

A New Perspective of the Imperative

Dunya Muhammad Muqdad I'jam

Introduction

Most of the English imperatives are considered as prescriptions imposed on the addressee by the speaker and as expressions of the speaker's acceptance of something coming true, respectively. However, exceptions to both accounts are not difficult to find. It is hypothesized that the semantic features shared by all the imperatives acquire different nuances (obligation, permission, acceptance, and wish), which correlate with different illocutionary forces, depending on certain situational factors, such as the relationship between the speaker and the addressee or the speaker's desire to be polite. Nevertheless, the illocutionary modifications involved by such factors will not prevent the element of speaker's concern from being present in all imperatives. The procedures followed start with introducing the meaning of the imperative and some previous views of the imperative. The second section includes a suggested semantic and pragmatic view of the imperative. To enrich this study, a trace of the imperatives is made through Thomas Hardy's short story "Anna, Lady Baxby" (1891). The last section includes the coming up conclusions

Section I

1-1-The Imperative: Definition

It is a term used in the grammatical classification of sentence types, and usually seen in contrast to indicative, interrogative ,etc(Crysal,2003:227).Its usage refers to verb forms used in the expression of commands ,as in:

(1)Go away. (Ibid)

According to Quirk et.al.(1985: 827),the directive takes the forms of imperative which differ from the declarative in that:

(i)it generally has no subject,

(ii)it has either a main verb in the base form or an auxiliary in the base form followed by a main verb in a base form,

(iii)it lacks tense distinction and does not allow modal auxiliaries, as:

(2)Be listening to this station.

(3)Be doing your homework when your parents arrive home. (Ibid)

(iv) passive imperative can occur with **be** when it has the meaning “Don’t allow yourself to be”, as:

(4) Don’t be made to look foolish.

(5) Don’t be told what to do. (Ibid)

In addition ,there is a passive imperative with **get**, as in:

(6) Get washed.

(7) Don’t get dressed yet. (Ibid)

1-2-The Imperatives with Subject

There is a type of imperative in which subject you is added:

(8) You be quiet.

(9) You take the book. (Ibid)

It expresses either irritation or merely insistence. In some instances, the vocative is used in the imperative, but it implies impoliteness:

(10) Nobody move.

(11) Play with me, MARY. (Ibid: 829)

The difference between the two is that the subject always precedes the verb whereas the vocative is movable. When the vocative is in the initial position, it will gain a fall-rise tone, whereas the subject has only the ordinary word stress (Ibid) .

1-3-The Imperative with DO

It can be made more persuasive or insistent by adding **do** before the verb. **Do** reinforces the positive sense of imperative:

(12) Do have some more tea. (Ibid)

1-4-Quirk et.al.'s View of the Imperative

Quirk et.al.(Ibid) claim that the distinctive feature of imperatives from other types of clause is the illocutionary force of a directive ,that is, the speaker or writer (henceforth S) prescribes some course of action for the addressee (A).Some of these directives are:

- Order, as: (13) Fire!
- Prohibition ,as: (14)Don't touch
- Request ,as: (15)Shut the door ,please.
- Advice, as : (16)Lock the door before you go to bed.
- Warning, as :(17)Look out.
- Suggestion, as : (18)Let's have a party.
- Instruction, as : (19)Take the first street on the left.
- Invitation, as: (20)Make yourself at home.
- Offer, as : (21)Have a cup of coffee.
- Granting permission, as: (22)Help yourself.
- Good wishes, as:(23)Enjoy your meal.
- Imprecation, as : (24)Go to hell.
- etc. (Ibid:832)

However, not all imperatives seem to conform to this force .For example, their aim could also be: to suggest that (A) can do what s/he wants (25);

to consent to a proposal (26); to give permission (27); to express reluctant acceptance (28); or to inform that something could be done (29):

(25) Study English or watch television: do what you prefer.

(26) A: Could I help you? B: Help me if you like.

(27) Smoke as much as you like.

(28) OK, do invite them, but if I were you I wouldn't.

