Commands: a cross-linguistic view

Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald

Language and Culture Research Centre, James Cook University

1 On non-linguistic parameters in grammar: setting the scene

Some linguistic categories show more correlations with cultural values, social hierarchies and their conceptualization than others. Genders, noun classes and classifiers tend to mirror social and cultural stereotypes and patterns of human perception. Language planning, political correctness and societal changes may play a role in shaping up gender and classifier systems. Meanings encoded within possessive structures often reflect relationships within a society, and change if the society changes. Underlying social institutions, hierarchies, concepts and attitudes may correlate with the expression of possession. Geographical features of a terrain — such as a hilly, or a riverine environment — are often reflected in demonstrative systems.¹

In every language one can make a statement, ask a question or tell someone what to do. This is the essence of three major types of speech acts — declarative, interrogative, and imperative. The ways in which people communicate, and specifically get one another to do things — via orders, pleas, entreaties and other directives — correlate with social conventions, existing hierarchies, and even kinship systems. These may include the relationships between the speaker and the addressee, their age and social status, the conventions appropriate for a particular genre and many more features.

This workshop focuses on the form and the function of commands (or directive speech acts), their interrelationship with cultural stereotypes and practices, and their origins and development, especially in the light of language contact under different circumstances.

¹ Correlations between possession and cultural parameters are addressed in Aikhenvald and Dixon (2013); see Aikhenvald (2015: Chapter 14) on how cultural parameters are reflected in other categories.
Our aim is to get a glimpse into how languages differ, and why — through areal diffusion and contact, genetic inheritance, social and cultural environment, and universal features of human communication.

2 Imperatives and commands

A tripartite division of major speech acts is reflected in their linguistic form. This division is subsumed under the concept of 'mood'. The form of a statement is declarative, and that of a question is interrogative. A command corresponds to the imperative mood. Just as there can be covert questions, one can express a command without using a dedicated form.

It is not uncommon for a linguistic term to have a counterpart in the real world. The idea of 'time' in the real world translates into 'tense' when expressed in a language. 'Time' is what our watch shows and what often passes too quickly; 'tense' is a grammaticalised set of forms we have to use in a particular language. Not every time distinction acquires grammatical expression in the language: the possibilities for time are unlimited, and for tense they are limited. Along similar lines, 'evidentiality' is a linguistic category whose real-life counterpart is information source. Similarly, an 'imperative' is a category in the language, while a 'command' is a parameter in the real world. Languages of the world have limited means of expressing imperatives. The possibilities for commands are immense, and open-ended.

Figure 1 Grammatical categories and their 'real world' counterparts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammatical Category</th>
<th>Its counterpart in the real world</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tense</td>
<td>time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gender</td>
<td>sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evidential</td>
<td>information source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imperative</td>
<td>command</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the day-to-day English usage, the adjective, and the noun, imperative, have a similar meaning, to do with 'commanding'. A bossy woman talks 'in a quick imperative tone'. It is

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2 This paper is based on Aikhenvald (2010), a source which contains further examples and details on imperatives and commands.
'imperative' that a scholar 'check their quotations'. Being imperative implies demanding obedience, execution, action, obligatory — The situation makes it imperative that you should return at once and The work is quite imperative, and its result will be most beneficial. Philosophers talk about 'the unconditional imperative of the moral law'.

The opposite — negative imperative, or prohibitive — implies trying to make someone not do something, having the effect of forbidding, preventing, or excluding; preventative or restrictive of something. Prices may be prohibitive, if they are too high.

'Imperative' and 'command' (or directive speech act) do not always refer to the same thing. Go away! is a command, and is imperative in form. But I can say the same thing jokingly to someone without meaning to chase them away — this will be reflected in my tone of voice or intonation. And one can command without using an imperative. A question Why don't you go away?, or a stern statement You will go away, or just one word Away! serve the same purpose.

Imperatives may cover entreaties and requests: Let me go to the party! and Try and behave! Advice and instructions are often cast in the form of an imperative — Don't repeat other people's mistakes! or Mix two spoonfuls of water with flour. Imperatives may also express invitations: Meet the Joneses! Or principles and life mottos: Publish or perish!

Or they may have an 'anti-command', or a mock-command meaning. A 'recipe for disaster' may be cast in an imperative. A spoofy passage on how to destroy your festive season contains mock commands — which tell you what not to do unless you want your Christmas time to turn into a disaster: Drive to somewhere terrible for a holiday. Stay in three motels with plumbing that gargles and screams all night. Break out in acne. Get food poisoning (from Börjars and Burridge 2001: 130).

Conditions, threats and ultimatums may be cast in the form of an imperative: Buy from that shop and you will regret it, or Be quiet or I'll send you to bed. Saying Take care! or Fare thee well! are not commands; these are conventional speech formulae, part of our linguistic repertoire.
Imperative forms in English (and perhaps in many other languages with just one dedicated imperative) are versatile in their meanings (see also Huddleston 2002: 929-31, Davies 1986). As Jespersen (1928: 467) put it, they may 'range from brutal commands through many intermediate steps (demands, injunctions, implorations, invitations) to the most modest and humble prayer (entreaty, supplication).'

In many languages imperatives stand clearly apart from other clause types in their grammatical properties. Imperative mood is the commonest way of expressing commands, and a multitude of related meanings, in the languages of the world. In some languages, imperatives may give the impression of simplicity in form. In other languages, they can also be dauntingly complex.

Non-imperative forms — statements, questions, exclamations — are frequently co-opted to express varied overtones of command-like meanings, intruding into the imperative domain. We will be referring to these as command strategies.

