A Unified Analysis of Imperative Sentences in English: Adjacency Approach between Lexical Bearers of Imperative Features and Functional Locus of Imperative Features

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ABSTRACT

The Journal of Studies in Language 34.3, 411-424. This article aims to address imperative constructions in English and provide unified licensing conditions under the one of the most current minimalist frameworks. The licensing conditions put forth in this study will account for positive and negative imperative sentences in English regarding the physical linear adjacency requirement between the functional host of (emphatic) imperative features and the lexical bearers of imperative features as well as the economy principle that vacuous syntactic operations that do not produce syntactic or semantic effects should be prohibited. The alternative licensing conditions offered in this study are comprised of four options. These four options might be considered optimal hierarchical syntactic conditions in that they are applied in an orderly fashion. (Cyber Hankuk University of Foreign Studies · Dankook University · Dankook University)

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1. Introduction

This study discusses essential issues in imperative constructions in English and provides general licensing conditions that may work for English positive and negative imperative sentences. The basic issues in imperative constructions are: (i) Why is do-support necessary in English negative imperative constructions? (ii) Why is the contraction of not and do necessary in inverted negative imperative constructions? (iii) Why should not be pied-piped along with do in inverted negative imperative constructions?

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imperative constructions? (iv) Why can’t emphatic positive imperative sentences be inverted sentences?

In order to answer these research questions, we will provide general licensing conditions in terms of the adjacency requirement between the functional host of imperative features and the lexical bearers of imperative features and the economy principle that bans vacuous operations. The functional host of imperative features is Complementizer, and the lexical bearers of imperative features are main verbs, or the bare infinitive verbs be, do, and don’t. In section 2, we will discuss essential syntactic issues in English imperative constructions. In section 3, we will address some of the previous studies on English imperative constructions. In section 4, general unified licensing conditions are put forth in terms of the adjacency requirement between the functional host of imperative features and the lexical bearers of imperative features. The general unified licensing conditions will account for not only English but also French. In section 5, a conclusion of this study will be provided.

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2. Essential Issues in English Imperative Constructions

Imperative constructions are distinguished from other types of constructions in that they do not have a finite tense and have optional subjects. Consider the following sentences.

(1) a. You be careful
   b. Be careful
   c. Be punctual.
   d. *Are punctual.
   e. *Must come to work by 9 am.

Sentences (1a), (1b), and (1c) are all grammatical sentences, and this shows that imperative sentences have optional subjects. The ungrammaticality of sentences (1d) and (1e) shows that imperative sentences are tense-free bare constructions. More essential issues in English imperative constructions are shown in the following sentences.

(2) a. Work hard, will you?
   b. Do work hard, will you?
   c. Do not listen to her, will you?
d. *Not listen to her, will you?
e. Do not smoke here.
f. Don’t smoke here.
g. You do not talk here.
h. You don't talk here.
i. Don’t you dive here.
j. *Do not you dive here.
k. *Do you not dive here.
l. You do work hard, will you?
m. *Do you work hard, will you?

Sentences (2a) and (2b) show that *do-support is optional in positive imperative sentences. However, the discrepancy in grammaticality between (2c) and (2d) shows that *do-support is obligatory in negative imperative sentences. Sentences (2e) and (2f) show that the contraction of *do and *not is optional in negative imperative sentences without a pronoun subject; and sentences (2g) and (2h) show that the contraction of *do and *not is optional in negative imperative sentences with a pronoun subject.

Sentences (2i), (2j), and (2k) are inverted negative imperative sentences. In inverted negative imperative sentences, the auxiliary *do and the negative *not must be contracted, as shown in (2j); and the negative *not must be pied-piped along with *do, as shown in (2k). Sentence (2l) is a positive emphatic imperative sentence that has a pronoun subject. This sentence cannot be inverted, as shown in (2m). All these provide us with four essential research questions for imperative constructions.

(3) a. Why is *do-support required in English negative imperative constructions?
b. Why is the contraction of *not and *do necessary in inverted negative imperative constructions?
c. Why should the negative *not be pied-piped along with *do in inverted negative imperative constructions?
d. Why can’t positive emphatic imperative sentences be inverted sentences?

In order to provide answers for these research questions, we will discuss previous studies on English imperative constructions such as Rupp (2003) and Potsdam (2007), and show that Rupp (2003) does not provide complete solutions for those four research questions. New licensing conditions will be provided as an alternative analysis of the imperative constructions. The new licensing conditions focus on the adjacency requirement between the functional category that hosts imperative features and the lexical items that bear imperative features as well as the economy principle that bans vacuous syntactic operations.

