

Child Slovenian Imperatives: Root Infinitive Analogues?

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1. Introduction

Early Root Nonfinites (ERNs) have received a great deal of attention in the child morphosyntactic acquisition literature in the last decade or so. It has been noted that besides producing correctly-inflected finite V(erb)s in root contexts, where a finite form denoting T(ense) and/or Agr(eement) is required in adult systems, children also produce various ERNs, specifically: (a) English, Swahili and Inuktitut-speaking children produce a high number of Bare Verb stems (BVs) (see Deen 2002 for reviews on English and Swahili; Swift 2004 for Inuktitut); (b) children speaking other non-null subject Germanic languages (Dutch, German and Swedish), French, and Russian produce a high number of Vs with infinitival morphology, i.e., R(oot) I(nfinitive)s (see Guasti 2002 for reviews); (c) children speaking null subject Romance (Catalan, Italian, and Spanish) and Slovenian produce a high number of B(are) P(articiples), i.e., active past participles not supported with auxiliaries (see Montrul 2004 for a review on Catalan and Spanish; Guasti 2002 for Italian; Rus & Chandra 2005 for Slovenian); (d) Greek-speaking children produce a high number of nonfinite participle-like Vs with perfective morphology and meaning (see Varlokosta et al. 1998)—forms which Hyams (2002, 2003) refers to as B(are) Perf(ective)s.

We have learned a great deal about early morphosyntactic systems since the conception of the “RI program”. First, it has been noted that early grammars exhibit a wide *variety* of ERNs and that *not all* children go through an RI stage, though it is still not well understood whether there is an “RI-like” (i.e., RI-analog) stage cross-linguistically. Specifically, it is not clear why there seems to be a clear cut between RI and non-RI languages and what developmental (linguistic) mechanism(s) is/are responsible for that, if any, and if null subjecthood and the richness of verbal morphology play a role in this cut (Hyams 2003). Second, it has become clear that the rate of ERNs *varies considerably* not only across (similar) languages (from 3% to as much as 90% of all early Vs), but also *within* a language (see Guasti 2002 for a review). Third, it seems that the properties generally associated with RIs are the following (after Hyams 2003): (a) the presence of nonfinite morphology (infinitive, bare V stem, or participle/perfective); (b) the lack of occurrence with T/Agr-related elements (e.g., subject clitics, reflexive clitics, and modals), as well as C-related elements

(wh-, focus/topic subject and object DPs); (c) eventivity constraint; (d) irrealis semantic meaning (i.e., expressing volition and intention).

Some of the most influential studies on ERNs have attempted to *unify* early grammatical systems by proposing a more or less specific *structural deficit* (e.g., Rizzi 1993/4; Wexler 1994, 1998), sometimes resorting to the syntax/semantics interplay (e.g., Hyams 2003). Various “unification accounts” have appeared in the acquisition literature in the recent years, based on various early languages, most notably: (a) BVs as RIs (Wexler 1994, on the basis of English); (b) BPs as RIs (Varlokosta et al. 1998, on the basis of Greek); (c) BPerfs as RIs (Hyams 2003, on the basis of Greek); and (d) Imperatives (IMPs) as RIs (Salustri & Hyams 2003, on the basis of Italian).

We believe that the “BVs as RI-analogues” and “BPs as RI-analogues” hypothesis have both been refuted successfully (see Hoekstra & Hyams 1998 for the former and Hyams 2002, 2003 and Rus & Chandra 2005 for the latter). This paper evaluates the last position (i.e., the “IMPs as RI-analogues” hypothesis), concluding that it *cannot* hold cross-linguistically for null subject languages with rich verbal morphology, contra Salustri & Hyams (2003). Bringing forth empirical facts from child Slovenian (SLO hereafter), this paper argues that SLO children’s IMPs do *not* lack the TP/AgrP projection(s) because they show perfect [Person] and [Number] Agr. Independently, in the syntactic accounts of adult Slovenian, IMPs have never been treated as tenseless structures, but full CPs with a fully-blown (i.e., nondefective) CP–AgrP/TP–VP structure. Furthermore, our data on child IMPs show that early IMPs also appear in constructions with object scrambling and clauses with post-IMP clitics, which in the present minimalist paradigm require a full clause structure, contra Salustri & Hyams’ “missing/eliminated functional heads” account.

