Subjects of imperatives

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1 Introduction

Schachter (1976:506) presents a generalization that if an imperative lacks an overtly indicated subject, a second person subject is understood. I would not have found this claim particularly noteworthy, other than for its mysterious attribution (Schachter cites an unpublished manuscript by Bell (1974), who allegedly cites Kenneth Hale), were it not for an (unpublished) counter-observation made by Ivan Sag. He noted that the old Indo-European languages such as Latin and Sanskrit had forms that were considered third person imperatives, even without pover subjects; and expressions such as French *allons-y* are considered to be first person, even without an expressed *nous*. In this squib I should like to investigate whether Sag's examples actually constitute a valid counterexample, and if so, how much damage is done. Is the hypothesis of Hale (or Bell's interpretation of it, or Schachter's interpretation of that; henceforth, 'the HBS generalization') a statistical universal, for which we must be content with a certain amount of material on the lighter side of the scale? Or can it be tightened up so that it makes less sweeping but more valid claims?[1]

For this study, I looked at a sample of about fifty languages in varying amounts of detail, ranging from a rather careful look at some of the Indo-European languages, especially those mentioned by Sag, down to a more or less unexamined recording of cursory statements recorded in basic grammars. Results must be considered preliminary, but it appears at this point that the HBS generalization about 2p imp. subjects needs to be revised and reformulated under the following three heads.

[1] I will not be addressing the curious use that Schachter (and apparently Bell) put the HBS generalization to in his paper, which is to demonstrate that a particular argument of the verb in Cebuano must be a subject because it can be omitted in the imperative. The reasoning seems to be that from the rule 'If an imperative's subject is omitted, then it is second person' one can derive the rule 'If a second person element is omitted in the imperative, then it is a subject.' This is a logic I am unfamiliar with. I can only assume that Schachter has omitted some details for want of space.

1. There is a cross-linguistic general relationship between the imperative mood (imp.) on the one hand and number and person on the other. If a language has any distinctively marked imperative form, it will minimally be the second person singular (2p sing.). If it has another, it will be the 2p plural (pl.). If another, 1p pl. inclusive or 3p. The 1p sing. is the form least likely to be found in an imperative system. Such patterns are rarely found in other moods, such as the subjunctive, which is often pulled in to fill in gaps in the imperative paradigm.

2. When the imperative system covers more than one person, these categories of person and number may be conflated, so that the person or number of a particular form may be underdetermined. When person is left ambiguous, because a verb form is so underdetermined and there is no explicit subject, then there is a strong conversational implicature that a command addressed to a party is meant for that party to carry out, i.e., has an implicit 2p subject. However, at least in the case of pro-drop languages, languages seem in general to leave open the possibility that the command is meant for a third party, that is, that a 3p subject is to be supplied. The languages of Latin and Sanskrit are particularly clear examples of this, and reveal a serious weakness in Schachter's formulation of the HBS generalization.

3. The unmarked nature of the 2p imperative is further indicated by the fact that cross-linguistically, in languages that mark person, the 2p sing. is very often left unexpressed. If any form has no personal affix in the imperative, its scope will include the second person. If any imperative can be used without a subject, the 2p pronoun can be omitted. This tendency to leave the 2p or 2p sing. unexpressed may be related to a more general tendency to make the imperative be the shortest form of the verb.

Before presenting the data, a terminological point. One problem that is very difficult to avoid when discussing this topic is the distinction between notional and grammatical categories, as Jespersen (1924:217) drew for person. Grammatically, person is a set of agreement markers that correlate strongly with whether a statement is about the speaker, addressee, or another party. Notionally, person is just that pragmatic concept, and a conflict can arise when one for example talks about oneself (notional first person) in the grammatical third person. The distinction between the different types of person is particularly important when discussing imperatives. Many people bring to the discussion a presupposition that imperatives simply must be second person, because it is senseless to give an order to oneself or to someone not participating in the conversation. (Thus forms like *God bless you* are sometimes excluded from the domain of the English imperative on a priori grounds.[2]) But it should be kept in mind that in principle, a verb could be grammatically third person or even completely unmarked for person and yet be intended for the listener to execute, or that a grammatically second person form could be used to talk about non-participants in a conversation (such as the indefinite *you* in English.) In this paper, when discussing covert subjects, I will in general be satisfied with notional criteria—is a command meant for the listener to execute, or some third party? This allows me to prescind from the question as to whether the omitted subject is in any real sense present and capable of entering into such things as grammatical agreement relations (which I rather doubt).