One does not need an imperative to express a command. A glance, a gesture, or a picture can do the job. Some pictorial command strategies are (note the red colour as an additional mark of warning and prohibition):

- Figure 1. 'Don't use phones'
- Figure 2. No smoking
- Figure 3. Don’t drink tap water
- Figure 4. 'Don’t bring food or drink into the room'
3 Canonical and non-canonical imperatives

The most straightforward command is that directed to the addressee. An imperative always implies a command to second person. Such addressee-oriented, or 'canonical', imperatives (in a 'narrow sense') may stand apart from other verbal forms in a language. They are commonly expressed by the bare root, or stem of the verb. The shortest word in Latin, *iū 'you (sg) go!*' is the second person singular imperative of the verb *īre 'go'. Such short and snappy forms may give an impression of superficial simplicity — as if the imperatives were, in some sense, poor relations of their declarative and interrogative counterparts. This simplicity is often a mere illusion, as we will show throughout this paper, and throughout the workshop.

Imperatives may be oriented towards other persons — third person and first person. In agreement with Aikhenvald (2010), we call them 'non-canonical' imperatives.

All imperative forms may form one paradigm — this is what justifies considering them together. An example in Table 1 comes from Yemsa, an Omotic language from Ethiopia (Zaugg-Coretti 2009: 136-7). The second person singular form is the shortest of all and the least formally marked. All plural imperatives (except for first person) bear a plural marker.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSON</th>
<th>SG</th>
<th>PL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>kāssū-nā</td>
<td>kāssū-nī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>kāssū</td>
<td>kāssū-sō-tī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Polite</td>
<td>kāssū-nī</td>
<td>kāssū-sō-nī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 feminine</td>
<td>kāssū-n</td>
<td>kāssū-sō-n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 masculine</td>
<td>kāssū-wó</td>
<td>kāssū-sō-wó</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Polite</td>
<td>kāssū-tō</td>
<td>kāssū-sō-tō</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Mauwake (a Papuan language of the Madang province), canonical and non-canonical imperatives are marked with suffixes and form one paradigm. Berghäll (2010: 132-3) explicitly states that there is 'no valid reason to divide them' into different categories based on
person. The imperative markers which attach to a verb in Mauwake are in Table 2 (Berghäll 2010: 133).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSON AND NUMBER</th>
<th>SUFFIXES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 dual</td>
<td>-u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 plural</td>
<td>-ikua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 singular</td>
<td>-e(-a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 plural</td>
<td>-eka (aka)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 singular</td>
<td>-inok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 plural</td>
<td>-uk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alternatively, non-addressee-oriented imperatives may stand apart from the addressee-oriented ones in their expression. In Dolakha Newar, a Tibeto-Burman language from Nepal (Genetti 2007: 337-41, 179-86), dedicated imperative forms are restricted to canonical addressee-oriented imperative. They have distinct forms for singular and plural addressee.

(1) jana mica ya-ŋ Dolakha Newar
    1sgGENITIVE daughter take-IMPV.SG:TRANSITIVE
    'Take my daughter!'

(2) chipe thau thau chê o-n Dolakha Newar
    2sgGENITIVE REFL REFL house go-IMPV.PL:INTRANSITIVE
    'Go each to your own house!'

A special construction is used for first person inclusive commands: the marker -lau attaches to the infinitive form of the verb, as in (3):

(3) u=ri thijin kā-i-lau Dolakha Newar
    this=INDICATIVE I INC.ERG take-INFINITIVE-I PL
    'Let's take this one!'
To issue a command to a third person, optative is used — as in (4):

(4) tha-hat
    OPTATIVE-speak
    'May he speak'

The major meaning of the optative is expressing a wish that something should happen.

Optative can only occur with first and second person if the action is not volitional.

Many traditional linguistic terminologies employ different terms for different person values of imperative. The most frequent ones are hortative or cohortative for first person, and jussive for third person, reserving 'imperative' just for second person. We saw, in (1)-(4) from Dolakha Newar, that first and third person imperatives may be formed differently from second-person imperatives, and not form a single paradigm. Second person imperatives are primarily commands. In contrast, first person imperatives may develop overtones of suggestion or permission, and third person commands shade into the expression of indirect, mediated wishes.

However, this 'splitter' approach (which ultimately stems from Indo-European and Semitic languages) is unsatisfactory for two reasons.

(i) Firstly, such a convention makes it awkward for analysing languages where all person values of an imperative form one paradigm, as exemplified in Table 1, for Yemsa.

(ii) Secondly, such tripartite analysis would be at variance with the analysis of other clause types. No grammar would use one label for first person declarative or interrogative, another one for second person, and yet another one for third.
4 Non-imperative forms in lieu of imperatives

Just a few languages of the world have a special verbal form for the interrogative mood. Most languages have a dedicated set of imperative forms. But others do not. Another verbal category is then 'coopted' to express an imperative. A command and a non-command meaning of the same form will be distinguished by context, and by prosodic and other clues (intonation, or an eye-gaze).

A declarative verb marked for imperfective aspect is a conventional way of expressing commands in the absence of dedicated command forms in Athabascan languages. The sentence in (5), from the Hare dialect of Slave, is ambiguous (Rice 1989: 1109):

(5) ?åradīla
    
    you.sg.IMPERFECTIVE.go.home
    'You (sg) go home!'
    'You (sg) are going home'

The two meanings can presumably be differentiated by intonation.

This usage reminds us of a cross-linguistic tendency to use declarative clauses as an option for directive speech acts. In many languages, including English, saying You are going home now can be understood as a stern command. In English, a language with a specialised imperative, this directive use of a non-directive verb form is part of a plethora of command strategies (see §7). A primarily non-directive form can be employed as a conventionalised command; this is a typical path for the development of dedicated imperatives.

A language may have a dedicated imperative form just for second person singular. A second person plural imperative is 'coopted' from another set of verbal forms. In Supyire, a Gur language from Mali (Carlson 1994: 520-6), the dedicated imperative which consists of

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3 In languages lacking a special set of imperative-only forms, commands can also be expressed with present tense forms or forms unmarked for tense; future forms, forms of various modalities or with irrealis; see Aikhenvald (2010: 38-44).
the verb root without a subject marker or auxiliary can only be used to command one person, as in (6):

(6) Lwɔhɔ  kan  náhá  
water  give  here

'Shake me some water' (lit. Give water here)

Using special non-declarative forms of personal pronouns is a feature of commands to second and first person (Carlson 1994: 151-4). Non-declarative pronouns are also used in questions. Statements always require declarative pronouns. This feature alerts us to a potential opposition between declarative and non-declarative speech acts in their form — something we could explore throughout the Workshop.

