Imperatives and their left periphery

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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 new light on the syntax-semantic properties of imperative clauses from a cartographic perspective and improve our understanding on discourse-related categories and their role in conversational dynamics (specifically, the connection between different types of Topics/Foci and illocutionary Force; cf. Krifka 2007, Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010).

2. Describing the picture: The association of Topics and Foci with imperatives. Assuming Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl's (2007) interface distinction between Aboutness-Shift (A-)Topics, Contrastive (C-)Topics and Familiar/Given (G-)Topics, it appears that the semantic and discourse properties of A-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 A-Topics can be explained by the fact that this operator must take scope over the proposition. As argued in Bianchi & Frascarelli (2010), an A-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./ Tirala, 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 suggestion that in English G-Topics are realized through destressing.

As for foci, a Mirative Focus (MF) totally 'clashes' with the imperative mood (compare declarative (6a) with (6b) from Italian), while Contrastive Focus (CF) is unproblematic 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! / ¡Bébete 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.

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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.
Based on the results provided by an interface investigation of elicited data and original interpretive questionnaires, this paper will show that imperative is a *mood* (not an independent illocutionary force) and, as such, it is encoded in a dedicated functional projection in the split-IP area. Furthermore, it is argued that the imperative mood is dependent on a 'hidden' illocutionary force that is activated in a matrix 'silent clause', including featural information about speaker and hearer (thus implementing works by Speas & Tenny 2003, Haegeman & Hill 2010 and Miyagawa 2012, a.o.). Specifically, the imperative mood is activated via an Agree relation with Fin°, where an imperative operator is located. In other words, resuming Ross' (1970) original 'performative hypothesis', it is proposed that imperatives are *subordinate clauses,* thus accounting for their reduced left periphery and that consequent unavailability of root-connected discourse categories that implement a conversational move.

The inactivation of an independent Force can explain why imperatives block the realization of A-Topics and MF, still allowing for C-Topics, G-Topics and CF. Intonational evidence is provided, examining the different discourse-related categories associated with true and 'disguised' imperatives, in a comparative approach across the three languages examined.

Selected References
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