2. The “Imperative as an RI-Analogue” Hypothesis (IRIAH)

The analysis presented by Salustri & Hyams (S&H hereafter) commences with the *prima facie* “RI-like” characteristics of child Italian IMPs, namely they are tenseless structures; they express irrealis semantic interpretation; and they occur mainly with eventive predicates. S&H make the following two predictions for the IRIAH: (a) in null subject languages with rich morphology, IMPs will occur significantly more often in the child language than in the corresponding adult language; and (b) IMPs will occur significantly more often in null subject child languages than in the RI languages.

Let us unpack some of the details of the S&H’ analysis. First, as observed correctly by S&H, IMPs seem to be among the first and most frequently used V forms in child Italian; compare the frequency rates in child speech with those of the adult target language in the two tables below:

Frequency Rates of IMPs and RIs in Early Italian (from S&H)				
Child	Age	%RI (mean)	% IMP (mean)	Total Verbs
Denis	2;0-2;7	2.8	31;1	318
Martina	2;1-2;7	0	17.5	513
Diana	2;0-2;7	0	16.4	863
Viola	2;1-2;7	0.2	30	198

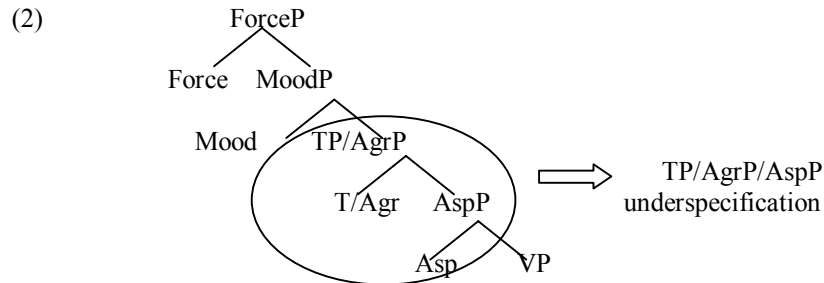
Frequency Rates of IMPs in Adult Italian (all forms) (from S&H)			
Discourse context	IMP Tokens	IMP%	Total Verbs
Adult-directed	36	5.6	950
Child-directed	82	14.9	550

Child IMPs peak at approximately 40%, in direct contrast with 15% in adult grammar, thus validating the first prediction. Second, the frequency of IMPs in child German remains constant at around 10% (between the ages of 1;6 and 2;7) even though child-directed German contains around 36% of IMPs.

S&H's next objective is to provide a "uniform" structural description for IMPs and RIs, only "apparently different" forms. A defining character of IMPs is V-raising to C, illustrated below in (1). Contrast an IMP (1a) with an indicative (IND) in (1b):

- (1) a. Prendi-la.
 take-it-cl.
 'Take it!'
- b. La prendi.
 it-cl.-take
 'You take it.'

Adopting Han's (2001) analysis of IMPs, S&H suggest (2) as the underlying representation for IMPs:



IMP Vs have an irrealis feature that must be checked against MoodP in a local configuration (i.e., head-head, spec-head, or head-complement). To satisfy locality, there must be no intervening heads/projections between MoodP and the

IMP V. IMPs are unmarked for T and arguably unspecified for Agr as well, suggesting that the intermediate projections are *eliminated* in the structure like the one in (2) above. The irrealis feature on the V is thus checked locally against MoodP and subsequent movement of the V to Mood allows the “directive” feature to be in a local checking relation with Force.