The subjunctive form (also used in adverbial and complement clauses) is used to command second person plural addressees:

(7) Yìi  à  wá!  
you.PL  SUBJUNCTIVE.IMPERFECTIVE  go

'Go' (you plural)

The subjunctive form with second person singular addressee is used in polite commands with a second person singular addressee, as in (8):

(8) Ma  a  ma!  
you.NONDECLARATIVE  SUBJUNCTIVE.IMPERFECTIVE  come

'Come, please!'

The same form is employed in non-canonical imperatives directed at first plural, and to third person — an example is in (9) (Carlson 1994: 525):
The members of an imperative paradigm may overlap with other, non-imperative forms, in their formal expression. In Italian, the second person singular imperative is identical to the third person singular present indicative for verbs of the first conjugation, e.g. *canta! 'sing!*, *canta* 'he/she sings', or second person singular present indicative, for verbs of other conjugations, e.g. *dormi! 'sleep!*, *dormi* 'you sleep'. First person plural imperative is always identical to the first person plural present indicative, e.g. *cantiamo! 'let's sing*, *cantiamo* 'we sing'. The second person plural imperative has the same form as the second person plural present indicative, e.g. *cantate! 'you pl sing!*, *cantate* 'you sing'. In contrast, third person imperative (singular and plural) is expressed by using subjunctive form, e.g. *canti! 'May she sing! Sing (singular polite)*, *cantino! 'May they sing! Sing (plural polite)* (Maiden and Robustelli 2007: 247-8). These overlaps have led some scholars to argue that Italian has no imperatives, and that the imperative is parasitic on other forms. There is however one thing they miss out — the special intonation and other suprasegmental clues that make sure that the addressee will distinguish a command from a statement or a wish.

5 Imperatives, their grammar, and meanings

Imperatives are often easy to recognise by the way they sound. In Warekena, an Arawak language from Northwest Amazonia, a declarative clause has a flat intonation; imperative clauses — which have the same segmental make up — show falling intonation on the last word. Imperatives in Bariai, an Austronesian language of New Britain (Papua New Guinea: Gallagher and Baehr 2005: 140), are identical in form to statements, but may be pronounced with higher volume and/or pitch.
Imperatives may differ from other clause types in terms of their number and person meanings. In Mauwake (a Papuan language of the Madang province), the imperative has just a dual form in the first person, and no singular. There is no dual number elsewhere in the language (Berghäll 2010: 133). A first person plural command in Russian has an inclusive overtone, as noted by N. S. Trubetzkoy in his 1931 letter to Jakobson (1985: 224-5).

The meaning of number in imperatives may differ from their declarative counterpart. In Russian, a singular second person imperative form can be addressed to an 'undifferentiated multitude' of people, e.g. Stoj, rebjata! 'Stop, folks!', while a plural second person imperative form is always addressed to many individuals, e.g. Stoj-te! 'Stand-pl' (as pointed out by N. S. Trubetzkoy in Jakobson 1985: 225).

Imperatives may differ from their interrogative and declarative counterparts in the way grammatical relations are expressed. As Jespersen (1928: 222) points out, 'the express indication of the subject (the second person) is generally superfluous with an imperative' in English (while it is required in clauses of other types). One usually says just Take your time! or Close the door! Adding the second person subject has a specific effect: it may have a patronising effect, as in You take your time, or reflect an 'attitude of impatient hearer-directed anger on the part of the addressee', as in You close the door (Schmerling 1975: 502). The exact meaning depends on the context and the intonation: it appears, however, that, by using second person pronoun, in many instances the speaker is 'laying claim to a certain authority over his addressee' (Davies 1986: 147).4

Omission of subject pronouns in imperatives is far from universal. In Mauwake subject pronouns are often omitted in declarative and interrogative clauses, but included in

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4 Further examples of special marking of grammatical relations in imperatives, from Estonian, Finnish and a selection of Uto-Aztecan and Australian languages, are in Aikhenvald (2010: 145-7). A summary of imperative and person in English and references are in Aikhenvald (2010: 66-75). Imperatives may have a special constituent order.
imperatives. Berghäll (2010: 82, 104) estimates that 39 per cent of imperative clauses contain an overt personal pronoun (as against 6 per cent in statements).

Imperatives may have aspectual distinctions — typically, fewer than declaratives. The most common aspect is continuous. In Yidiñ, an Australian language, it is marked with the suffix -\textit{ji-n} 'continuous action', and involves a command to 'continue an action that is already in progress' (Dixon 1977: 371, 291 and p.c.):

(10) \textit{mand-i: gala-bujun gali-\textit{ja}-\textit{ji-n jaba:n-gu} Yidiñ}  
\textit{hand-LOC spear-STILL go-COMIT-CONT+IMPV eel-PURP}  
'Keep going, with your spear still in your hand, for eels!'

In Yemsa, the imperfective aspect has a continuous meaning if used with an imperative: the action to be performed is expected to last for a long time. Imperfective forms in main clauses have a habitual meaning (Zaugg-Coretti 2009: 137, 156-7).

The most frequently attested tense distinction in imperatives is that of immediate versus delayed, or future, imperative (in agreement with the prediction by Lyons 1977: 746-7). This seemingly simple binary opposition contrasts with a wider range of possibilities for future meanings grammaticalised in declarative clauses. Alternatively, different kinds of future can be expressed in imperatives and in declaratives.