Another area in which the notional and grammatical may diverge is in the very idea of the imperative itself. The imperative may be a grammatical mood, or it may be the notion of giving an order. Of course, orders can be given without using the imperative mood *(I order you to close the door)*, and there are many uses of the imperative that are not classifiable as a command or even as a request. One of the most spectacularly non-imperative uses is the conditional construction. Jespersen (1924:314) cites examples like Stevenson's *Spoil foc's'le hands, make devils*, where the intent of the utterance is far from advocating spoiling. In an attempt to limit the scope of this squib, I shall mostly be looking at grammatical imperatives, though of course in less inflected languages there may not be a lot of overt evidence for distinguishing mood on a purely formal basis.

2 Person hierarchy

The relationship between the imp. mood and person can be formulated as a set of implicational universals: 1p sing. ⇒ 3p or 1p pl. ⇒ 2p pl. ⇒ 2p sing.

2.1 Second person singular

In the set of languages I have looked at, many of the Indo-European ones have a distinctive imperative form only in the 2p sing. This is particularly noteworthy because the oldest Indo-European languages (as will be seen), and surely the protolanguage (PIE) have more complicated patterns, so the restricted paradigms are the result of repeated innovations, presumably towards a typologically more common pattern. In Old High German (Braune 1967:265) and Old English (Millward 1971) there were occasional instances of a 1p pl. imp. form, probably separate innovations in certain dialects, which didn't last; certainly Old English after the time of Ælfric had no 1p pl. imperative. Otherwise these languages had a distinct imperative only for the 2p sing., and used the indicative for the 2p pl. The situation still holds for

[2]Those of an historical bent sometimes exclude those sentences on the grounds that in earlier English they were in the subjunctive, a separate mood from the imperative.

modern German (Donhauser 1985:60-70, Lederer 1969) and Yiddish (Birnbaum 1979:269-270), and likewise in Old Norse (Gordon 1962:297-308) through modern Icelandic (Einarsson 1945:94). Italian (Speight 1962) and Rumanian (Nandris 1953:106-7) have the same pattern, an innovation over Latin. In modern Farsi (Elwell-Sutton 1941:25), it is an innovation over Old Persian (Kent 1953:77). Masica (1991:476) says that most of the modern Indo-Aryan languages have a specific imp. only in the 2p sing. (using the subjunctive for other forms), an innovation over Old Indic.

Written French belongs in this category, but as pronounced, the imperatives are all identical to the indicatives. Even the one instance in which the imperative is spelt differently, the 2p sing. of verbs in *-e*, where the imperative leaves off the *-s* of the indicative, this *-s* is written and pronounced in sandhi contexts: *parles-en* 'speak of it'. Otherwise, in the few cases where an imperative form seems to be different from the indicative, it is because a subjunctive is being used: *sois* 'be' versus indicative *es* 'art' (Grevisse 1964:569-71, 577-8).

2.2 Second person plural

If a language adds another distinctively imperative form, it will be the 2p pl. The ordinary Latin imperative (*amā, amāte* 'love', versus indicative *amās, amātis*) fell into this category (Gildersleeve 1895:71-84), although as will be seen there was another imperative tense that did not. The Iberian languages Spanish (Ugarte 1958:67-68) and Portuguese (Hills et al. 1925:155) continue this pattern in their only imperative: Spanish *habla, hablad*, Port. *fala, falai* 'speak'. The subjunctive is used in other persons. Modern Demotic Greek innovates this pattern (Bien et al. 1983:276-283), losing the 3p imper. of the ancient language. Russian (Maltzoff 1965:176-82) innovates this pattern over common Slavic: *piš-í, piš-í-te* 'write'. This is the basic pattern in the Semitic languages as well, although they also distinguish the gender of the person to whom the command is addressed (Biblical Hebrew, Weingreen 1959; modern Hebrew, Rosén 1966:17, 20; Classical Arabic, W. Wright 1898:61; Akkadian, Ungnad 1964:69-83; Tigré, Prospero 1935:334; Amharic, Prospero 1935:341; Syriac, Robinson 1962:58). Bantu has only second person imperatives (Zulu, Nyembezi 1972:6-15; Swahili, Ashton 1947:25-6, 118-20), as does Maya (Tozzer 1921:82-4). This is probably true of many other languages as well, but grammars are often not explicit about this. Many people assume that the imperative is inherently a second person mood, and so do not bother to state that restriction on its applicability. Of course it is impossible to distinguish that from the case where the writers omit mention of existing first or third person imperatives through oversight or because of their comparative rarity.

