

Asier Alcázar and Mario Saltarelli, *The syntax of imperatives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. XIV + 221 pages. ISBN 978-1-107-00580-8. EUR 83,04.

The last few years have seen the publication of several monographs on the imperative, such as Aikhenvald (2010), Kaufmann (2012) and Takahashi (2012). The book under review contributes to this growing body of literature in that cross-linguistic research is brought to bear on a minimalist account of the imperative and the indexical speech act categories of speaker and addressee are regarded as essential for the syntactic analysis.

In Chapter 2, after the introductory first chapter, Alcázar and Saltarelli evaluate a number of generative assumptions about the imperative in light of recent typological studies. The data are found to confirm that the imperative is a universal sentence type and is restricted to controllable process predicates and second person subjects, which are optional. The idea that the imperative is non-finite and/or defective is said to be untenable, however. The fact that imperatives may exhibit complex morphology in the world's languages and express tense (e.g. immediate versus non-immediate future), evidentiality (e.g. directive by proxy) and the like is taken as evidence that their syntax is as elaborate as that of declaratives and interrogatives. In the same vein, it is noted that imperatives and hortatives like 'let them go!' and 'let's go!' have crucial properties in common (e.g. controllable process predicates only) and form a homogeneous paradigm in numerous languages. Any theory of the imperative should therefore account for the hortative as well in the authors' view. They also argue that analyses of the imperative as conveying a strong deontic speech act/a potential event are too narrow/broad and that its similar range of directive functions across languages is best captured as a performative prescription.

The fact that the study, unlike much generative work, takes typological findings on board is positive. The way in which they are interpreted at times leaves something to be desired, though. The cross-linguistic infrequency of compulsory subjects, for instance, is seen as support for the optionality of the imperative subject while the rare phenomenon of evidential marking is considered proof that the imperative has the same structural complexity as the other sentence types. Alcázar and Saltarelli also simply disregard dependent clause uses of the imperative as probably 'paratactic under closes analysis' and 'not express[ing] the illocutionary force of the imperative clause' (p. 35) anyway, thus – to some extent – limiting the data to what fits their proposal.

Chapter 3 lays the theoretical groundwork for the minimalist analysis in the next chapter. Earlier generative accounts are argued to postulate many imperative-specific properties (e.g. the absence of tense, a jussive phrase) and,

as such, to be incompatible with the strong minimalist thesis. According to this principle, linguistic theory should not have any complexities or exceptions beyond those that really cannot be avoided. Exceptions such as the aforementioned properties are said to be eliminated when imperatives are regarded as on a par with declaratives and interrogatives structurally. Crucially, though, it is deemed conceptually necessary to represent speaker and addressee in imperative syntax. To support their view, the authors discuss similar proposals that consider other sentence types too (e.g. Speas and Tenny, 2003) and a number of phenomena in the world's languages that point to the structural presence of the context of utterance: indexical shift, logophoricity and conjunct-disjunct-marking systems. In the former, for instance, an indexical like 'I' in a clause syntactically dependent on a clause with a propositional attitude verb like 'he says', i.e. in indirect discourse, is understood not as 'he_i says that I_j am nice' but as 'he_i says that I_i am nice'. It is, in other words, interpreted vis-à-vis the reported context of utterance. The observation that languages differ in the range of indexicals which can shift this way is taken to justify the separate syntactic encoding of the various elements of the context of utterance.

Within the minimalist framework, to which the present author does not subscribe but a critique of which is beyond the scope of this review, Alcázar and Saltarelli make a convincing case for the inclusion of the context of utterance in syntax. Undoubtedly, their ultimate goal of establishing prescription by the speaker to the addressee as central to the imperative will – in some form or other – be welcomed by most functionalists too. The lead-up to the authors' actual proposal is rather lengthy, though: the typological and theoretical preliminaries make up half of the monograph. One could say that Chapters 2 and 3 are required for generativists and non-generativists respectively but this argument loses much of its force when one takes the final chapter into account as well. Chapter 5, another one-seventh of the book, deals with the feature of Basque declaratives and interrogatives that they can agree with non-argument addressees. Allocutive agreement is intended as yet more circumstantial evidence for the need for the syntactic representation of speaker and addressee. However, most of the chapter concerns descriptive details of dialectal variation and the two more theoretical pages on the phenomenon (in Chapter 4!) do not count as a comprehensive analysis of speech act participant encoding in all sentences types in Basque. For that reason, Chapter 5 is not discussed any further here.