Koasati, a Muskogean language (Kimball 1991: 263-72) has two delayed imperatives, one meaning 'do later on' and the other one 'do much later on', illustrated in (12) and (13). A simple 'root' imperative in Koasati has the force of a command to be performed immediately:

(11) \textit{lakáwwi-\textit{ø-DEL} Koasati}  
\textit{LIFT-2sgIMPV-PHRASE.TERMINAL.MARKER}  
'Lift it!'
(12) am-ha:láh-hóli-\(\text{\textperiodcentered} \)h 
1sgDATIVE-move-2pl.INC.IMPV-DELAY
'Help me later!'

(13) tala-:\(\text{\textperiodcentered} \)hah 
weave(IMPV)-LONG.DELAY
'Cook it for me a lot later!'

Declarative clauses in Koasati offer no equivalent to the two futures in imperatives.

A future versus non-future distinction found in imperatives may not exist in declarative clauses at all. Haida, an isolate spoken in British Columbia (Canada), distinguishes 'neutral' imperatives and 'non-immediate' commands. Neutral imperatives order 'a familiar addressee to immediately perform a certain action (or be in a certain state)' (Enrico 2003: 121). Declarative clauses in Haida do not distinguish between immediate and delayed future; there are no grammaticalised future markers in the language.⁵

Verbal categories found just in imperatives include distance in space (and also 'extralocality', that is, a command to perform an action in a different location, and motion, as in some Carib languages: Carlin 2004). A simple immediate and formally unmarked imperative in Tariana, an Arawak language from north-west Amazonia is shown in (14):

(14) pi-\(\text{\textperiodcentered} \)ha 
2sg-eat
'Eat! (here and now)

Examples (15)-(16) illustrate special marking of distance in space (close to the speaker versus far from the speaker).

⁵ Further examples of an immediate versus delayed future in North American Indian languages are in Mithun (1999: 153-4); see also Aikhenvald (2014).
(15) pi-ñha-si
2sg-eat-PROXIMATE.IMPERATIVE
'Eat here' (close to the speaker)

(16) pi-ñha-kada
2sg-eat-DISTAL.IMPERATIVE
'Eat over there' (away from where the speaker is; addressed to people outside the house)

A delayed imperative, 'do later on', is shown in (17):

(17) desu pi-ñha-wa
tomorrow 2sg-go-DELAYED.IMPERATIVE
'Eat tomorrow!'

There is also a conative imperative. Note that Tariana does not have a dedicated conative marker for declarative clauses.

(18) pi-ñha-thara
2sg-eat-CONATIVE.IMPERATIVE
'Try and eat (please); eat it to try it out'.

Further imperative forms include an imperative by proxy marked with a tenseless form of the reported evidential (19).

(19) pi-ñha-pida
2sg-eat-REPORTED.IMPERATIVE
'East on someone else's order!'
Reported evidentiality is the only evidential category frequently expressed in commands (Aikhenvald 2010: 138-43). Perhaps the most salient category imperatives have is 'strength' of command and politeness. Tariana has a special polite imperative shown in (20):

(20)  pi-ñha-nha

2sg-eat-POLITE.IMPERATIVE

'Would you like to eat, could you please eat?'

Maale, an Omotic language from Ethiopia, has three canonical (addressee-oriented) imperatives which differ in the degree of politeness. The regular imperative and the polite imperative distinguish singular and plural forms — see Table 3. The polite imperative is built on the regular one. The impolite imperative does not distinguish number.

Table 3 Number marking in canonical imperatives in Maale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NUMBER OF ADDRESSEE</th>
<th>REGULAR IMPERATIVE</th>
<th>POLITE IMPERATIVE</th>
<th>IMPOLITE IMPERATIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>singular</td>
<td>Verb-é</td>
<td>Verb-é-tera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plural</td>
<td>Verb-uwáte</td>
<td>Verb-uwátera</td>
<td>Verb-ibay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overtones of politeness tend to be a prerogative of imperatives (special polite forms for second and third persons combinations in Yemsa were shown in Table 1). Aspectual forms may have overtones of politeness when used with imperatives. The imperfective imperative in Supyire (Carlson 1994: 521), and also in Yankunytjatjara (Goddard 1983) and in Russian, has polite overtones. (And we saw, in (8), that subjunctive in Supyire expresses polite requests).

Future in imperatives in Huallaga Quechua can indicate that the action has to be performed in the future. Or it may make the command sound more polite (Weber 1989: 103).

Politeness interrelates with societal hierarchies and conventions. The ways in which interpersonal relations (to do with the relative status of the speaker and the addressee) are reflected in commands are particularly spectacular in languages with honorific registers.
Dolakha Newar (Genetti 2007: 130-1, 180-2) has two honorific registers. Honorific imperatives (and honorific personal pronouns) are used if the speaker is 'considerably younger than the addressee'; they are also used 'to address deities, or others held in reverence'. For Korean, Sohn (1994: 9-11, 41-3) describes six levels of honorification, which display a complex interaction between the speaker's relative age, social status and relationship to the addressee.

Politeness distinctions in Maale (Table 3) do not directly relate to any social hierarchy. The regular, or neutral, imperative can be used for orders and to instruct someone how to perform a certain task — for instance, in describing how to get somewhere. The polite imperative has 'begging' connotations, and does not show strict correlations with age and status of the speaker with respect to the addressee. The impolite imperative does: it is used 'when ordering somebody who is younger or low in status, parents to children when they are angry and most often among children when one of them acts as a boss. The impolite imperative is also used in chasing away pet animals' (Amha 2001: 126).

Meanings of politeness and 'strength' in imperatives mirror the ways in which people communicate, reflecting existing social relations and hierarchies. Throughout the Workshop, we aim at unveiling, and explaining, them.