Although the 2p singular clearly has a special status, I doubt that the 2p plural does. Rather, it is the next most common form simply by dint of being second person non-singular. Accordingly, one would expect there to be languages which have a second person imperative undifferentiated for number, and no other imperative. This seems to be the case for modern English, although this is somewhat contentious. Some linguists have argued that the English imperative actually embraces the third person, if one scratches beneath the surface. Bolinger (1967:354) cites the following dialogue, which I assume he made up:

> Why can't he support his family?—He doesn't earn enough on this job.—Then get himself another one. I don't see why *we* should be expected to support him.

I'm not at all sure what to make of this example. Perhaps there are dialects where people accept this sort of thing. If so, one might wonder whether this is really a 3p usage proper, or whether some discourse factor has led to truncation. Certainly the response I get when I try this out is 'You left out "he ought to"'. Bolinger also adduces several pairs like the following:

> How can I convince them?—Tell them the truth.
>
> How can she convince them?—Tell them the truth.

The argument here seems to be that the first reply can be taken as an imperative; the two replies are felt to be structurally identical; so the second reply must be imperative too, but necessarily third person. These examples are intriguing, but it is not altogether clear that they are really imperatives. These may be infinitives, which are identical in form to the English imperative. Certainly in German the closest translation would be *Ihnen die Wahrheit sagen* (Susanne Riehemann, p.c.) or in French *Leur dire la vérité* (Christine Poulin, p.c.), using the infinitive; the imperative would definitely be ruled out. Bolinger may not have considered this objection probative, since he believed that the infinitive and imperative were closely interrelated, basic forms. Most of his evidence, however, comes from the fact that the two forms are identical in English; but they have fallen together for purely phonetic reasons, and the principle would not generalize well cross-linguistically. There are other languages where the imperative and an infinitive are identical or suspiciously close—Biblical Hebrew and Quechua (R. Wright 1989:18-19) come to mind—but this is not an extremely wide-spread correlation.

Levenston (1969) too insists that the imperative is not second person, but rather, is simply opposed to the first person. Levenston calls this a 'to whom it may concern' person (p. 39), citing such sentences as *Stand up, the boy who threw that ink pellet!* as showing that third person subjects are compatible with the imperative. An analysis of such noun phrases would take this squib too far afield, but it is likely that such examples can be referred to vocative functions, sometimes in apposition to the true subject. Thus the example given could have had the verb *Show yourself*, with a second person reflexive; *the boy* is not the subject of the sentence, but a vocative clarifying exactly who is being addressed. See for example Downing (1969:581), who finds that these 'third person' imperatives are distinguishable from (archaic) subjunctives precisely in that they address members of a group.

The original Katz and Postal data (1964; summarized at Bolinger 1967:335) arguing for 2p still holds up well. The reflexives used with imperatives are *yourself* and *yourselves*, and the tag *will you?* is possible in imperatives that denote true requests, but never **will he?* These facts seem to hold even if an overt third-person form is used: one can say *Everybody cross yourself*, and even if one avails oneself of the option of using a third person reflexive, the only possible tag is still second person: *Everybody cross himself, will you?* I might add that in conditional expressions like *Use a gun, go to jail*, where notionally one is dealing with timeless, impersonal implications, a third person anaphor like **Use his gun...* would be impossible, but *Use your gun, go to jail* is fine. This is not just a matter of using *your* in an indefinite sense, since the indefinite **Use one's own gun, go to jail* doesn't work either.

So despite some interesting data brought up in favour of third person subjects, it seems that English imperatives are second person, and this is particularly clear in the case under consideration, when there is no overt subject. Even the *let's* imperative cannot be used in an exclusive sense (Hamblin 1987:59); that is, *let's go* necessarily includes the addressee. This suggests that *let's* is marked for both first and second person, and that it is only by dint of this latter feature that it can be used in English imperative constructions.

There is nevertheless one small set of exceptions. Expressions like *The Lord make his face to shine upon you* have true third person subjects, and although these are often separately classified as subjunctives, there is no apparent reason for this other than historical considerations or the a priori idea that imperatives should not be third person. But as Downing (1969:581) notes, these are relic forms, obligatorily referring to God as actor; he cites the impossibility of **Somebody turn you into a frog.* More to the point, the verbs *bless* and *damn* (but not apparently any of their synonyms) can be used without a subject, with the actor understood to be God. Furthermore, *fuck* and its synonyms appears also to be usable without a subject in a third person imperative sense, although here it is less clear who the actor is meant to be. These then are true exceptions, but it is a very small group of relic forms that appear to have lost all productivity.