3. A Review of Previous Studies

This section deals with how previous studies analyzed English imperative constructions. We will deal with the FP theory put forth by Rupp (2003) and the CP theory put forth by Potsdam (2007) and discuss if they can account for the
four essential issues in imperative constructions.

Rupp (2003:109) postulates the functional phrase between the tense phrase and the verb phrase for the subject position of imperative sentences. Let us consider the following structure.

\[(4)\]

\[\text{In structure (4), the subject in imperative constructions is base-merged at SPEC-VP to satisfy the theta role requirement and moves to SPEC-FP to complete the imperative sentences. The FP differs from the TP in that it does not have the EPP feature, and thus the FP theory can explain why the imperative subjects are not obligatory but optional sentence elements. In the FP theory, as shown in (4), imperative subjects can be raised only as far as the SPEC-FP, which is asymmetrically c-commanded by } \text{don’t}. \text{ This explains why universal quantifier subjects have only a narrow scope with respect to the negative not in the inverted negative imperative sentences. The narrow scope of the universal quantifier is clearly shown in the following examples.}\]

\[(5)\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{a. } & \text{Don’t everyone get a raise.} \\
\text{b. } & = \text{Not everyone should get a raise. (NEG > EVERY)} \\
\text{c. } & \neq \text{Nobody get a raise. (EVERY > NEG)}
\end{align*}\]

The FP theory accounts for two issues in imperative constructions in English. However, it does not provide answers for the essential issues raised in (3a) and (3b). The negative imperative sentence in (2d) will have the following structure under the FP theory.

\[(6)\]

\[\text{The FP theory does not postulate Complementizer in the imperative construction, and there is no lowering of imperative force feature from Comp across the negative not to the verbal lexical element listen. Hence there is no reason why sentence (2d) should be an ill-formed sentence. The FP theory does not account for (3a).}\]

\[\text{The negative imperative sentence in (2j) will have the following syntactic structure under the FP theory.}\]
In structure (7) the *do* occupies the head Tense position, and the negative *not* occupies the head neg position. Since the FP theory does not postulate Complementizer in the imperative constructions, *do* and *not* do not undergo raising to Comp, but stay *in situ*. Hence there is no reason why (2j) should be an ill-formed sentence. The FP theory does not account for (3b), either.

In contrast to Rupp (2003), Potsdam (2007) offers the SPEC-TP analysis for imperative constructions. Let us consider the following CP structure.

In structure (8) the subject of the imperative sentence occupies the position of SPEC-TP. Potsdam (2007) argues that the subjects of imperative sentences have the canonical subject properties for two reasons. First, imperative sentences are derived in the same fashion as declarative sentences, as shown in the following sentences.

(9) a. You are caught in a trap.
   b. [TP You\_i are [caught t\_i in a trap]].
   c. Don’t you be caught in a trap.
   d. [CP Don’t\_j [TP you\_j be [caught t\_i in a trap]].

In (9a), the subject of the passive sentence is base-merged at the complement position of the main verb to satisfy the theta role requirement and is raised to the position of SPEC-TP to satisfy the case requirement, as shown in (9b). The same is true of the imperative sentence (9c), whose syntactic derivation is well-specified in (9d). Therefore the subject of an imperative sentence can have the same canonical properties.

Another example of empirical evidence that the subjects of imperative sentences occupy the position of SPEC-TP is floating quantifiers in imperative sentences. Consider the following sentences.

(10) a. The kids are both helping her.
b. [CP [TP The kids are [VP both t_i helping her]].

c. The twins both stay here for the picture.

d. [CP [TP The twins [VP both t_i stay here for the picture]].

In (10a), the subject of the sentence is base-merged at the position of SPEC-VP and is raised to the position of SPEC-TP leaving the floating quantifier *both* stranded at the base position, as shown in (10b). The same is true of the imperative sentence (10c), whose syntactic derivation is well-specified in (10d). Hence, the subject of imperative sentences can have the same canonical properties of occupying the position of SPEC-TP.

The SPEC-TP analysis of Potsdam (2007), however, has difficulties accounting for three essential issues in imperative constructions. Consider the following sentences.

(11) a. Don’t you dive here.

b. *Do not you dive here.

c. Do you not dive here?

d. *Do you not dive here.

e. You do work hard, will you?

f. *Do you work hard, will you?