V-raising in IMPs is hence obligatory for feature checking and is achieved via underspecification. On the other hand, IND Vs bear T/Agr morphology, hence eliminating TP/AgrP/AspP is not a possibility. Crucially, the technology adopted for IMPs is the same as for RIs. Infinitivals have an irrealis feature that is checked against MoodP and a local checking relation is rendered possible only by the underspecification. IMPs and RIs are thus outcomes of the same underlying structures, and subsequently share temporal, modal, as well as aspectual interpretations.

Finally, RIs and IMPs (though with a very low frequency) can *co-exist* within a single language. To explain the preference for RIs over IMPs—as evident in child German, for example—S&H appeal to economy considerations and assume movement to be a last resort operation. Since feature checking on the infinitival V can be done at a distance without actually moving the V into the domain of MoodP (by merely underspecifying the intermediate projections), RIs stand out as *more economical* derivations over IMPs, which require the V’s movement to the checker’s domain.

However, as we will see below, S&H’s claim about IMPs being RI-analogues *cannot* be extended to all non-RI/null subject languages. Child SLO IMPs show perfect [Person] and [Number] Agr, allow focalized and topicalized subject and object DPs in pre-IMP positions, and appear in structures with post-IMP clitics, with the clitic climbing onto the IMP V. These facts, which we present in details below, all argue against S&H’s “missing/eliminated functional heads” account for child IMPs in null subject languages.

3. The Study

The present study investigates IMPs in very early child SLO (age 1;3–2;0; mean age: 1;7; MLU 1;4–2;31; mean MLU: 1.94), trying to shed light on the IRIAH. The data for the study are taken from Rus & Chandra (2005), which is part of a larger corpus of child SLO, originally reported in Kranjc (1999). Before turning to child SLO IMPs, let us review some of the crucial morphosyntactic properties of adult SLO IMPs, commonly assumed in the syntactic literature. We review the IMP morphology, subject use, as well as the clitic placement in SLO IMPs, showing that IMPs are full CP–TP–VP clauses with no defective Infl-related projection or defective Infl-related features. This review will serve as the basis for

our argument against the IRIAH. In the subsequent section we then explore these properties in the child system.

4. Adult Slovenian Imperatives

According to traditional descriptive grammar, SLO distinguishes among three moods, namely IND, IMP, and exclamative (Toporišič 2000). The IND and the IMP have *distinct V* morphology. The table below shows the IMP conjugation paradigm, contrasted with the present IND one, which has 9 cells. The IMP has a restriction in allowing only for 2SG, 1DU/PL, and 2DU/PL forms:

Slovenian Imperative Paradigm					
	2SG	1DU	2DU	1PL	2PL
Present Indicative	delajš you-work	delava we two-work	delata you two-work	delamo we work	delate you work
Imperative	delaj you-work!	delajva let us two-work!	delajta you two-work!	delajmo let us three-or more work!	delajte you three-or more work!

On the basis of SLO, Milojević Sheppard & Golden [S&G hereafter] (2002) argue against Platzack & Rosengren's [P&R hereafter] (1997) hypothesis about IMP clauses being tenseless, where the term tenseless is not to be understood merely as non-finite (in which case T would carry a feature [-finite]), but rather as a clause completely lacking the TP projection.¹ What S&G have in mind when arguing against the lack of T in IMPs is that the presence of an overt C (SLO *da*) indicates that there must be a complement clause to the head C, namely a TP. Furthermore, they show that in SLO, the complementizer *da* (just like *that* in English) never c-selects a [-finite] clause, as seen below in (3):

- (3) a. Ukazal mi je, (da) naj delam.
ordered me is (that) *naj* work-1SG PRES IND
'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.'

