

The Functional Structure of Imperative Phrase Markers: Evidence from Adult and Child Slovenian Imperatives

Traditional grammars classify imperative (IMP) clauses as ‘finite’ along with indicatives (INDs) and subjunctives, mainly on the basis of the presence of overt nominative subjects and particularly on the basis of T(ense)/Agr(eement)-based morphology found at least in some languages (Bohnacker 1999; Rupp 2003).

However, null subject languages do not usually use overt subjects with tensed verbs and overt nominative subjects may occur with non-IMP infinitival verbs (e.g., in German) (Bohnacker 1999). Furthermore, in certain languages, such as Icelandic, tensed verbs can take non-nominative oblique subjects (*ibid*). Finally, many languages do not have separate inflectional IMP paradigms as in INDs and subjunctives, but rather employ other morphosyntactic devices that give rise to the IMP meaning, such as specific particles, clitics, or clitic-like affixes, verb stem alterations, or simply use infinitives or subjunctive forms with an IMP force (Han 2001; Platzack and Rosengren 1998; Zanuttini 1997). On the basis of all of these facts, the majority of “mainstream” generative literature has rendered IMPs as ‘tenseless’, arguing that T/Agr (‘Infl’) projection(s) are either inactive or missing their features, or – even most commonly – lacking Infl(-related) feature(s) entirely (e.g., Han 2001; Platzack and Rosengren 1998).

This paper challenges such a hypothesis on the basis of both, adult and child Slovenian IMPs, arguing that the “Infl” category in the IMP phrase marker *cannot* be taken (universally) as a “degenerate” head and that an IMP contains a ‘T-based’ (tensed) phrase marker. This conclusion comes from several observations. First, it is shown that the Slovenian IMP verb paradigm is *distinct* from the IND one and all other ‘nonfinite’ verb forms (there is no other mood but the IND and IMP in the language). Second, the paper shows that Slovenian IMPs can *embed* (Rus 2005), contrary to the mainstream belief that this is not an option in the grammar, and that the distribution of the complementizer *da*, ‘that’ in embedded IND and IMP clauses suggest that IMPs are indeed *tensed* [1]. Furthermore, clitic placement in IMPs resembles a state of affairs found in IND clauses [2]. Third, the subjects of embedded IMPs seem to exhibit *the same* syntactic characteristics as the subjects of matrix IMPs, which in turn exhibit *the same* syntactic characteristics as the subjects of IND, tensed clauses: they can bind an anaphor in VP ([3]a); they control the PRO subject of non-finite complements ([3]b); and they agree with predicatively used adjectives and past participles ([3]c) (Sheppard and Golden 2002). Additional piece of evidence for our hypothesis comes from child Slovenian, where it has been established recently that very young children show not only productive, target-like IMP morphology and adult-like pronominal and reflexive clitic placement, but also *object scrambling* with a DP object raising across the IMP verb, marked for T/Agr, a non-adult construction which nevertheless speaks for the presence of ‘Infl’ in IMPs [4] (Rus and Chandra 2006).

Hence, the paper concludes that IMPs should *not* be taken to be ‘incomplete’, T-less clauses but that they rather comprise of an IND-like phrase structure with a full set of functional material (similarly to Rupp’s 2003 analysis of Old, Middle and even Modern English and Bohnacker’s analysis of Icelandic). Furthermore, our analysis also shows that the facts for *tensed(-based)* representation of IMPs do not necessarily translate into evidence for ‘finiteness’ (in traditional terms), as is often misinterpreted in the literature. The paper ends with a conceptual observation by stating that early grammatical systems can (and *should* be) *informative* for a linguistic theory, one of the goals of the modern generative linguistic enterprise that is usually left aside in the field.

- [1] (a) Ukazal mi je, (da) naj delam.
 ordered me is (that) *naj* work-1SGPRESIND
 'He ordered me to work/He told me that I must work.'
- (b) Ukazal mi je delati.
 ordered me is work-INF
 'He ordered me to work.'
- (c) *Ukazal mi je, da delati.
 ordered me is that work-INF
 'He ordered me to work.'
- (d) Ukazal ti je, da delaj.
 ordered you is that work-2SGIMP
 'He ordered you to work/that you must work.'
- (e) Ukazal ti je (*da) delati.
 ordered you is (*that) work-INF
 'He ordered you to work.'
- [2] (a) Kupim ti avto.
 buy-1SGPRESIND you-CLDAT car-ACC
 'I buy you a car.'
- (b) Kupi mi avto!
 Buy-2SGIMP me-CLDAT car-ACC
 'Buy me a car!'
- [3] (a) Rekel je, da si kupi kolo.
 said is that yourself buy-2SG IMP bicycle-ACC
 'He said that you must buy yourself a bicycle.'
- (b) Rekel je, da se navadi PRO pospraviti svojo sobo.
 said is that refl get used-2SGIMP to clean up your own room-ACC
 'He said that you should learn to clean up your room.'
- (c) Rekel je, da bodi previdna!
 said is that be-2SGIMP careful-SGFEM
 He said that you must be careful.'
- [4] Bončka jej! (Tomaž, 1;10)
 candy-ACC eat-2SGIMP
 'Eat the candy!' [from Rus and Chandra 2006]

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