

(A)symmetries in imperative negation: Finiteness and specialization

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This paper's first aim is to test a claim by Miestamo & van der Auwera (2007) about finiteness asymmetry in imperative versus standard negation. The (a)symmetry notion at issue here was developed by Miestamo (2005) for his investigation of standard negation (SN). It can be characterized like this: the constructions/paradigms of domain $f(x)$ differ from those of x (not) only in the presence of $f()$ marking. For his object of study, symmetry means that, as in Dutch in (1), the negation $f()$ of declarative verbal main clauses x just involves extra negative marking.

(1) Dutch (Germanic)

jij slaap-t (niet) goed
2SG.NOM sleep-2SG.PRS NEG good
'You (don't) sleep well.'

In Pite Saami in (2), though, SN requires a negative auxiliary carrying the agreement and tense-mood marking and a lexical verb in its non-finite connegative form. Miestamo (2005) calls such a loss of finiteness relative to a lexical verb's positive appearance finiteness asymmetry (A/Fin). A/Fin's frequency in SN is argued to be due to SN's inherent stativity: negative clauses "report absence of events, ... negate change and thus refer to the inert state of the universe" (Miestamo 2005: 197). Verbs losing finiteness reflect this trait as they become "less verby and more nouny" (Miestamo 2005: 206) and nouns typically designate more time-stable concepts than verbs (cf. Givón's 200 temporal stability scale). A/Fin is found in imperative negation (IN) too, however. Yuhup's imperative marking in (3a) –rising tone, lack of other morphemes– moves to 'be' in (3b) and the lexical verb takes a negated non-finite form normally conveying simultaneity.

(2) Pite Saami (Saami; Wilbur 2014: 139, 229)

a. *mánná aj mujhta-v ...* b. *ittji-v mánn mujte*
1SG.NOM also remember-1SG.PRS NEG-1SG.PST 1SG.NOM remember.CONNEG
'I also remember ...' 'I didn't remember.'

(3) Yuhup (Nadahup; Ospina Bozzi 2002: 166, 173)

a. *wědⁿ* b. *~dédⁿ-~dih dih*
eat.IMP speak.CONC-NEG be.IMP
'Eat!' 'Don't speak!'

Crucially, Miestamo & van der Auwera (2007: 71) maintain that A/Fin occurs less often cross-linguistically in IN than SN, attributing the difference to IN's "illocutionary dynamicity": negative imperatives, like positive ones, still require activity from the hearer. Their claim is based on a 30-language sample only, though. Adopting Miestamo's (2005: 73-96) analytic framework of A/Fin, this paper will check it in a 200-language sample –following Miestamo et al.'s (2016) genus-macroarea sampling with predetermined size method– and examine whether A/Fin in SN and A/Fin in IN imply each other.

To answer these questions, it is important to determine what counts as IN. One may consider Lower Chehalis in (4) to instantiate A/Fin in IN but (4b), paraphrasable as 'your filling it is not the case', is actually an indicative used directively. The language has no construction dedicated to the meaning 'don't ...!' and could be argued to exhibit asymmetry in specialization (A/Sp), given the imperative suffix in (4a). Its comparison to (4b) would be one to an SN construction, which is to be avoided if one wants to contrast the domains of IN and SN in terms of finiteness.

(4) Lower Chehalis (Tasmosan; Robertson 2014:108, 110)

a. *√yəl-áʔ-əc* b. *√hílu-Ø ʔə-s-√ləč' -ən*
help-IMP-1SG.OBJ.PFV NEG-3.SBJ.PRF 2SG.POSS-NMLZ-fill-3.OBJ.PRF

‘Help me!’

‘Don’t fill it!’ or ‘You do not fill it.’

The observation that languages may lack specialized (negative) imperative constructions is not new (e.g. Aikhenvald 2010: 7) but A/Spe’s frequency across the world has not been examined yet. The second aim here is to undertake such a study, to see to what extent the presence/absence of a dedicated imperative implies that of a dedicated negative imperative (or vice versa) and to bar cases such as (4) from the A/Fin investigation. The paper will adopt Jary & Kissine’s (2016) comparative concept of imperative and adapt it for negative imperatives, requiring structures to be specialized for directivity (e.g. no ambiguity with indicative/optative meanings) and able to serve the “whole” range of directive purposes (e.g. no permission/warning-only meanings). The focus will just be on constructions oriented to the hearer(s) only, though (e.g. not ‘let’s ...!’).

The initial results (132 languages, Australia & New Guinea and South America just partially covered) reveal that, in most languages, IN is symmetric regarding specialization, 73% having dedicated imperatives *and* negative imperatives but 5% having neither (e.g. Agta, Greater Central Philippine, simply uses its declaratives directly). More than one fifth still displays A/Spe and, of these languages, 11 have no real negative imperative (e.g. Yuhup) and 17 no imperative (e.g. Slave, Athapaskan, relies on the indicative imperfective for positive directives). Together, the numbers suggest that the presence of an imperative strongly implies the presence of a negative imperative and vice versa but also that the absence of one does not imply the absence of the other. The substantial minority of languages with A/Spe or no dedicated constructions at all could be taken as problematizing the (negative) imperative’s status as a universal sentence type (e.g. Sadock & Zwicky 1985) and –even without considering their grammatical make-up– the imperative and negative imperative as a cross-linguistically paired set of constructions. As to A/Fin, the results so far do not bear out Miestamo & van der Auwera’s (2007) claim, rather the opposite: it occurs in 19% of languages in SN and 26% of languages with IN. The figures cast doubt not only on their appeal to illocutionary dynamicity for IN but perhaps also on stativity as motivating A/Fin in SN. The fact that, in more than half of the languages, A/Fin in SN and A/Fin in IN imply each other (e.g. in Pite Saami) is attributable to analogy/a desire for structural uniformity across negation domains. Such a need for cohesion might also explain at least some of the languages with A/Fin in SN but no A/Fin in IN (e.g. in Great Adamanese, the (negative) imperative involves an optional subject and complementary suffixes). In languages with A/Fin in IN and no A/Fin in SN, finally, the former is often due to the negative imperative marker’s independent diachrony (e.g. in Vitu, Oceanic, IN consists of a negator derived from ‘leave’ plus a nominalized lexical verb; cf. Aikhenvald 2010: 10.3 on sources for prohibitives).

References

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