How can an imperative be negated, turning a positive command into a prohibition? In many languages, an imperative can be negated with a special negative marker (e.g. the particle me in Mauwake, or the prohibitive negator da- in Dolakha Newar: Genetti 2007: 338). Or it can be negated with the same marker as the declarative (as is the case in French and German). A negative imperative in Cupeño, a Uto-Aztecan language, contains a negative particle qay which is also used in declarative clauses. A prohibitive clause requires an irrealis form of the verb (Hill 2005). Or there can be a special form of a verb: in Seimat, an Austronesian
language of the Manus Province in Papua New Guinea, the prohibitive is formed with a negative marker *kum* (also used in declarative clauses) followed by a reduplicated form of the verb (a positive imperative consists of a verb stem marked with a motion suffix) (Wozna and Wilson 2005: 76-7).

In many languages negative imperatives have one form corresponding to several positive imperatives. Negative imperatives in Tariana do not distinguish distance in space and time; nor do they have a special polite form (further examples are in Aikhenvald 2010: 181-6). This is consistent with a general cross-linguistic tendency to neutralise grammatical categories under negation (Aikhenvald and Dixon 1998).

6 The limits of imperatives

Not every verb can be turned into an imperative. A prototypical directive speech act involves an action the addressee may be able to control. Many languages have a restriction on using in commands verbs which describe an uncontrolled action or a state. In Tariana, stative verbs such as 'be cold', 'be sick', 'be afraid' and verbs of physical and mental states cannot form imperatives. In Bagvalal, a North-east Caucasian language, verbs which refer to physical states (such as 'tremble', 'die', 'sob'), to emotional and mental states, and uncontrolled verbs of perception typically cannot form imperatives (Dobrushina 1999: 321-2). Imperatives cannot be formed on non-volitional verbs in Arapaho (Cowell 2007) and Haida (Enrico 2003). Verbs of perception — 'see' and 'hear' — typically have telic meanings of 'look' and 'listen' when used in an imperative context (Aikhenvald and Storch 2013).

Even in English — which appears to allow imperative formation on any verb imaginable, if an appropriate context is supplied — an imperative like *Weigh 50 kilos!* may sound strange, unless cast in the context of a weight loss program, a fairy tale, or a
conditional construction (*Weigh 50 kilos, and you won't have to pay for the excess weight on this flight*).

Curiously, such restrictions do not have to apply to negative imperatives. As Huddleston (2002: 933) puts it, positive passives with *be* in English 'are not often found with directive force', but 'negatives lend themselves more readily to such an interpretation' (Huddleston 2002: 933). *Don't be intimidated by those cowards!* is perfectly acceptable, and can be interpreted as 'Don't allow yourself to be intimidated'. Or, in Davies' (1986: 15) words, it is 'sometimes easier to conceive of a person's being able to avoid an experience (such as being hurt or being misled) than to imagine his [their] ability to deliberately undergo it'.

Along similar lines, in Japanese prohibitives can be formed on passives, while positive imperatives cannot be (Takahashi 2000, and further examples in Aikhenvald 2010: 188-9).

We can recall, from §5, that grammatical distinctions found in positive imperatives may be neutralised under negation. A number of languages go against this tendency. For instance, Urarina, an isolate from Peru, has one positive imperative, and three prohibitive forms. Two of these markers, *paaui pe* and *nihjauria*, imply that the prohibition is absolute, as in a directive at a sermon. A 'weak' prohibitive, marked with *kwa*, implies a less strict, or a temporary, prohibition (Olawsky 2006: 579-82).

Why is this so? An argument can be made that social constraints and prohibitions are highly important in many cultures perhaps, more so than mere requests and instructions. This is a point we aim at addressing throughout the workshop — how do negative commands ('prohibitions') compare with their positive counterparts, and what are the conditions and the restrictions on their use.

An imperative form may have to be avoided for a different reason. It may be felt to be too abrupt and embarrassingly imposing. Then other forms are coopted to express further nuances. This is the essence of command strategies.
7 Command strategies

Marking imperatives follows the principle of iconicity, or iconic motivation, whereby the meaning of the form is reflected in the form itself. A short command to the addressee expressed with a short canonical imperative is likely to have overtones of immediacy; it may well sound brusque and abrupt. In contrast, a longer form used in a directive speech act will sound milder, politer, and less insistent and face-threatening (see also Brown and Levinson 1987). As Haiman (2003: 59) put it, 'the greater the politeness, the longer the message'.

That is, if a language has several imperative forms, the shortest one is likely to be an abrupt order, not infrequently perceived as rude, or as having overtones of urgency and immediacy. In contrast, imperatives with further specifications — such as delayed or future ('do later on'), distal ('do elsewhere'), reported ('do following someone else's order') and others — will always be segmentally longer and more formally marked. Examples above confirm this. The abruptness of a brief imperative form may impose limits on its use (in the contexts of lack of social equality and the desire of being especially nice and mild). And this is where other means of framing commands, requests and other meanings under the umbrella of directive speech acts come into play.

Command strategies embrace a large variety of forms, many of them language specific. Command strategies and their choice may reflect what Brown and Levinson (1987: 70) call 'conventionalised indirectness'. So, Can you pass the salt? would be read as a request by a native speaker. It will hardly ever be taken to be a question about the addressee's strength or capacity of performing this action. Why don't you come to the blackboard? is not a question asking for a reason why the student remains seated — it is a directive to come to the
blackboard. Many non-native speakers of English miss out on understanding such 'pseudo-questions' as commands.\(^6\)

Further recurrent forms 'coopted' as command strategies include interrogative forms of all sorts, statements (including those cast in present, or future), free-standing (or de-subordinated) non-main clauses, nominalised verbal forms and elliptical expressions (see Aikhenvald 2010: 256-95 for further details).

English has a wide variety of interrogative directives. 'Ability questions' typically start with *can you, could you, are you able* and so on. In Huddleston's words, they 'lend themselves to indirect directions, since a likely reason for me to be interested in your ability to do something is that I want you to do it' (Huddleston 2002: 940). A question (pronounced without question intonation) *Would you open the door or Will you pass me the salt* is normally understood as a request, and a special explanation would be required if it were to be understood as a polar question (Comrie 1984: 281). A negative counterpart, *Won't you pass me the salt*, has overtones of being less 'civil' (Jespersen 1928: 481).