(29) Sign at the bottom of the application form.

1-5-Palmer's View of the Imperative

Palmer (1986:29-30) proposes another possible common feature for all imperatives: they express, in the most neutral way, (S)'s favourable disposition towards the action. (S) merely «presents» a proposition, just as with the declarative, but for action, not merely for acceptance as true, by A. However, this definition has the disadvantage that the term «favourable» does not apply to cases like (28), where (S) expresses a reluctant acceptance for the action to be carried out.

1-6-Davies' View of the Imperative

Davies (1986:51) also states that imperatives share a common semantic feature: (S)'s acceptance of the proposition being made true:

(...) the speaker who utters an imperative which presents a proposition p is

conventionally assumed to accept p's (sic) being made true. (...) by uttering an imperative he usually intends to convey that he accepts

something's (sic) being made the case.

(Ibid)

A New Perspective of the Imperative

Davies's account has the disadvantage that the notion of «acceptance» has to cover even those imperatives that express a command or a strong wish:

(30) Go and visit Granny at once!

(31) Get well soon.

Section II

2-1 A Suggested Semantic View of the Imperative

The following notions, which correspond to different kinds of modalities, make pairs related to the logical pair possibility-necessity (see Carretero, 1991):

1. Belief-Knowledge (epistemic modality);
2. Physical possibility-Physical necessity (dynamic);
3. Permission-Obligation (boulomaic-deontic);
4. Acceptance-Wish (boulomaic-non-deontic). (Ibid: 345-366)

The last two pairs of the above mentioned notions, Permission-Obligation and Acceptance-Wish, constitute the core of «**boulomaic modality**», that is, the modality which concerns the attitude of a will (which may be (S)'s or not) towards the «content of the proposition being made true (henceforth PMT)». It is considered that **boulomaic modality** provides a clue to a semantic feature common to all imperatives: imperatives always express **boulomaic modality**, that is, they indicate the degree of concern of a will towards the content of a proposition being made the case. They express then Acceptance, Wish, Obligation or Permission.

Imperatives have two additional defining characteristics, which distinguish them from the rest of the expressions of **boulomaic modality**:

- 1) The will concerned is the speaker's;

2) They refer to the time of the speech act.

The four types of imperatives form a system with two variables which concern (S) and (A) :

1- **degree of speaker s will.** The degree of (S)'s will towards the PMT may be:

a) weak (Permission Acceptance): (S) accepts the (PMT) but s/he does also accept the «propositional content not being made true» (PnotMT)

b) strong (Obligation, Wish): (S) does not accept the (PnotMT)

2. **power of (S) to impose on (A) to carry out the (PMT).** Two different cases can be distinguished according to this variable:

a) (S) imposes over (A): Permission, Obligation;

b) (S) does not impose over (A): Acceptance, Wish.

The four main types of imperatives, which correspond to the four main types of boulomaic modality, are defined by the combination of the two variables:

	a. Weak will	b. Strong will
Imposition	Permission	Obligation
non-imposition	Acceptance	Wish

non-imposition

(32),(33),(34)and (35)are instances of permission,obligation,acceptance ,and wish, respectively:

(32) Leave the office if you like: you have already typed all the letters I needed.

(33) Come here at once! I need some help.

(34) Phone her if you like, but if I were you I wouldn't.

(35) Have a nice time at the party tomorrow.

2-1-2 A Suggested Pragmatic View of the Imperatives

The common semantic feature proposed in Section (2-1) is correlated by a pragmatic feature: all imperatives share an element of “fitting the world to the word”, in Searle's (1976) terms. In the Imperatives of Wish and Obligation, (S) expresses her or his will to fit the world to the word; in those of Acceptance and Permission, (S) sets forth her or his acceptance of both the fitting and the non-fitting of the world to the word.