Sentence (11a) is an inverted negative imperative sentence where *do* and *not* are contracted into *don’t*. This contraction is obligatory, as shown in (11b). In a negative interrogative sentence such as (11c), the negative *not* can be stranded. However, in an imperative counterpart sentence such as (11d), the stranding of the negative *not* is unacceptable. Potsdam (2007) explains that this is because *do* alone does not have an emphatic feature to undergo T-to-C movement. This might not be a principled explanation because *do* alone can have an emphatic feature in sentences such as (11e). The positive emphatic imperative sentence (11e) cannot be inverted, as shown in (11f).

Sentences (11a) ~ (11f) show three essential issues in imperative constructions: (i) Why is the contraction of *not* and *do* necessary in inverted negative imperative constructions? (ii) Why should the negative *not* be pied-piped along with *do* in inverted negative imperative constructions? (iii) Why can’t the positive emphatic imperative sentences be inverted sentences? Potsdam (2007) has difficulties providing a principled explanation on these issues.

4. Adjacency Conditions Between Lexical Bearers of Imperative Features and Locus of Functional Imperative Features

In the previous section, we discussed previous studies of English imperative constructions and showed that they do not provide complete answers for the four research questions. In this section, we will provide an alternative approach for analyzing imperative constructions in terms of adjacency between the functional host of imperative features and the lexical bearers of imperative features as well as the economy principle. Consider the following computational architecture put forth by Chomsky (2005).
Structure (12) has three functional categories Comp, Tense, and $\nu$. Comp and $\nu$ are the phase heads that can derive syntactic operations. Since the imperative features are force features that determine sentence types, we rightfully establish that Comp is the locus of the imperative feature. Let us consider the correlation between syntactic features and lexical items.

Structure (13) shows the three heads Y, X, and W. Suppose that X is the locus of a certain syntactic feature. The syntactic feature is a morphological affix feature or abstract affix feature. The abstract affix feature differs from the morphological affix feature in that it has no morphological reflex. However, the abstract affix feature can equally derive the syntactic operations as can the morphological affix feature. Since the affix feature cannot stand alone, it should be borne by the lexical item. There are three ways in which the affix feature of head X is borne by the lexical item.

(14)  a. Y raises to X.
   b. X is lowered to Y.
   c. Z is base-generated at X
   d. The options should be chosen in accordance with economy principle.

Option (14a) demonstrates the case of attracting another head to satisfy the affix feature of X. This option depends on the strong V feature of X. In the structure of a double verb phrase, the upper light verb that attracts the main verb is an example of a universally strong X that attracts Y. In the structure of TP, T has a morphological affix tense feature and
can attract or be lowered to the lexical head of the double verb phrase depending on its strength. In French, which has an enriched inflection, T can attract the lexical head of the double verb phrase. However, in English, which has an impoverished inflection, T cannot attract the lexical head of the double verb phrase. Hence option (14a) is bypassed and option (14b), where T is lowered to the head of the double verb phrase, is used instead. The differences between French and English are clearly shown in the following examples.

(15) a. Jean embrasse souvent Marie.
   John kisses often Mary
b. *Jean souvent embrasse Marie.
   John often kisses Mary
c. John often kisses Mary.
d. *John kisses often Mary.

French sentences (15a) and (15b) show that the affix feature of Tense must be borne by the lexical head of the double verb phrase that raises to Tense. This is because French has an enriched Tense that attracts the head of the double verb phrase. The English sentences (15c) and (15d) show that the affix feature of Tense must be hosted by the lexical head of the double verb phrase that Tense is lowered to. This is because English has an impoverished Tense that cannot attract the lexical head of the double verb phrase. 3)

Option (14b), which is available for English, shows a kind of head movement that is subject to relativized minimality in the sense of Rizzi (1990). If another head intervenes between Tense and the head of the double verb phrase in such a way that it is c-commanded by Tense and c-commands the head of the double verb phrase, the lowering of Tense to the head of the double verb phrase is blocked by the intervening head. Consider the following sentences.

1)

[Diagram]

Suppose that X is Tense and Y is verb. In French, regardless of verb is a main verb or a light verb, Y raises to X. In English, a light verb can raise to X, but a main verb cannot raise to X. Instead Tense is lowered to Y. Lowering is used only when raising is not available. These provide us with empirical reasons to put raising ahead of lowering. Therefore the option of raising is assumed to have priority over lowering for feature movement.