In Chapter 4, Alcázar and Saltarelli present their so-called light performative hypothesis. The term will probably remind the reader of Ross's (1970) performative hypothesis. The difference is that the current proposal involves a light verb *v* rather than a lexical verb, as the derivation of the

imperative in Figure 1 (based on p. 113) shows. The illocutionary force in CP is argued to license the value ‘prescribe’ in v’, of which the first argument is the speaker and the second one the addressee, which also serves as the first argument/subject of the lexical verb

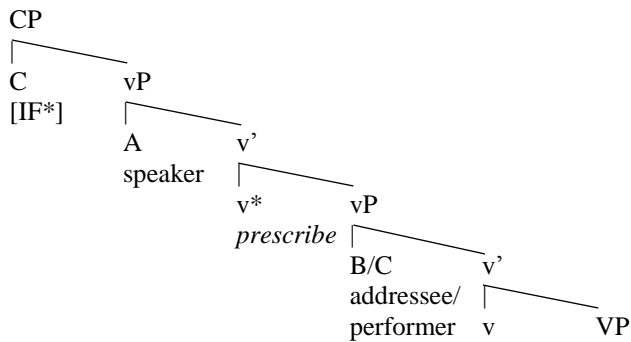


Figure 1: The imperative.

The hortative is very similar in the authors’ view: it just distinguishes performer from addressee, as in Figure 2 (based on p. 114). The latter is the first argument of an additional causative light verb, the former its second argument and the subject of the lexical verb (i.e. A prescribes B to cause C to do something).

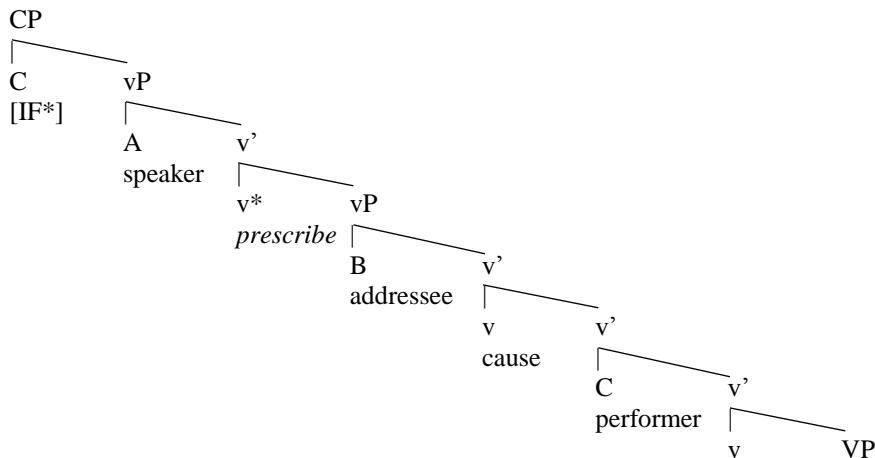


Figure 2: The hortative.

The rest of the chapter outlines the predictions that the light performative hypothesis makes and points out evidence in grammaticalization for its various components. The imperative’s future tense, for example, is said to result ‘from the perceived meaning of the directive speech act as “prescription”’ (p. 138). The fact that, in certain languages, hortatives like ‘let them go!’ have third as

well as second person inflection is considered confirmation for the existence of separate performers and addressees. In the same vein, the reality of a prescriptive light verb is inferred from phenomena such as prohibitive auxiliaries and emphatic *do*, which are seen as overt realizations of *v*.

Alcázar & Saltarelli's proposal is intriguing in that it syntactically integrates notions which have always been associated with the imperative (e.g. addressee involvement and directivity) while postulating the structural parity of all sentence types in keeping with the strong minimalist thesis. Yet, given this ambitious assumption, it is peculiar that no (first) attempt is made to prove the parity. The authors simply state that 'demonstrating or refuting whether other sentence types feature a performative *v* is beyond the scope of [the] research' (p. 197). The predictions too are sometimes discussed in an unsatisfactory way. Past imperatives such as *had gebeld!* ('you should have called!', literally 'had called!'), for example, are essentially argued away on grounds of not fitting the hypothesis, however much they may resemble 'normal' imperatives formally (e.g. Syrian Arabic in Aikhenvald, 2010, p. 132): their reprimand and reproach uses are just said to 'fall short of the basic I-language scenario of imperatives' (p. 140) with its future-oriented prescription in Figure 1. Finally, it should be noted that the analysis of hortatives may require further refinement: does *laat ik gaan!* ('let me go!', literally 'let I go!'), for instance, actually include an addressee different from the speaker – in line with a general principle – as the first argument of a causative light verb or, put differently, are speakers of this hortative really prescribing some addressee to cause themselves to do something?

All in all, despite some shortcomings, the study will be of relevance and use to generativists working on imperatives and/or indexicality. Functionalists, by contrast, may not find the minimalist intricacies particularly interesting.

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