Imperative Fragments and Speech Acts

Why are Imperative Fragments Limited in their Possible Speech Acts?
PLC 2026

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March 1, 2026

Overview

1. Introduction
2. Command Fragment Properties
3. Homogeneity Across Languages
4. Command Prosody
5. Outstanding Questions: Ellipsis
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Clause-Type Systems

Sadock & Zwicky (1985) point out that, given a random language, there is a high likelihood of finding a closed clause-type system like the following.

(1) a. You caught the speckled geese. (Declarative)
b. Did you catch the speckled geese? (Yes-no question)
c. Catch the speckled geese! (Imperative)

Verbless Imperative Fragments

The vast majority of attention has been paid to canonical imperatives like in (1c). Natural languages, however, are filled with fragmentary utterances that can be used with imperative-like force.

(2)
a. Enough!
b. Silence!
c. Feet on the floor!
d. No hippos in the pool!
e. Not another word!
f. Ticket, please.
g. Out of my sight!
h. Gentlemen, to bed!

Range of Uses Available to Canonical Imperatives

Imperatives are most typically associated with the speech act COMMAND. Canonical imperatives participate in a range of uses other than COMMAND, however (Davies, 1986; Kaufmann, 2012; Condoravdi & Lauer, 2012; Schmerling, 1982).

(3) a. Get out of my sight! (Command)
b. Take a cookie, if you like. (Permission)
c. Please don't rain tomorrow! (Wish)
d. Take two in the morning and one before bed. (Advice)

Inhomogeneity in Imperatives

This issue makes providing a consolidated analysis (similar to the one provided for modals by Kratzer 1981) challenging. For example, (4a) is most likely to be evaluated w.r.t *necessity* and (4b) is most likely to be evaluated w.r.t *possibility*. Kaufmann (2012) dubs this issue *the problem of quantificational inhomogeneity*.

(4) a. Get out of my sight!
$\Box$ get out(addressee, my sight)

b. Take a cookie, (if you like).
$\Diamond$ take(addressee, cookie)

Homogeneity in Fragment Imperatives

Despite the inhomogeneity of canonical imperatives, most fragments are homogeneous and only usable as commands.

(5) a. Books off the shelf! (Command)
b. Figurines in the mailbox! (#Wish)
c. #Books off the shelf, if you like. (Permission)
d. A: How do I avoid a lawsuit?
B: Hands to yourself. (#Advice)

Distinct Forces?

Given the differences in potential forces between the utterance types, it might be appealing to argue that they are distinct, albeit similar, constructions.

(6) a. Take a hike! (Canonical Imperative)
□ / ◊ take(addressee, a hike)

b. Books onto the shelf! (Fragment)
□ / *◊ put(addressee, books, on the shelf)

Despite this tempting possibility, the evidence leads me to believe that the fragments are derived from full CIs.

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Goal Commands

One type of fragment command is a *goal command*. Goal Commands are fragment commands with an optional theme (*feet* in 7a) and an obligatory goal (*on the floor* in 7a).

(7) a. Feet on the floor!
b. Hands where I can see them!
c. Chin up!
d. Out of my sight!

Across Languages

Goal commands appeared in nearly every language in a small sample, with some variation in case marking, word order, etc.

(8) a. Qo'l-lar stol-da!
hand-Pl table-Loc
'Hands on the table!' (Uzbek)

b. Lichi-ta refrigeradura-pi!
milk-Acc fridge-Loc
'Milk into the fridge!' (Southern Quechua)

c. Ton anaptira sto rafi!
the.Acc lighter.Acc on.the shelf
'Lighter onto the shelf!' (Greek)

Pragmatic Update

Goal Commands obligate the addressee in a way seemingly identical to canonical imperatives.

(9) a. Books off the shelf! → The *addressee* must make the books be off the shelf.

b. (You) be careful now! → The *addressee* must be careful.

Syntactic Subject

Syntactic binding also supports a 2nd person subject, as they do for canonical imperatives. 1P and 3P reflexive pronouns produce a Condition A violation (10a), and non-reflexive 2P pronouns produce a Condition B violation (10b).

(10) a. Hands off yourselves / *myself/ *himself / *themselves!

b. Hands off *you / me!

(11) a. Paint yourself / *myself / *himself / *themselves!

b. Paint *you / me!

Imperative Tags

Tags are also possible with fragment commands, but the subject of the tag is always 2nd person, and does not match noun that is expressed overtly.

(12) Hands off the table, won't you? / *won't I? / *won't they? / *isn't there? / *isn't it?

(13) Pass me the salt, won't you? / *won't I? / *won't they? / *isn't there? / *isn't it?

Taken in tandem, these facts strongly suggest that the fragment commands are derived from full canonical morphosyntactic imperatives.

Interim Summary

- Goal Commands appear to be derived from canonical imperatives.
- The possible speech acts are reduced between the canonical imperative and the fragment.

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Inhomogeneity in Canonical Imperatives

In a small sample, every language exhibited some inhomogeneity for canonical imperatives.