2)

[Diagram]

In the double verb phrase structure, the lower verb phrase hosts the internal arguments, which is followed by raising of the main verb to the light verb. The amalgam of the light verb and main verb hosts the external argument. In the double verb phrase structure, the raising of the main verb to the light verb is a language universal property.

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(16) a. John often kissed Mary.
    b. *John not often kissed Mary.
    c. John did not often kiss Mary.

In sentence (16a), the affix feature of Tense is lowered to the lexical head of the double verb phrase. However, this is not possible in negative sentences such as (16b), where the lowering of the affix feature of Tense is blocked by the intervening negative *not, which is c-commanded by Tense and c-commands the lexical head of the double verb phrase structure. In order to rescue the sentence, *do-support is used, as shown in (16c), which mirrors option (14c).

So far, we have discussed three ways in which the affix feature of T is borne by the lexical items. French uses option (14a) and English uses options (14b) and (14c). Now we will turn to the head of CP, which is the locus of the imperative feature. Consider structure (17).

Suppose that W is the Comp that is the locus of the imperative feature. In English, the imperative feature is an abstract feature that does not have a morphological reflex. However, we will equally apply three ways in which the morphological affix feature is borne by the lexical items and see how three essential issues in imperative constructions are explained. Let us reconsider options (14a), (14b), (14c), and (14d), revived here as (18a), (18b), (18c), and (18d).

(18) a. X raises to W.
    b. W is lowered to X.
    c. Z is base-generated at W.

In the double verb phrase structure, frequency adverbs are base-merged to vP by adjunction. If Tense is strong enough to attract the amalgam of the light verb and main verb, the main verb appears on the left-hand side of the frequency adverb, which is the case in French. If Tense is not strong and lowered to the amalgam of the light verb and main verb, the main verb appears on the right-hand side of the frequency adverb, which is the case in English.
d. The options should be chosen in accordance with economy principle.

Option (18a) demonstrates the case of attracting another head to satisfy the affix feature of W. This option is divided into two cases. The first case is that X has a base-merged lexical item. If X has a base-merged lexical item that can bear the imperative feature of W, X raises to W instead of W lowering to X, since option (18a) has priority over option (18b).

The second case is that X does not have a base-merged lexical item, but Y has a base-merged lexical item. Suppose that the base-merged lexical item at Y cannot raise to X. Then the imperative feature of W has no other option but to be lowered to Y. This is the case in positive imperative sentences with main verbs in English. Suppose that the base-merged lexical item at Y can raise to X. If the lexical item that has raised to X from Y can also raise to W, the imperative feature of W is borne by the lexical item by successive raising. If this successive raising is not available, the imperative feature of W is borne by the lexical item by lowering of the imperative of W to the lexical item at X that has raised from Y.

Option (18c) is used as a last resort when neither raising nor lowering is available. For example, if there can be a head that is c-commanded by W and c-commands X, then a certain lexical item can be base-merged at W to host the imperative feature of W. Otherwise, option (18c) cannot be used.

Now let us bring up the four essential issues in imperative constructions. They are repeated here as (19a), (19b), (19c), and (19d).

(19) a. Why is do-support necessary in English negative imperative constructions?
   b. Why is the contraction of not and do necessary in inverted negative imperative constructions?
   c. Why should the negative not be pied-piped along with do in inverted negative imperative constructions?
   d. Why can't positive emphatic imperative sentences be inverted sentences?

We will first discuss the issue (19a). Consider the following sentences.

(20) a. Work hard, will you?
   b. Do work hard, will you?
   c. *Not listen to her, will you?
   d. Do not listen to her, will you?

Sentences (20a) and (20b) are positive imperative sentences that show that do-support is optional. Let us explore the syntactic structure of the positive imperative sentences.

Structure (21) shows the syntactic structures of positive imperative sentences (20a) and (20b). The abstract imperative feature of Comp should be borne by the lexical item. In positive imperative constructions such as (20a), the imperative feature of Comp is lowered to the lexical item work, bypassing the null T.

In positive emphatic imperative constructions such as (20b), the verb do, which is base-merged at T, can be raised to Comp to host the emphatic imperative feature of Comp, or the emphatic imperative feature of Comp can be lowered to the verb do. The first option, which is T-to-C movement, is syntactically vacuous for two reasons. First, it does not
produce any NP-Aux inversion effect. Second, it does not produce extra semantic effects since the sentence is already an emphatic positive imperative sentence before the movement takes place. The T-to-C movement of do violates the economy principle (18d). Therefore, the emphatic imperative feature of Comp is lowered to do, which is option (18b).