Moreover, the four semantic types of imperatives could also be considered as pragmatic types, which differ in terms of illocutionary force. These differences will be explained in terms of Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of “face” and “face-threatening acts (FTAs)”, and the sociolinguistic variables which interact with those. By face they understand «the public self-image that every member (of a society) wants to claim for himself (...)»(Ibid:61). Face consists of two related aspects: negative face, the claim « (...) to freedom of action and freedom from impositions and positive face, «the positive consistent self-image or "personality" (...)», that is, the claim that one's interests, wishes or claims should be taken into account.

The face-threatening acts (FTAs) are the acts (which may be speech acts or not) which intrinsically threaten (S)'s or (more commonly) (A)'s positive or negative face.

In performing a speech (FTA), S is likely to use politeness strategies, to assure the maintenance of a good relationship with (A). The strategy to be used depends on the following factors:

- a) whether the (FTA) concerns positive face or negative face; in this respect, positive politeness (PP) strategies will be distinguished from negative politeness (NP) strategies;
- b) sociolinguistic variables: the relative power (P) and the social distance (D) between (S) and (A), and the importance of the FTA (R, from «rating»).

At this point the differences between the four semantic types of imperatives in terms of politeness will be accounted for. Perhaps the most obvious difference is that between the imperatives of Permission and Obligation and those of Acceptance and Wish in terms of the (P) variable: in the latter, but not in the former, (S) has power to make (A) carry out the (PMT) or to let her or him do what s/he wants.

Nevertheless, these distinctions, especially that between Obligation and Wish, are not so straightforward as it seems at first sight. In fact, both terms could be conceived as the extremes of a continuum, in which instances of imperatives would be situated at different points. The following factors bring instances near the Obligation extreme:

- a) a high P variable ((S) has power over (A));

////////////////////////////////////

A)'s possibility to carry out the (PMT) (it is impossible to oblige anyone to do something s/he cannot do);

he (FTA) threatens (A)'s negative face (that is, (S) imposes on (A) to carry on a (PMT) which will be beneficial for (S);

b) (S) does not give (A) the option not to comply with the (FTA). (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 95-98) Where these factors are present, (S)'s imposition over (A) is maximized, and straightforward imperatives are uncommon because the (FTA), which seems stronger. For instance (36) is a more polite way than (37) to address to a subordinate: (36) Would you type these letters for me?

(37) Type these letters for me.

Nevertheless, in certain situations where efficiency has priority over politeness, such as cases of emergency (38), task-oriented focus of interaction (39) and attention-seeking in conversation (40), imperatives of Obligation are less uncommon (Ibid): (38) Help! (39) Give me the nails. (40) Listen, I think I've got an idea.

Where one or more of the factors is not present, the relative deviation from the meaning of Obligation in the strict sense may turn imperatives into devices which enhance politeness instead of lowering it; the frequency of imperatives is thus higher (Downing and Locke, 1992: 198-199):

1. when (S) is not a superior to (A), imperatives can convey intimacy (Ibid: 108): (41) Come to me, darling. (Ibid)

2. when the (PMT) is not under (A)'s control, the imperative cannot be one of Obligation; then it is not part of an (NP) strategy, but of a (PP) strategy which strengthens (S)'s Wish that (A)'s interests should be fulfilled:

(42) Get well soon. (Ibid)

3. when the (FTA) does not affect (A)'s negative face, the imperative does not express Obligation. If it concerns A's positive face (as in (43), where the (PMT) is beneficial for (A)), (S) stresses her or his care about (A); if it concerns (S)'s negative face (44) or S's positive face (45), the imperative minimizes the importance of the (FTA) (which will be an imposition on S and a benefit for A). Therefore, in these cases, the imperative enhances politeness:

(43) Be careful while you drive.

(44) Leave the cleaning for me.

(45) Don't worry about me (ie. don't give too much importance to my interests).

4. when (S) gives (A) an option not to comply with the (PMT), there is no Obligation in the strict sense. This usually happens when the (R) variable is relatively high (i.e. when the fulfilling the (PMT) is a serious imposition on (A), as in (46)). Imperatives of Permission (47) or Acceptance (48) also give A possibility not to comply with the PMT, the difference between these two being that, in the former, A has the option because of the lack of S's power to impose on her or him, whereas in the former A's option is a result of S's permissive attitude:

(46) Please help me with this difficult task. Would you be so kind?