(14) a. Kitob-lar-ni shkaf-ga qo'y!
book-Pl-Acc shelf-Dat put.Imp
'Put the books on the shelf!' (command)

b. Iltimos, chiroyli bo'l!
please handsome be.Imp
'Please be handsome!' (wish)

c. Meva-dan ol, xohlasang.
fruit-Abl take.Imp, if.you.want
'Take some fruit, if you want.' (permission) (Uzbek)

Homogeneity in Goal Commands Across Languages

(15) a. #Qo'l-lar stol-da, xohlasang!
hand-Pl table-Loc if.you.want
'Hands on the table, if you want!' (Uzbek)

b. #Lichi-ta refrigeradura-pi, muna-qti-yki-qa!
milk-Acc fridge-Loc want-if-you-Top
'Milk into the fridge, if you want!' (Southern Quechua)

c. #Ton anaptira sto rafi, an theleis!
the.Acc lighter.Acc on.the shelf if you.like.2sg
'Lighter on the shelf, if you like.' (Greek)

A Solution for Traditional Imperatives

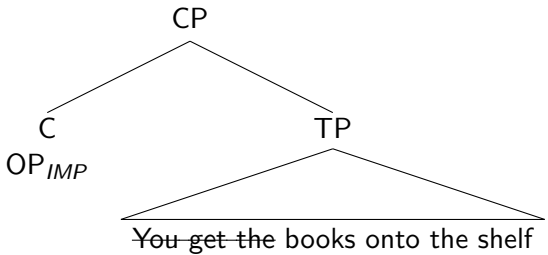
Following Condoravdi & Lauer (2012) and Kaufmann (2012), Oikonomou (2016) analyzes imperatives as having a covert operator that has a fundamentally *existential* force, as in (4b) above.

(16) $[\![\text{Imp}]\!]^{w,c} = \lambda q \in D_{<st>}.\ \exists w' \in W$ such that S_c's desires in w with respect to the A_c's actions are satisfied in w' & $q(w') = 1$

This operator is strengthened via exhaustification over alternatives by default to accommodate the very common *universal* interpretations, as in COMMANDS.

The Problem

(17)



Leaving aside how exactly this structure is elided, we cannot properly restrict the uses.

The Puzzle

How then, can we handle the fact that the canonical imperatives have a range of functions and quantificational forces that the fragments lack?

- There is a lot of evidence that the fragments are derived from full canonical imperatives with a verb.
- However, the operator used to generate the meaning of these canonical imperatives appears to overgenerate when applied to fragments.
- Idea: If we could tie the fragmentation to the exhaustification, we could explain the co-occurrence.

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Prosody

Some recent work has shown that different uses of imperatives can be accompanied by different sentence level prosodic contours (Oikonomou (2016) for Greek; McClay et al. (2023) for English). McClay et al. (2023) argue that there could be prosodic morphemes that condition the uses of each quantificational force in English.

(18) a. Have a cookie! ↓ (command, advice)
b. Have a cookie. ↑ (permission)

Prosody affects uses

In actual usage, certain uses of imperatives are not compatible with certain prosodies.

(19) a. ???Have a cookie, if you like! ↓ (command, advice)

b. Have a cookie. ↑ (*command)

Exhaustifying Morpheme

If the prosodic morpheme associated with COMMAND had the semantics of exhaustification (Zimmermann, 2000; Kaufmann, 2012), then its combination with the imperative operator would be limited to COMMAND usage. Following Oikonomou (2016)'s analysis of the exhaustivity operator in imperatives, I argue that this prosodic morpheme has the following semantics.

(20) $[\![\text{CommPros}]\!]^w = 1$ iff $[\![\text{S}]\!]^w = 1$ and $\forall \phi \in \text{ALT}(\phi(\text{w})) = 1 \rightarrow ([\![\text{S}]\!] \subseteq \phi)$

Consequence: Obligatory Exhaustification

This means that command prosody is obligatorily associated with exhaustification, and is not compatible with *anti-exhaustifiers*, unlike canonical imperatives.

(21) A: What's one way to stop smoking?
B: Stop buying cigarettes for example.

(22) A: What's one way to tidy up?
B: #For example, books on the shelf.

Immediacy

Canonical imperatives are evaluated w.r.t. to some future time, but fragment commands can only be interpreted in the *immediate* future.

(23) Hands up immediately / (#tomorrow)!

(24) #Kitob-lar(-ni) shkaf-ga, ertaga!
book-Pl-Acc shelf-Loc tomorrow
'Books on the shelf, tomorrow!' (Uzbek)

Prosody and Immediacy

(25) Hand me that pen tomorrow when you arrive.↑ (Can be interpreted as command situated in the non-immediate future)

(26) Hand me that pen!↓ (Can only be interpreted as command situated in the immediate future)

(27) ??Hand me that pen tomorrow!↓

Futurity in Imperatives

If this is on the right track, then English prosodic morphemes are analogous to non-prosodic morphemes in other languages.

