter the set of what is commanded/allowed/etc. in the world of the utterance.

Modals quantify over a set of possible worlds supplied by a **contextually given** **background function** **fc** at an **evaluation index i**, e.g. ||must||c = Pxi.[i’[i’ **fc(i)**] P(x)(i’)]].

(e.g. fc(i) = {set of indices accessible at i according to what the speaker wants})

**Performativity** arises when the context supplies a background which is entirely controlled by the speaker (e.g. his orders). His asserting something about that background forces the hearer to accept it (*Saying-so-makes-it-so!*).

Imperatives contain a covert modal verb (cf. Portner 2003), call it MIMP.

Syntactically, the covert imperative modal MIMP binds and thereby deletes the imperative feature of the verb.

**⇒ MIMP is in complementary distribution with overt modals.**

MIMP only allows for background functions of the speaker dependent type

**⇒ imperatives never get descriptive usages**

The background function fc is computed from the context i0, not from the evaluation index.

**⇒ imperatives are entirely context dependent.**

||MIMP||(i0)(w) = λPλxλi.∀i’[i’∈ speaker-fc(i0) → P(addresseei0)(i’)]

### Consequence for embedding:

Modals may be embedded under loss of their performative interpretation:

(11) John thinks (according to me) you must go.

thinkJohn … **λi** ||you must go|| =

λ**i**[∀i’ ∈ speaker-commands-fulfilled**(i)**] → go(ADR)(i’)]]

Abstracting over imperatives yields a trivial proposition: ‘the set of all indices such that the imperative is given in the utterance world’

(12) λi ||MIMP go||c = **λi**[∀i’ ∈ speaker-commands-fulfilled**(i0)**] → go(addresseei0)(i’)]]

**Sensible embedding is restricted to propositions that are dependent on the evaluation index. Imperatives depend only on the context of utterance. Abstraction over context variables is prohibited by Kaplan (1978) as a *monster*.**

### Possible reason for universal markedness:

(i) triviality of the embedded proposition

(ii) vacuous quantification (but cf. Potts 2000)

(iii) performativity can not be suspended with via binding of the evaluation index **→** matrix sentences are semantically restricted to those compatible with the speech act performed by the imperative (cf. Meier 2000 for discussion of independent illocutionary force for embedded sentences)

## 6. Conclusion:

When **imperative embedding** is not blocked syntactically, it is **subject to severe semantic restrictions due to the exclusive (utterance) context dependence of imperatives**. This may be causing a universal tendency not to embed them at all.

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