(47) Watch television if you like: you've already studied enough. (Ibid)

(48) Go by car if you like: it's up to you, but remember the road is dangerous.

Section III

Data Analysis

3-1 Hardy's "Anna, Lady Baxby" (1891) : Theme

A New Perspective of the Imperative

Hardy's short story has its scene in Sherton Castle during the British Civil War (1642-1649) between the Loyalist to the Monarchy of King Charles and the Rebellious Parliamentary Forces. Anna is married to the loyalist Lord Baxby. When her husband goes out of the castle that day to raise forces for the King. The besiegers arrive. Anna is summoned to her brother's camp, and she is advised by him to leave her husband's castle and join him before the attack is carried out. His sister refuses to leave the castle. At night, her husband comes back with some forces which make the besiegers retreat a few miles off. She quarrels with her husband and decides, without telling him, to join her brother that night. When her husband falls to sleep, she wears his hat and robe and steps out of the castle, only to be called at by a pretty young woman who mistakes her for her husband since the latter has just invited her to the castle's terrace. Realizing her husband's treachery, Anna changes her mind, and immediately returns to the Castle unnoticed. In the sleeping room, she tethers her sleeping husband's hair-lock so that he may not leave his bed without her noticed. The husband, who has forgotten his casual date, remains asleep and the issue ends here.

3-2 The Semantic-Pragmatic Analysis: Throughout the whole short story, the imperative has five occurrences from sentence (24) to sentence (31). It is clear from the following quotation:

“**Say not that.** “he replied, hastily.” If truth hides at the bottom of a well, why should you suppose justice to be in high places? I am for the right, at any price. **Anna, leave the castle;** you are my sister; **come away, my dear, and save thy life.** ... “**Anna-do obey me!**“ he entreated.” Blood is thicker than water. and what is

there in common between you and your husband now?" Hardy's "Anna, Lady Baxby" (S.24-31) In the first imperative, **say not that**, there is no obligation in the strict sense; it is a task-oriented focus of interaction (by trying not to let her complete her turn). If it is not an obligation in the strict sense, then it must be a request especially when the PMT is beneficial for (S). and (S) has a relative power to impose on (A). In the second imperative, **Anna, leave the castle; you are my sister**, the vocative (Anna) here is used by (S) i.e. (the brother) in an impolite way because it provides the only information that (S) has authority over (A). And when (S) says "you are my sister", he uses a way of politeness in order not only to seek (A)'s collaborative attitude in order to satisfy (S)'s needs but also to save the negative and the positive face of (A).. It is clear through the brother taking the advantage from the reality of brotherhood to persuade her to change her mind and leave her husband. This means that the (S)'s attitude towards the (PMT) is positive through the clause which merely stresses (S)'s wish that the preposition should be made true since the consequences will be beneficial for (S), (A) or both. In the third imperative, **come away, my dear**, there is a deviation from the meaning of obligation in the strict sense to the use of the imperative as a device of politeness in stead of lowering it to seek (A)'s acceptance. According to Downing and Locke (1992:198-199) the frequency of imperative is higher when (S) is not a superior to (A), imperatives can convey intimacy. In this sense, it does not convey obligation at all because this imperative does not threaten the negative face of (A). What is more, it does not meet one of these conditions mentioned in section (2-2) previously:

- a) a high power (P) variable ((S) has power over (A));

A New Perspective of the Imperative

b)(A)'s possibility to carry out the (PMT) (it is impossible to

oblige anyone to do something s/he cannot do);

c)the(FTA) threatens (A)'s negative face (that is, (S) imposes on(A) to

carry on a (PMT) which will be beneficial for(S);

d)S does not give A the option not to comply with the (FTA). (Brown and

Levinson, 1987:95-98)