In Jarawara, a polite way of marking a request is to use an imperative with the thing asked for marked by personal pronoun and the intentional suffix (R. M. W. Dixon, p.c.):

\[(21)\]  
oko  faha-bone  taa-ti-na-hi

my  water-INTENTIONAL  give-2sg-AUX-IMMEDIATE.POSITIVE.IMPERATIVE

'Please give me some water' (literally 'Give me my intended water')

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\(^6\) Conventionalized 'command strategies' are called 'non-imperative directives' by Huddleston (2002: 939-42). Another term for these is 'semantic imperative' (Press 1979: 80-1). In contrast to 'syntactic' imperatives which have an imperative form, semantic imperatives have the function, but not the form, of commands. Martin (1975: 965ff) refers to command strategies in Japanese as 'circumlocutions'.

In English, a present or a future form of a verb can be used as a stern command. You will go to school tomorrow, said to a hooky-playing teenager, implies authority. Not so in Nyangumarta, an Australian language: here an imperative is perceived as 'a very direct way of speaking, and often a more respectful way of issuing a command is to use the future tense' (Sharp 2004: 185). In Arapaho, 'the use of the future often makes the utterance not really a command at all, but instead a recognition of the strong authority of the other person, who cannot be commanded, or prevented from acting, but only deferred to' (Cowell 2007: 57).

In many European languages, just about any form can be understood as an instruction what to do — given the right context. But it is absolutely not the case for every language. Amha (2001: 127) remarks that speakers of Maale do not interpret questions as commands (neither do Jarawara: see Dixon 2004, Tariana, or Haya: see Lehman 1977: 148). The degree of conventionalization of each imperative strategy is language-specific, and may correlate with the overtones of each of the grammatical structures concerned. For instance, questions in Tariana are limited in use to seeking information; overusing them creates an impression of being nosey and domineering. This may explain their lack of command function.

Non-main clauses can become desubordinated and used as independent clauses, to issue a command, or a request. An imperative form in Mauwake is the most common way of getting someone to do something. To make an order softer and less direct, one can use a non-final form of a verb with different subject marking (the final clause is left out altogether). This is especially common for commands to children, e.g. P-ekap-eya (BRING.PREFIX-come-2/3sgs) 'Bring it!' (Berghäll 2010: 284). Desubordinated same subject medial clauses with completive meaning in Manambu are used in an exact opposite way — as stern commands to be obeyed immediately, e.g. Wapwi kusu-ku! (clothes put.on-COMPLETIVE.SS) 'Put your

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7 Similar examples come from Martuthunira, an Australian language (Dench 2009), Nishnaambewin (Algonquian: Valentine 2001: 994), and Modern Hebrew (Malygina 2001).
clothes on!'. A similar form can be used to address 'us', implying immediacy: *Mel kuse-ku!*

(eye close-COMPLETIVE.SS) 'Let's pray' (lit. having closed eye).

Desubordinated *if*-clauses in Modern English are used more and more frequently as a way of asking people to do something, as in *If Mr and Mrs Smith could make their way to the Qantas desk* and *If you come down and support the film*. Stirling (1998) shows how these — seemingly incomplete — clauses are developing into a separate clause type, with a specific function of mild request. It is perhaps their 'incompleteness' and an overtone of tentativeness that makes them milder than a straightforward *Come down and support the film!*

Over time, desubordinated clauses may fully evolve into the only available means of marking a command. In Iyo, a Papuan language spoken in the Madang Province of Papua New Guinea, imperative sentences are marked with a medial verb form inflected with an imperative marker (Minter 2009: 103).

Free-standing nominalizations, participles and other derivations can be used as directives. In many European languages, infinitives (citation forms) are frequent especially in written instructions, as in German *nicht hinauslehnen* '(people must) not lean out (of a train)'; Estonian *mitte suitsetada* 'not to smoke; smoking is forbidden'. A directive cast in the infinitive in Russian 'denotes a peremptory order, a categorical prescription and command', and also 'expresses obligatoriness of an action, its fatal inevitability...' (Vinogradov 1947: 604-5), e.g. *Uvolitj! 'To dismiss!'.* An infinitive in Armenian can be used as a directive only in utterances addressed by a superior to their subordinates (Kozintseva 2001: 265-6). Participle commands in German used with motion and posture verbs are typically used if the person

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8 Imperative forms rarely occur in dependent clauses. This has been described for Hua and Yagaria, two closely related languages of the Papua New Guinea Highlands (cf. Aikhenvald 2010: 109). A same subject medial verb in Yalaku, a Ndu language from the East Sepik Province, PNG, can take an immediate imperative prefix if the whole sentence is within the scope of the command, e.g. *mə-hara-ta və*(IMPV-get-SS look) 'get (it) and have a look!'.
issuing a command is in a position of authority. Stehengeblieben! 'Stand still!' can be said by a policeman to an offender; or by annoyed parents or teachers to a child.

The brevity of verbless sentences — such as English Out! Away! — or stand-alone nominalised forms as directives correlates with their overtones of curt and stern commands leaving no space for lack of compliance. This follows the principle of iconicity: the shorter the form, the less polite it is. However, this is not universal: converbal clauses in Siberian Yupik Eskimo when used on their own as commands have overtones of suggestion and a polite request. Over time, a non-imperative form in a directive function may come to be used as the only available means for expressing a command: this is what we have seen in languages (such as Slave in (5)) with no dedicated imperative form.