From the examples above, we see that the *da* c-selects either a [+finite] T (3a) or a [-finite] T (3b). However, it cannot be complemented by an infinitival clause with the presence of the overt *da* (3c).²

Let us now turn to the subject use. In SLO, the syntactic subject in matrix IMPs need not be expressed, just like in English. Syntactically, it is restricted to 2SG, 1DU/PLs and 2DU/PL, as noted above. Semantically, the subject is either the same as the addressee or quantifies over the addressee, again just like in English (Han 2001). Hence, either the hearer addressed by the speaker must be present or one or more persons the action is directed to must be present when the utterance containing an IMP V is uttered. The subjects of SLO IMPs seem to exhibit *the same* syntactic characteristics as the subjects of *finite clauses*: they can bind an anaphor in VP (4a), control the *pro* subject of non-finite complements (4b), and agree with predicatively used adjectives and past participles (4c) in both matrix as well as embedded contexts (cf. S&G 2002):

- (4) a. Kupi si kolo.
buy-2SGIMP *pro* yourself bicycle
'Buy yourself a bicycle!'
- b. Navadita se pospraviti svojo sobo.
get used-2DUIMP *pro* refl *PRO* to clean up your room
'(You-two) get used to clean up your room!'
- c. Bodite previdni v gozdu!
be-2PLIMP *pro* careful-PLMASC in wood
'(You three-or more) be careful in the woods!'

Overt subjects are, of course, possible (either full NPs or pronouns), generally denoting contrast or emphasis:

- (5) Ti si kupi kolo, ne Marija.
you yourself *pro* buy-2SGIMP bicycle not Mary
'You (must) buy yourself a bicycle, not Mary!'³

If we assume that subject Agr features are shared by *pro*—a standard assumption in the literature—then *pro* must be *referential*. This seems to rule out P&R's proposal on the absence of Agr or finiteness in IMP clauses.⁴ From these facts, we conclude that IMPs *cannot* be tenseless clauses and we take them as *tensed forms*, having *the same* structure as *finite clauses* (CP-TP-VP).

SLO is a null subject second position (2P) (Wackernagel) clitic (CL) language with raised IMP Vs preceding the CLs. Though SLO is a language with 2P clitics (6a), pronominal CLs can sometimes be sentence-initial. However, clitics *cannot*

precede the IMP V (*CL+V-IMP) in matrix clauses, where the only possible word order is V-IMP+CL:

- (6) a. *Ga poslušaj, če hočeš.
 him-CL-DAT listen-2SGIMP if want-2SGPRESIND
 ‘Listen to him if you want!’
 b. Poslušaj ga, če hočeš.
 listen-2SGIMP him-CL-DAT if want-2SGPRESIND
 ‘Listen to him if you want!’

In interaction with negation, structures with CLs yield the *Neg+V-FIN+CL* word order. In matrix IMPs, the word order is exactly the same. Hence, as regard to clitic placement, SLO matrix IMPs show *the same* word order as CL placement in IND clauses. The following is the proposed phrase structure for SLO IMPs from Rus (2005)⁵:

- (7) a. [CP [MP V-IMP [TP CL⁰] /matrix clauses/
 b. [CP V-IMP CL [MP ... [TP ...] /matrix clauses w/ V raising/
 c. ... [CP C [MP CL V-IMP [TP ...] /embedded clauses/

Let us now proceed to child Slovenian IMPs in some detail.

5. Imperatives in Child Slovenian

Very early child SLO shows an extremely high number of IMPs (56% of all V forms) and BPs (16.3 % of all V forms), with practically no RIs (<1%), as the table below, taken from Rus & Chandra (2005) shows:

Child Slovenian Verbal Forms				
Sentence Type	IMPs	Past Participles	Finite Vs	Other
Total #	679	197	187	142
%	56.4	16.3	15.5	11.8

Hence, frequency-wise, we confirm S&H’s claims about the frequency of IMPs in null subject languages with rich morphology. However, our data also show perfect [Person] and [Number] Agr, as shown in the following table:

Agreement Correct on Imperative Verbs in Child Slovenian	
Total # IMPs	679
Agr correct	673/679 (99.1%)

We see that there are only six Agr errors in early IMPs in our data. There are three different errors (with different Vs), all of which are phonological reductions of the IMP forms (i.e., generally, base stems without affixes). Compare the children's errors in with the correct adult-like forms on the right in (8) below:

- (8) a. *Pu. (Pusti!) (Katja, 1;11) cf. Pust(i)!⁶
 leave-IMP2SG
 'Leave this/it/me!'
 b. *Maga, ohh! (Pomagaj!) (Lenart, 1;9) cf. Pomagaj!/Pomagi!
 help-IMP2SG
 'Help (me).'
 c. *Dej ne.(Dej, nehaj!) (Kaja, 1;11) cf. Dej, nehaj/nehi!
 give-IMP2SG stop-IMP2SG
 'Come on, stop it.'

