

Is there any room for discourse in imperatives?

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1. Introduction and goal. A number of recent works have examined the internal composition and extent of the phrasal hierarchies in the left periphery of different clause types, mainly concentrating on the distinction between root, ‘root-like’ subordinates and (diverse) embedded clauses (cf., among others, Haegeman 2002; Heycock 2006). Some works have also focused on the projection of discourse categories, leading to a clause-related distinction for (different types of) Foci, Contrast and Topics, also based on semantic and prosodic interface considerations (cf. Âmbar 1999, Haegeman 2004, 2012; Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010; Bianchi 2012). The data examined generally concern declarative or interrogative clauses, while no such study was ever proposed for imperative clauses.

This paper intends to provide a contribution in this direction, confident that such a ‘multifactorial investigation’ can shed light on the imperative interpretation and improve our understanding of discourse-related categories in Italian, Spanish and English.

2. Describing the picture: The association of Topics and Foci with imperatives. Assuming Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl’s (2007) interface distinction between Aboutness-Shift (AS-)Topics, Contrastive (C-)Topics and Familiar/Given (G-)Topics, it appears that the semantic and discourse properties of AS-Topics can hardly associate with the imperative mood, as shown by examples (1a-b) from Italian, where (1b) involves an AS-Topic in the left periphery:

- (1) a. *Basta giocare: vai subito a finire i compiti!*
‘Stop playing: go and finish your homework immediately!’
b. **Basta giocare: i compiti, vai subito a finirli!*
‘*Stop playing: your homework, go and finish it immediately!’

If we follow Kempchinsky’s suggestion (2009) that imperatives have a semantic operator in Finiteness, which is interpreted as ‘anyone else except the speaker’, their incompatibility with AS-Topics can be explained by the fact that this operator must take scope over the proposition. As argued in Bianchi & Frascarelli (2010), an AS-Topic constitutes a speech act on its own (an ‘initiating speech act’, cf. Krifka 2001), introduced by a dedicated speech act operator and (possibly) conjoined to the speech act expressed by the following sentence. Hence, though they might *in principle* be associated with an imperative, a sentence like (1b) cannot be interpreted because two instructions cannot be successfully managed in the same complex speech act. On the other hand, C-Topics (2B) and G-Topics (3) seem to be allowed (both in Italian and Spanish), showing that they can be interpreted in the scope of operators:

- (2) A. *Dove posso mettere questi fiori?* (‘Where can I put these flowers?’)
B. a. *Le rose, mettile nel vaso, il girasole lascialo sul tavolo.*
b. *Las rosas ponlas en el jarrón, el girasol déjalo sobre la mesa.*
(lit. the roses put-them in the vase, the sunflower leave-it on the table)
(3) a. *La palla tirala./ Tírala, la palla.*
b. *La pelota tírala./ Tírala, la pelota.* (lit. the ball throw-it/throw-it the ball)

In this respect, English appears to provide some cross-linguistic differences. Cormany (2013) argues that non-contrastive topics are not allowed in English and, in general, left-peripheral arguments are often unacceptable (from Jensen 2007):

- (4) a. **Your essay, leave in my pigeon hole this afternoon.* b. **The weapons leave behind.*

However, this is not absolute. Sentences (5a–c), from Haegeman (2012:120), obtain acceptable results, and the context clearly induces a C-Topic interpretation for the fronted constituents. Thus C-Topics (though not G-Topics) are fronted in imperatives:

- (5) a. *The tie give to Bob, the aftershave give to Don.*
b. *Anything you don’t eat put back in the fridge.*

This is expected given Bianchi & Frascarelli's idea that English G-Topics are just distressed.

As for foci, a Mirative Focus (MF) totally 'clashes' with the imperative mood (compare declarative (6a) with (6b) from Italian), while Contrastive Focus (CF) seems to be unproblematic (both in Italian/Spanish and in English) as long as the focused element remains in situ, as in (7). The crucial observation is that MF is argued to be connected with a root 'evaluative' force (a "proposal to negotiate a shared evaluation", cf. Bianchi 2012), while Correction can be associated with any kind of clause.

- (6) a. Wow! DUE BOTTIGLIE abbiamo bevuto! (Wow: TWO BOTTLES OF WINE we drank!)
b. *Wow! DUE BOTTIGLIE bevi immediatamente! (Wow: TWO BOTTLES drink now!)
- (7) Bevi L'ACQUA, non il vino! / ¡Bébetete EL AGUA, no el vino! (Drink WATER, not wine!)

Generalization: The realization of discourse-related categories seems to suggest a non-root analysis for imperative clauses, despite their apparent matrix character.

3. The proposal. Cormany (2013) proposes that in imperatives V raises to Fin and the 'subject' to spec-FinP. Jensen (2007), on the other hand, concludes that imperatives lack a CP domain altogether. We think that the data examined lead toward a different solution.

Our working hypothesis is that imperative is a mood, not an independent illocutionary force, and this mood (and its associated non-finite morphological form) is the consequence of a 'hidden' illocutionary force that is activated in a matrix 'silent clause'. In other words, we resume and revisit Ross' (1970) original 'performative hypothesis' and propose that imperatives are in fact subordinate clauses, thereby explaining why they lack an independent ForceP projection when they merge with the matrix silent performative V.

In the present framework, the relevant 'silent subordination' implies the existence of a 'silent speech act' that is encoded in a specific projection, the Illocutionary Phrase, also including featural information about speaker and hearer. The imperative mood is activated via an Agree relation with Fin^o where an imperative operator is located.

This proposal can explain the relevant data since the inactivation of an independent Force will rule out AS-Topics and MF, though still allowing for C-Topics, G-Topics and Contrast. It also accounts for a number of cases in which an imperative form is not associated in fact with an imperative mood, but with a different interpretive feature (creating minimality effects). This is for instance the case of an imperative form associated with Information Focus, as in *La palla, prendila tu/La pelota cógela tú* ('The ball, you take it'). Intonational evidence will be provided, examining the different discourse-related categories associated with true and 'disguised' imperatives, comparing Italian, Spanish and English on both spoken corpora and elicited sentences.

References

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