Therefore, it is possible to consider the imperative as a (FTA) in which (A) wishes (S) to comply the (PMT) .As a result, the second imperative found in this sentence, **save thy life**, is also considered as a wish because when the (PMT) is not under (A)'s control, the (FTA) does not affect (A)'s negative face. It concerns (A)'s positive face(where the (PMT) is beneficial for (A)),(S) stresses his care about (A).Moreover, it is possible to consider it as a recommendation since the (PMT)is beneficial for (A).The imperative is thus following a strategy by which (S) expresses his concern about(A)'s interest.The last imperative, **Anna-do obey me**, shows a strong obligation and wish at the same time that (S) does not accept the PnotMT).Therefore, the (S) imposes over (A) to carry out the (PMT). This is obvious through the use of the emphatic do which indicates the meaning that (A) should carry out the (PMT).In addition ,the use of emphatic do is to show (S)'s insistence (the brother) for the (A)'s complying with the (PMT) because it will be beneficial for (A) i.e Anna.With the use of the vocative, which is an indication of impoliteness according to Quirk et.al.(1985:828),the brother tries to exercise an authority over his sister by ordering her to obey him and then trying to gain her acceptance by reminding her that her relation with him is much more stronger than

that with her husband,"Blood is thicker than water. and what is there in common between you and your husband now?"

Section IV

Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the study, the most outstanding of which are the following:

- 1- A common semantic feature seems to be found in all of the imperatives: the expression of boulomaic modality; in other words, imperatives give indications about the speaker's concern towards the content of a proposition being made true. This general meaning interacts with other factors, such as the strength of the speaker's will that the proposition comes true, the relationship between the speaker and the addressee, the linguistic and situational context and the addressee's power to make the proposition comes true; according to these factors, different types of imperatives can be distinguished (imperatives of Acceptance, Wish, Permission or Obligation). Therefore the hypothesis is verified since these four semantic types are correlated by variations in illocutionary force, which may be modified by a wide variety of linguistic means, such as an explicit subject, the vocative, and the emphatic do before the base form of the verb.
- 2-In spite of the fact that the occurrences of the imperatives; in Hardy's short story; are only five, these occurrences show all the semantic types of imperatives except permission. Anna's brother tries his best to convince his sister to leave her husband because he treats her badly. Therefore; he performs different kinds of imperative acts with different semantic meanings conveyed by different pragmatic uses. He moved from a task-oriented focus of interaction in order not to let her complete her turn, to a kind of obligation in an impolite way in order to stress the idea that she is in danger while she is staying in the castle. Then, he gets benefit from the reality of brotherhood to persuade her to leave her husband i.e. there is a wish, made by the brother, that the proposition should be made true. Another shift is that from obligation to seeking her acceptance in a polite way by suggesting intimacy when saying "my dear". The other shift is that from seeking acceptance to a wish and an advice because her brother stresses his care about her. The last shift returns back to the obligation because by the use of the vocative and the emphatic do, her brother imposes over her in order to carry out the (PMT) i.e. to leave her husband. With this sense of obligation, the brother is seeking Anna's acceptance by reminding her that her blood relation with him is stronger than her relation with her husband.

REFERENCES

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). **Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

A New Perspective of the Imperative

Carretero, M. (1991) .(in press). «Una propuesta de tipología de la modalidad: la aceptación como categoría modal».

<http://www.edu.in.foer.lingua.com>

Crystal,D.(2003).**A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics**. Blackwell.Oxford.

Davies, E. (1986). **The English Imperative**. London: Croom Helm.

Downing, A., & Locke, P. (1992). **A University Course on English Grammar**. Hemel Hempstead: Simon & Schuster,

Palmer, F. R. (1986). **Mood and Modality**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Quirk, R.; Greenbaum, S.; Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985).**A Grammar of Contemporary English**. London: Longman.

Searle, J. R. (1976). «The classification of illocutionary acts». *Language in Society*. [http://www. Searle. findhtml.net/](http://www.Searle.findhtml.net/)