Imperative forms may have further meanings, not directly command-like. Imperative forms in English 'are often used in such a way that no real request is meant: the hearer or reader is only asked to imagine some condition, and then the consequence is stated', as in Let women into your plans, and you never know where it'll end (Jespersen 1933: 295). In Russian, what looks like an imperative form can be used in conditional clauses (Vinogradov 1947), and as a main clause predicate with the meaning of a sudden or surprising action, e.g. a on vozjmi da i skazhi (and he take:2sg.imperative and emphatic.particle say:2sg.imperative) 'and he said all of a sudden'. These are 'pseudo-imperatives': they are notionally equal to conditional or concessive clauses. In many languages imperative forms grammaticalise as attention getting devices, as in Italian guarda 'look!', or Portuguese olha 'look!'. Imperatives are often used in speech formulae — blessing, curses, greetings and farewells, just as in English Bless you, Take care or Fare thee well. The first person imperative in Manambu of the verb 'speak' is a way of signalling the speaker's turn in a conversation. Mastering the discourse use of such imperative form is important for communicating properly.
8 Commands, and language contact

In a situation of intensive language contact, similar situations tend to be conceptualised in similar ways and warrant similar verbal description. A major factor behind the diffusion of patterns in a situation of societal multilingualism is the desire to be able to say what one's neighbour can say — making 'the categories existing in the languages that are in contact mutually compatible and more readily intertranslatable' (Heine and Kuteva 2003: 561). For the coexisting systems to converge, functional, semantic, and formal matching is desirable. Frequency is a major facilitating factor in linguistic diffusion: the more frequent the category in one language, the likelier it is to diffuse into another. In many languages, commands are among the highest frequency forms in conversations and narratives.

In a situation of intensive language contact, one language may evolve imperative constructions similar to those in the neighbouring languages, through grammaticalizing verbs and reinterpreting existing morphemes. Within the multilingual Vaupés River Basin, one future marker in Tariana has become reinterpreted as delayed imperative (-wa in (17)), and the other one as proximal imperative, 'do here' (-si in (15)). A secondhand imperative, 'do on someone else's order' (in (19)), has been developed out of an erstwhile reported or quotative evidential. As a result, the imperative categories in Tariana parallel those in East Tucanoan languages, in which Tariana speakers are fully proficient. East Tucanoan languages and Tariana are spoken within the same Vaupés River Basin Linguistic area. The degree of structural similarities between them is rather striking (see Aikhenvald 2008).

In a situation of intensive language contact involving Nivkh (a Paleosiberian isolate), imperatives adjust to the dominant Russian patterns (Gruzdeva 2002). In many Aboriginal languages of Australia negative imperatives have become more like English than they were traditionally (Laughren 2002: 116 on Warlpiri; Schmidt 1985 on Young People's Dyirbal). And individual one-word imperative forms are highly borrowable. The Turkish particle
hajde! 'go!' was borrowed into Bulgarian as an uninflected form. Speakers of Modern Hebrew use Arabic yalla! 'let's go, come on'. Sharing pragmatic patterns and types of context, and subsequent diffusion of organizing discourse structures, results in common genres, idiomatic expressions and further ways of saying things for languages in contact (see references in Aikhenvald 2006). Commands are highly prominent in greetings and speech formulae throughout the Vaupés area. The Tariana farewell formula matfa-pida (be.good-REPORTED.IMPERATIVE) 'good-bye; best wishes' (lit. let it be good on (our) behalf) is a calque from Tucano äyu-áto (good-REPORTED.IMPERATIVE), with the same meaning. The farewell formula was calqued from Tucano into Tariana, creating an anomalous structure: secondhand, or any other imperative cannot be formed on stative verbs except in this case.

A further factor that facilitates the diffusion of categories is the impact a category has on cultural norms and behavioural requirements. An obligatory category in a language which correlates with behavioural requirements is more susceptible to diffusion than one which does not. For instance, obligatory evidentials often correlate with a cultural requirement for an explicit statement about how one knows things. Those who are not explicit run the danger of being treated as liars, or as incompetent. This cultural requirement may explain why evidentiaity spreads so easily into contact languages, including some varieties of American Indian English, Latin American Spanish, and Amazonian Portuguese; it tends to diffuse across linguistic areas (Aikhenvald 2004, 2012).

The diffusion of imperative forms and their usage, and of commands strategies in general, has been attested in varied language contact situations, including one-to-one contact, linguistic areas and linguistic regions.⁹

⁹ See Emeneau (1956); Aikhenvald (2012) for the discussion of these concepts.
9 'Imperatives' we live by

The English-speaking world abounds in imperative forms, used to command, entice and invite. In Alice in Wonderland, the cake instructs Alice: Eat me!, and the bottle joins in: Drink me! Houses in real estate agencies advertisements beg us Make me your home!

A more inventive command to the same effect urges: Do not drive faster than your guardian angel can fly. A neon sign projects a mock-command: Drink and drive — you are a bloody idiot. Commands and instructions do not have to contain an imperative: Drowsy drivers die, or A power nap will save your life could well be rephrased as Break your drive and have a rest!

Despite an overwhelming frequency of imperatives in many genres of English, an imperative enjoys a bad reputation: overusing it in face-to-face conversation creates an image of a bossy and unpleasant person. Imperatives are often avoided because they are face-threatening.

In Yankunytjatjara, an Australian language (Goddard 1983: 306-7), a parent-in-law cannot directly address the son-in-law asking him for food. A request has to be done through an intermediary. This intermediary is also not allowed to use a direct way of commanding — that is, an imperative. Social and kinship relationships within a community restrict the imperative usage.

Nuer, a Western Nilotic language, has a specialised imperative paradigm (Crazzolàra 1933: 140). However, according to Akalu (1985: 63-4), who did an extensive firsthand anthropological study of the Nuer (especially the Nipnip group), 'the Nipnip never use imperatives […] in communication with each other', because of the overtones of 'superiority' and 'hierarchy' the imperatives have. They use other verb forms instead (such as an optative).
In her comparison of what she perceived as gentle and mild Arapesh culture with the harsh and rough Mundugumor, Margaret Mead (1935: 199-200) observes: 'the first lessons that a Mundugumor child learns are a series of prohibitions', and then adds, in a footnote:

'The people make an extraordinarily frequent use of the imperative form. When I think of a Mundugumor verb it is always the imperative form that leaps into my mind, in strong contrast to my memory of Arapesh, in which imperatives were very seldom used.'