(28) Classical Latin

a. Duc me ad eum, obsecro.
lead.Imp me to him please
'Take me to him, please.' (Terence, The Self-Tormentor, Act 3)

b. Si vi-m faci-et, in ius duc-ito homin-em.
if force-Acc do-Fut.3Sg in law.Acc lead-Fut.Imp man-Acc
'If he does anything by force, bring him to justice.'
(Terence, The Eunuch, Act 4)

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Ellipsis?

One outstanding question is whether or not the fragments are derived via the full imperatives via ellipsis.

(29) ~~Get your~~ feet onto the floor!

If so, it's not a normal ellipsis process.

Another Unusual Property

Fragment commands do not permit certain material that might be expected on their edges.

(30) a. *You hands off the table!
b. *Not hands off the table!
c. *Quickly hands off the table!

...that seems to hold across (at least some) languages

(31) *Hon-o tana-ni hayaku!
book-Acc shelf-Loc quickly
Intended: 'Books on the shelf quickly!' (Japanese)

(32) *Hemen kitap-lar raf-a!
quickly book-Pl shelf-Dat!
Intended: 'Quickly books on the shelf!' (Turkish)

(33) ???Meli-ey son ppalli!
head-Loc hand quickly
'Hands on your head quickly!' (Korean)

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Epistemic Uncertainty and GPs

Epistemic Uncertainty seems to lack modality with GPs.

(34) No smoking allowed in the bar! $\rightarrow$ Speaker believes both (There will be smoking in the bar) and (There will not be smoking in the bar) to be possible.

There is no epistemic uncertainty over the status of the rule with a felicitous GP, but rather about addressee behavior.

GPs Have the Same Range

The same range of uses is available to both imperatives and GPs. I argue that this is best represented by their meaning coming from the same source.

(35) a. No smoking in the pool room! (Command / Warning)
b. Fine, no washing your hands before dinner then. (Concession)[1]
c. Please no raining tomorrow! (Wish)
d. No rubbing the infected area. (Advice)

[1] Concession seems to be the most controversial of these, in terms of robustness of judgments. The intended context is something like:

(1) A: Remember to wash your hands before dinner!
B: I don't need to, they aren't dirty!
A: Fine no washing your hands then, see if I care when you get sick!

Whimperatives

Going back to Sadock (1970), "whimperatives" have been considered a problem for theories of clause types.

(36) Why don't you be quiet!

It has been argued that an utterance like (36) is interrogative (Green, 1975). Curiously, however, do-support is not triggered. The contrast between (36) and (37) is clear.

(37) Why aren't you quiet?

Latin whimperatives

(38) a. quin omitt-e me!
WHY.NOT LET.GO-IMP ME.ACC
'Why don't you leave me alone?' (Terence, Phormio, Act 3)

b. quin tu aud-i!
WHY.NOT YOU.NOM LISTEN-IMP
'Why don't you listen?' (Plautus, Bacchides, Act 2, Sc. 3)

c. quin ego hunc agred-ior de ill-a?
WHY.NOT I.NOM HE.ACC CONFRONT-1SG ABOUT HER-ABL
'Why don't I confront him about her?' (Plautus, Mercator, Act 2, Sc. 3)

Kaufmann 2012

Schwager (2006); Kaufmann (2012) argues that the imperative operator is essentially a necessity modal that comes along with a series of presuppositions that ensure imperatives are sufficiently performative.

(39) $[\![\text{IMP}]\!]^c$ [[There is no smoking allowed]] $\approx$ There should be no smoking allowed!

- Non-past Constraint
- Authority Condition
- Epistemic Uncertainty
- Ordering Source Restriction

Keshet and Medeiros 2019

Keshet & Medeiros (2019) argue that we can separate the modality of the operator from the presuppositions of (Kaufmann, 2012) to account for the distribution of Imperative-and-Declarative Conjunctions.

(40) a. OP_{IMP} [ModP][TP]

b. OP_{IMP} [$\text{ModP}_{priority}$][TP Leave!]

c. OP_{IMP} [ModP_{future}][TP Take the A train, and you'll be there after dark.]

IaDs have accessible TVs

(41) a. A: Take the A Train, and you'll be there after dark. (IaD)
B: That's not true, I'll never get there taking the A train!

b. A: If you take the A train, you'll be there after dark. (Conditional)
B: That's not true, I'll never get there taking the A train!

(42) a. A: Take another step and I'll shoot.
B: You're lying.

b. A: If you take another step, I'll shoot.
B: You're lying.

Truth Values and Imperatives

(43) a. OP_{IMP} [ModP allowed][TP There is no smoking!] (TVs accessible)

b. OP_{IMP} [ModP MOD_{future}][TP Take the A train, and you'll be there after dark.]

(TVs accessible)

c. OP_{IMP} [ModP $MOD_{priority}$][TP Paint these walls!]

(TVs inaccessible)

It is not the imperative operator that blocks truth values, but its combination with a priority modal. Under this conception, the fact that GPs have accessible TVs is not unexpected. "Allowed" fulfills the requirement to have ModP filled by a modal element.