Constructions with IMP Vs appear with a number of Vs, both transitive as well as intransitive in various constructions, as seen below:

- (9) a. Glej jih! (Lenart, 1;11)
 look-IMP2SG them.ACC
 'Look at them!'
 b. Čaki! (Vesna, 1;7)
 wait-IMP2SG
 'Wait!'
 d. Noter dej to. (Lenart, 1;11)
 inside put-IMP2SG this
 'Put this inside!'
 e. Tuki makni tole. (Kaja, 1;11)
 here move-IMP2SG this
 'Move this in here!'

We see that IMP constructions appear even in very elaborated structures with Foc and Top DPs and APs (for the issue on "productivity" in terms of IMP morphology, see Rus & Chandra in press).

Overt sentential subjects in IMPs are extremely rare, showing correct target null subject setting. Just like in adult SLO, subjects in child SLO appear when the speaker wants to add emphasis or contrast (cf. (5) above for adult SLO):

- (10) a. Goga, pejt!⁷ (Vesna, 1;7)
 Goga.NOM go-IMP2SG
 'Go, Goga!'

- b. Vesna (d)ej men. (Doroteja, 1;11)
 Vesna.NOM give-IMP2SG me.DAT
 ‘Vesna, give it to me!’

Some constructions show object scrambling, i.e., constructions where the object DP appears in pre-IMP position.⁸ If the IMP raises to C via (M and) T, as assumed in the syntactic literature, then these constructions provide a good piece of evidence that the phrase structure in early IMPs does *not* lack Infl-related projections, and broadly, that the phrase structure contains a complete set of functional projections above VP. In (11) below, we show a couple of examples of object scrambling that appear in our data:

- (11) a. Tole pokaž. (Katja, 1;11)
 this.ACC show-IMP2SG
 ‘Show me this!’
 b. Bončka jej. (Tomaž, 1;11)
 candy.ACC eat-IMP2SG
 ‘Eat the candy!’

There are a couple of cases with reflexive CLs, such as the following:

- (12) Se obuj teta. (Vesna, 1;7)
 refl put on shoes-IMP2SG auntie.NOM
 ‘Put on your shoes, auntie/woman!’

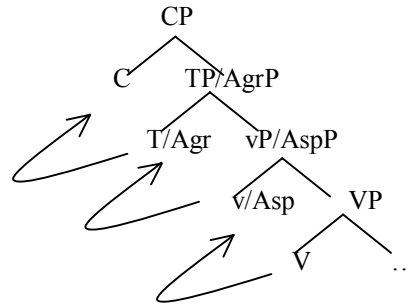
Morphologically, the CLs in IMPs are correctly-inflected for case and correctly-placed in post-IMP position (for more examples, see Rus & Chandra in press):

- (13) Biba, biba, lej jo. (Katja, 1;10)
 creepy-crawley.NOM look-IMP2SG it.ACCFEMSG
 ‘Creepy-crawley, look at it!’