She goes on to describe how the life of a Mundugumor is governed by strict rules to do with kinship relations — creating an impression of a highly rigid and unfriendly society replete with prohibitions (in contrast with the mild and undemanding Arapesh, conceivably free of the demanding 'kinship imperative'). This is what overusing imperative forms implies, for Margaret Mead as a Western scholar.

Mildred Larson, in her guide to translators, warns her readers against projecting one's European intuitions onto another language with different communication strategies (Larson 1998: 471):

'In Africa, a friend might come and put down a couple of dishes of food on one's doorstep and say, "Eat!". To a person of some other culture, such as American, it might sound very harsh, and the person would feel they must obey. But, as a matter of fact, that is not the intent in the African culture. The friend has cooked supper and is simply inviting the other person to share it. That person is free to eat a full meal or just take a few mouthfuls and then say that they are satisfied. If in a text translated from an African language and culture into English, such a situation were a part of the story, the translator would not use the English imperative "Eat!". the translator should rather say, "Would you like some?" or "Help yourself, if you would like". The words would like give the attitude and cultural information which was communicated by the command "Eat!" in the African story.'
Along similar lines, John Saeed, in his grammar of Somali (1993: 83), remarks: 'Note that, possibly as a result of the egalitarian nature of traditional Somali society, imperatives do not have the same associations of power and impoliteness as in English and are consequently much more commonly used'.

The interaction of linguistic and cultural constraints may account for differences in the actual usage of imperatives. In many Australian Aboriginal societies asking information questions is tantamount to showing yourself as nosy and intrusive. Information is volunteered rather than directly requested — this makes communication indirect and minimally face-threatening. The same applies to commands and directive acts of all sorts. A polite request in Kuuk Thayorre is phrased as a negative statement (Gaby 2007).

And if a command is to be used, it is often contextualised, and an explanation is offered. This appears to be a conventionalised technique in Yidiñ (Dixon 1977: 350, p.c.) and in many other languages:

(22) ŋundo giyi gali-n wanda:-nj

2sgNOMINATIVE PROHIBITIVE go-IMPERATIVE fall.down-APPREHENSIVE

'Don't you go (there), you might fall down'

Understanding and mastering directive speech acts — the ways of commanding, requesting and so on — in a language is a key to successful communication. And using a wrong way of requesting is a sure way towards a breakdown in communication. When children acquire their first language, commands and requests is what they hear most, and what they have to learn first, to survive and to fulfil their needs.

How are commands phrased and contextualised? What are their overtones, and how are they employed by different age groups and different strata of a society within which the language is spoken? This is what we aim at ascertaining within the Workshop.
10 To conclude: understanding imperatives and commands

Imperatives and other ways of framing commands, requests and other ways of getting people to do things in general are ubiquitous. Imperatives — dedicated grammatical devices whose core meaning is a command — contrast with questions, statements and exclamations in their meaning and marking. In many languages, an imperative is not enough — and other forms may (but don't have to) be coopted to express what one wants someone else to do. However, the meanings of such 'command strategies' are not uniform across languages.

Success in using command technique, and imperatives, correctly is a key to efficient communication with the given society. Communicative efficiency is based on cooperation between speakers and addressees. As Grice (1989: 26) puts it:

'Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some degree at least, a common purpose or a set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction.'

This 'cooperative principle' supports the ways in which imperatives and other command forms are used and manipulated to reflect the conventions and their renegotiation in human communication, in different societies across the world. The plethora of commanding and requesting techniques in any given language reflect an on-going struggle, between striving to achieve efficient communication, and desire to save face and yet to reach the commanded, or requested result. Cooperation with the addressee is to be negotiated, so as to achieve a minor maxim 'be polite' (Grice 1989: 28). And some non-primarily imperative forms may, over time, acquire unmistakably explicit command meanings. These are a frequent source for imperatives as separate forms, throughout the languages' history.

In our view, every description of a language should both state what is there, and also ask why it is there. Sound explanations need to look at genetic history, the contact situation,
the physical environment, and also the linguistic needs of the speech community in terms of its social and political organisation, food-production techniques, means of transport, lifestyle, and interaction with neighbours. Imperatives, commands and further ways of framing requests, entreaties, pleas etc, are particularly prone to reflecting these — which makes them a useful case study for a general question 'why' is the language the way it is.

Social changes accompany changes in the use and the ways of framing imperative constructions. The question is: how? This is one of the urgent tasks for language analysts, grammarians, sociolinguists and cultural anthropologists.

Imperatives and directive speech acts reflect societal relationships and attitudes. In some societies one advises rather than commands. In others, commanding is a normal course of action. Imperatives and the ways of phrasing directives offer a fertile ground for collaborative research for scholars from all walks of linguistics — synchronic language analysts, historical linguists, typologists, sociolinguists, psycholinguists and anthropological linguists. There is a treasure chest for projects in core areas of linguistics, and cross-disciplinary studies. This is what we now intend to embark on.

Some of the questions about imperatives are:

• What is the nature of imperatives, their semantics and usage?
• How do they relate to other forms and categories in the languages of the world?
• What are the parameters of their formal and semantic variation, within a cross-linguistic perspective?
• What is the place that imperatives occupy among an array of directive speech acts?
  What cultural parameters are likely to be expressed in directive speech acts?
• Do imperatives always command?
• What alternatives to imperatives do languages offer?
• How are imperatives used in the different linguistic communities around us?
• Where do imperatives come from?
• How do they fare in language contact situations? And how can they be affected by language contact?
• How does social change affect their use?

The Appendix contains a more detailed checklist of points for the participants.

**Abbreviations:** ABS - absolutive; COMIT - comitative; CONT - continuous; IMPV - imperative; INC - inclusive; ERG - ergative; LOC - locative; pl, PL - plural; PURP - purposive; REFL - reflexive; sg, SG - singular; SS - same subject.

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