Sentences (20c) and (20d) are negative imperative sentences that show do-support is obligatory. Let us explore the syntactic structure of negative imperative sentences.

Structure (22) shows the syntactic structures of negative imperative sentences (20c) and (20d). The abstract imperative feature of Comp should be hosted by the lexical item. In negative imperative sentences such as (20c), the main verb listen cannot raise to T let alone raise to Comp since English Tense does not have the strong V-feature to attract the main verb. The second option is lowering the imperative feature of Comp to the main verb listen. This is also not possible because the intervening not, which is syntactically a head, blocks the lowering of the imperative feature of Comp, which is a kind of head movement. The lowering the imperative feature of Comp to the lexical item is possible only when the former and the latter are adjacent to each other. Therefore do-support is used as a last resort to rescue the sentence, as shown in (20d). This is the option (18c).

Now let us go to the second issue (19b) and the third issue (19c). Consider the following sentences.

(23) a. You do not talk here.
    b. You don't talk here.
    c. Don’t you dive here.
    d. *Do not you dive here.
    e. *Do you not dive here.
Sentences (23a) and (23b) show that the contraction of *do* and *not* is optional in negative imperative sentences with a pronoun subject. However, in inverted negative imperative sentences such as (23c) and (23d), the contraction of *do* and *not* must take place. Let us look into the syntactic structure of inverted negative imperative sentences.

(24)

![Diagram](image)

Structure (24) shows the syntactic structure of inverted negative imperative sentence (23c). This structure is derived from T-to-C movement, which is syntactically a head movement. Since two heads cannot move together in a single head movement operation, the two heads *do* and *not* are contracted into the one head *don’t*, which in turn undergoes T-to-C movement to derive the sentence (23c). If the two heads *do* and *not* undergo head movement to Comp without contraction, two heads are jammed into one head, deriving a geometrically ill-formed sentence. This is why the contraction of *do* and *not* must take place in the inverted negative imperative sentence.

Sentence (23e) shows that the T-to-C movement of *do* cannot strand the negative *not* in the inverted negative imperative sentence. Let us look into the syntactic structure of sentence (23e).

(25)

![Diagram](image)

In structure (25) the negative *not* fails to be carried along with *do*, and is stranded in the negative phrase. The stranded negative *not* fails to bear the imperative feature of Comp and thus cannot participate in the formation of the imperative meaning of the sentence. Therefore, sentence (23e) cannot be the right form for the inverted negative imperative sentence.

4) Suppose that $\alpha$ is the functional locus of the imperative feature, and the verbal element $\beta$ and the negative $\gamma$ are the potential lexical bearers of the imperative features. In the negative imperative constructions, $\beta$ and $\gamma$ should both adjacent to form one negative imperative unity. In the case that $\beta$ and $\gamma$ undergo raising to the functional locus of imperative feature $\alpha$, $\beta$ and $\gamma$ should be contracted into one head before raising to $\alpha$, which can host only one head. The negative imperative unity is well-supported from Korean. In the Korean imperative constructions, the imperative marker is ‘-a’ and the negative imperative marker is ‘-ma’, which is a united form of the imperative marker and the negative element.
Now let us go to the final issue (19d). Consider the following sentences.

(26) a. You do work hard, will you?
    b. *Do you work hard, will you?

Sentences (26a) and (26b) show that the positive emphatic imperative sentence cannot be an inverted sentence. The T-to-C movement of do in (26b) is a semantically vacuous operation in that it does not produce any extra semantic effects since the sentence is already an emphatic positive imperative sentence before the movement takes place. The T-to-C movement of do violates the economy principle (18d). Therefore, the emphatic imperative feature of Comp is lowered to the verb do.

5. Conclusion

In this study, we discussed essential issues in imperative constructions in English and provided licensing conditions for English imperative constructions. The essential issues discussed in this study were (i) Why is do-support required in English negative imperative constructions? (ii) Why is the contraction of not and do necessary in inverted negative imperative constructions? (iii) Why should the negative not be pied-piped along with do in inverted negative imperative constructions? (iv) Why can’t positive emphatic imperative sentences be inverted sentences?

The answers for these research questions were provided in terms of the adjacency requirement between the functional host of the imperative feature and the lexical bearers of the imperative feature, as well as the economy principle that bans vacuous syntactic operations. The alternative licensing conditions offered in this study are hierarchical conditions in the sense that they are applied in order.

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