6. Child Slovenian Imperatives: A Reanalysis

The data presented in the previous section unveils the overgeneralization eminent in the IRIAH. *Not all* null subject languages with rich morphology will exhibit IMPs as RI-analogues (if this is the right analogy after all!), child SLO being a prime example in this regard, where IMPs abound, but appear with rich and correct morphological marking. We take this as strong evidence against the IRIAH and propose (14) as the structural representation for Child SLO IMPs:

(14)



We assume that CP has an irrealis/mood feature that must be checked obligatorily by V-raising. This is accomplished by successive-cyclic movement of the V via v/Asp and T/Agr heads, which also explains correct Agr facts. Note that our analysis also assumes a locality constraint on feature checking—there must be no intervening heads between C and the V. The IMP V's movement to T/Agr to check the phi-features on the latter places it in a local relation to C, whereby it undergoes further movement into it, checking and deleting the target's uninterpretable feature in the process.⁹ Our analysis has two immediate advantages. First, it adequately captures the Agr facts in child SLO, and second, it is explanatorily more desirable, as it undermines superfluous operations like TP/AgrP/AspP underspecification in child grammars.

6. Conclusion

The presence of T/Agr suffixes, the use of pronominal and reflexive clitics, topicalized/focalized DPs, post-verbal object clitics and scrambled object DPs in pre-verbal positions in constructions with finite Vs have all been taken in the field to be evidence for a complete set of functional projections in both adult and child grammatical systems. SLO IMPs show all these properties. Independently, it has also been argued in the syntactic literature that on the basis of word order facts with clitics, Agr morphology, as well as subjects, SLO IMPs are fully-fledged clauses rather than structures with defective T/Agr. Hence we cannot but conclude that Slovenian children IMPs are perfect analogues of their adult counterparts. These facts argue against Salustri & Hyams' (2003) hypothesis that IMPs are nonfinite structures, analogous to RIs.

Notes

¹ P&R state: “*Imperatives do not seem to be related to time (...), so we assume that there is no tense-feature in their lexical entry and hence no TP*” (italics ours).

² IMPs as full CP–TP clauses also occur in embedded contexts in SLO (cf. Rus 2005). These are not crucial for the present study as our data contain no embedded examples.

³ The same restrictions apply in embedded IMPs, where there are no speaker–hearer restrictions like in matrix clauses, but the IMP subjects still show the same restrictions as those in matrix IMPs, i.e., they must be 2SG, 1DU/PL, or 2DU/PL (cf. Rus 2005).

⁴ P&R explicitly claim that subject Agr (and Asp) features are *unrelated to finiteness* and that would mean that in the system we are proposing, the subject Agr features have *no* referential role. This seems to be counterintuitive to standard assumptions of reference between subject Agr features and *pro*, though we leave this issue aside here (cf. also S&G).

⁵ This approach assumes that all IMPs check IMP morphology via V–to–M movement in both matrix and subordinate clauses. In matrix clauses only, the movement can be longer, with the V moving all the way to C⁰. This operation may arise for independent reasons, e.g., when a CL is in P1 position in [Spec, CP] with the IMP V in C⁰, or when there is a phrase in P1 providing a host for a clitic in P2 as a consequence of the Wackernagel effect. The CL in both cases climbs together with the V and adjoins to C.

⁶ The forms in brackets are the ones that the investigator recorded in the original transcription, indicating that the context required the IMP form. The V *pustiti* (leave, stop) has *pusti* as the perfective form and *puščaj* as the imperfective one. Some SLO Vs have two distinct IMP forms, one ending in *-i* and one in *-aj/-ej* for 2SG, though most Vs only have the *-aj/ej* form. Moreover, in colloquial SLO the *-i* in *pusti* (consonant cluster + *-i*) is not pronounced in some dialects.

⁷ *pejt* is a colloquial/dialectal form of *pojdi*, the IMP form of *iti*, ‘to go’. Some Vs have irregular IMP morphology.

⁸ Interestingly, the same (non–adult) word order is attested in constructions with finite Vs and bare participles (Rus in print; Rus & Chandra 2005), indicating the presence of a complete set of functional heads above the VP (i.e., CP–TP/AgrP).

⁹ This analysis is also consistent with the phrase structure and technology proposed in Rus (2005) for adult SLO IMPs, though Rus assumes that IMP Vs need not move all the way to C, but must move at least to MoodP to check off/license morphological mood, where MoodP immediately dominates TP. Hence, the technology adopted there is the same (i.e., resting on successive cyclic movement).

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