

DISCOURSE - PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF OVERT SUBJECTS IN ENGLISH SENTENCES

Baylar I. Hajiyeu

Abstract: *This article deals with discourse-pragmatic properties of imperative sentences in English. The subject of an imperative sentence must be overtly present if it represents the most important information. The imperative subject is associated with the use of territorial strategies. More specifically the presence of a non-obligatory subject signals the speaker's territorial claim on the information conveyed in the given imperative, and that in consequence of such a claim, the imperative takes on a more authoritative character.*

Key words: *pragmatic functions, imperative sentence, non-obligatory subject*

This article deals with discourse-pragmatic properties of imperative sentences in English.

The subject of an imperative must be overtly present if it represents the most important information. This, of course, does not mean that imperative subjects that do not represent the most important information must undergo *pro-drop*. As for subjects with second-person reference, I have indicated throughout that they can be overtly present even when they do not represent the most important information.

A number of researchers in the past have addressed this question and have offered various remarks and observations. Yamakawa, for instance, writes that the speaker chooses to "append" you to the imperative for the following purposes:

... first to emphasize the person addressed, often with the intention of contrasting or distinguishing him from some other person or persons, and secondly to add some subjective emotional colouring to the tone of the utterance and so reflect on the expression of you some feeling on the speaker's part towards the action that is to be done by the person addressed.

Offering much the same observations, Downes states,

... in those cases where a subject is supplied it is with good reason and the hearer can infer that some conversational purpose is served, either to spec the addressee's identity where this is required..

Similarly, Quirk remarks that the subject *you* may be "contrastive in the sense of addressee-distinguishing," or, when used noncontrastively, either "admonitory" or "persuasive." Don't tell ME to be quiet. YOU be quiet! (Contrastive)

b. You mind your own business, and leave this to me! (Admonitory)

c. I know you can do it if you try hard enough. You show me what you can do. (Persuasive)

Whatever differences may set these characterizations apart, there is an apparent commonality that underlies them all, namely, the implicit view that the various ways in which overt imperative subjects are used and interpreted can be reduced to two basic functions, the first driven by purely informational reasons, and the second, by what may be described as emotive reasons.

The first function, which I shall call "informational," has frequently been referred to in the literature as "contrastive," and is illustrated by Downes' first two examples and Quirk et al.'s first example. Looking at these examples, it is perhaps clear why I have opted for the label "informational," rather than the traditional "contrastive."

The second function, which I propose to call "emotive" in the sense of Jakobson, mainly concerns the second-person pronoun *you* in its "non-obligatory" use-i.e., where it does not represent the most important information in the utterance and thus is not required by the Pecking Order of Deletion Principle. This function is much more difficult to delineate

than the first because the ways in which it can manifest itself are (or at least they appear to be) quite variegated.

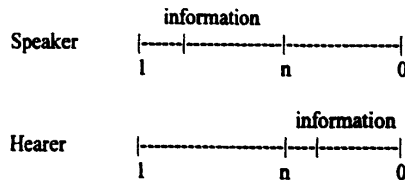
The elusive nature of the emotive function is perhaps most patently evidenced in the following statement by Curme: "[the subject you indicates] that the person addressed should take an interest in something, or that it is intended for his good or for his discomfort, or that it should concern or not concern him especially."

In remonstrance to such unenlightening characterizations, Davies claims that there is in fact a single feature that can be attributed to all the manifestations of the emotive function. This feature, she concludes, is authority." When the speaker is emphasizing his authority to issue a command, for instance, the addressee as impatient may perceive the resulting effect, irritated, or aggressive, whereas when the speaker is offering advice or making a suggestion, his emphasizing his authority may be taken as an expression of encouragement or concern. Of course, intonation plays an important role as well in how a given imperative is perceived. For instance, an utterance like "You tell him how you feel" can have very different emotive effects depending on how it is intoned.

While there is great validity in Davies' analysis, I believe that her notion of authority can be captured in terms of a more general theory, viz., the theory of territory of information. The theory of territory of information, which is first proposed in Kamio and developed further in Kamio's works, has the following basic assumptions:

Territory of Information (Kamio)

a. There are two linear psychological scales, one for the speaker and the other for the hearer, which measure the distance between the speaker/hearer and a given piece of information.



A given piece of information is located on these scales and can take any value between (and including) 1 and 0. b. A given piece of information that is closer to the speaker than "n" belongs to the speaker's territory of information, and that which is closer to the hearer than n belongs to the hearer's territory of information, where n is a specified value between 1 and 0 and designates the outer boundary of both territories.

The exact location of a given piece of information on the two psychological scales, Kamio expounds, is determined on the basis of the following general conditions:

General Conditions on the Location of Information (Kamio)

- a. Information obtained through the speaker's/hearer's internal direct experience;
 - b. Information embodying detailed knowledge which falls into the range of the speaker's/hearer's professional or other expertise;
 - c. Information obtained through the speaker's/hearer's external direct experience;
 - d. Information about persons, objects, etc. that are close to the speaker/hearer.
- Information that satisfies one or more of these conditions is considered to belong to the speaker's/hearer's territory of information. (The acceptability judgments given are Kamio's:

(54) a. I feel lonely.

b. ?? I seem to feel lonely.

(55) a. ?? That lady is your mother.

b. Isn't that lady your mother?

According to Kamio, (54b) is marginal because in general, information that falls within the speaker's territory on account of condition cannot be expressed using a "non-direct" form-i.e., an utterance that contains a hedging element or a rhetorical question. In (55), on the other hand, the (a) sentence is marginal because the speaker with a "direct" form-an utterance that makes a direct assertion without any hedging elements.²⁴, cannot express information that belongs to the hearer's territory generally

As to how the notion of territory of information bears on imperatives, I claim that whenever the speaker uses a non-obligatory *you* subject, he is asserting that the information conveyed in the imperative belongs to his territory of information. I also claim that the authoritativeness that is associated with the use of non-obligatory *you* is a derivative of such a territorial claim. To begin, let us reconsider examples (50-51), repeated below as (56-57):

(56) a. You get out of here this minute! b. You do as I say!

(57) a. You tell him how you feel.

b. You sit down and put your feet up.

In each of these examples, it can be reasonably argued that the information conveyed in the imperative belongs to the speaker's territory of information by virtue of the fact that it satisfies condition.

Now, let us compare examples (56-57) with examples (58-59) below, which are from Davies 1986:148:

(58) A: I'll tell him if you don't stop it.

B: OK, you tell him, then-I don't care.

(59) A: I'm going to report you to the boss.

B: You do that then-it doesn't bother me.

Unlike in (56-57), the information conveyed by the imperative utterance in (58-59) do not truthfully express what speaker B wants to be done. Rather, it expresses what speaker A wants or intends to do, which speaker B apparently has no power to veto. The information, therefore, can be said to belong to speaker A and not speaker B. By using an overt *you* subject in this case, then, speaker B is willfully asserting information that actually does not belong to his territory. That is, speaker B is intentionally treating the information as if it represented what he himself wants to be

To recapitulate, I have contended above that the emotive function of the imperative subject is associated with the use of territorial strategies. More specifically, I have argued that the presence of a non-obligatory *you* subject signals the speaker's territorial claim on the information conveyed in the given imperative, and that in consequence of such a claim, the imperative takes on a more authoritative character.

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Для контакта:

Байлар Гаджиев, Докторант Бакинського Государственного Университета. E-mail: ismetahmadov@mail.ru

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