Other languages that have a generalized 2p imperative are Dutch (Shetter 1973:33) and most of the modern Scandinavian languages (Haugen 1982:123, 136-142), and apparently Maya (Tozzer 1921:82-4). Some languages can use the 2p sing. form to address more than one person, even though there is a distinct plural (Mongolian, Bosson 1964: 27, 88-90).

2.3 First person plural

The most common next step is to add a 1p pl. imperative. Although PIE seems to have had 2p and 3p imperatives but no 1p forms, many of the daughter languages have reorganized so as to have 2p and 1p imperatives but no 3p forms. It has already been noted that Old English and Old High German experimented with a 1p imperative (which, by the way, weakens my imperative person hierarchy, since they had no distinctive 2p pl. forms). Czech (Šára et al. 1970:74-5), Polish (Bisko et al. 1973:121-3), and Serbo-Croatian (Javarek and Sudjić 1972:123-4) have also adopted the pattern of having imperatives in only the 2p and the 1p pl.; their source language also had a 3p sing. imperative, which was rejected. Although explicit statements are hard to come by, it appears that this form is almost entirely used for an inclusive reading, that is, including the addressee. Thus the special status of this form devolves from its inclusion of 2p-ness, and so is again just a consequence of the special status of 2p imperatives. This will work out nicely if one provides that the three persons are not a mutually exclusive ternary feature but a combination of binary features, where the 1p inclusive plural is marked both for 1p and for 2p.

Other languages have a special means of expressing 1p pl. commands or exhortations, even though not strictly through a morphological imperative. English has a specially contracted *let's* form that makes it distinct from 3p uses of *let*, where there is a confusion with the permissive meaning (*let him go* could be jussive or permissive, but contracted *let's go* is strictly hortative). German has a verb-initial usage *gehen wir* 'let's go', which is not possible with that meaning in the 3p. Icelandic has preserved the Old Norse way of using the 1p pl. indicative (but not the 3p) in an imperative sense (Einarsson 1945:94), and French has innovated this as well (Grevisse 1964). In some other languages there are differences between the first and third persons, although it may not be so clear that the 1p is really special: in Turkish, for example, an imperative mood is used for the 2p and 3p, but the subjunctive for the 1p pl. (Mardin 1961:38-41). In general, the subjunctive is a common substitute in persons and numbers where the imperative proper is lacking.

2.4 Third person

A language with 2p imperatives may add 3p imperatives. Occasionally this happens even when there are no 1p imp. forms. In Latin, the future imperative had both 2p and 3p uses, although the forms were distinguished only in the plural, leading to some important ambiguities that will be discussed in the next section. Ancient Greek had both 2p and 3p imperatives, although in the 2p the indicative was used in the dual and plural, pointing out a weakness in my hierarchy (Buck 1933:302-4). Old Persian also had 2p and 3p forms without a 1p (Kent 1953:77), and so did Sanskrit (W. Whitney 1889). All of these are old Indo-European languages, and so the data must reflect a continuance of the PIE state of affairs; it should be noted that the daughter languages all broke up this pattern. Outside of Indo-European, Turkish has an imp. only for 2p and 3p, using the subjunctive for 1p pl. (Mardin 1961:38-41).

At other times, the 3p and 1p pl. imperatives coexist. Catalan may be interpreted as having developed 1p pl. and 3p imperatives, although these generally agree either with the indicative or the subjunctive (Gili 1974:55-78). Old Bulgarian (Old Church Slavic) included only the 3p sing., substituting periphrasis for the plural (Rosenkranz 1955:122-3).

2.5 First person singular

Finally, languages may have a full imperative paradigm. Within Indo-European, modern Irish has innovated this state (Gramadach 1958:46-71). It seems that Mongolian (Bosson 1964: 27, 88-90), Hungarian (Bánhidi et al. 1965:232-9), Finnish (A. Whitney 1956:101), and Eskimo (Thibert 1970:159-61) have full paradigms as well. In uninflected languages, where there is a greater combinatorial freedom, it is harder to pin down the grammaticality of unusual 1p sing. collocations.

In summary, the examination of the person hierarchy as it applies to imperatives suggests that the HBS generalization is true at least up to this point: Cross-linguistically, if an imperative form is restricted to a single person, that will be the second person, and the subject, if omitted, is obligatorily 2p.

3 The person of omitted subjects

In many of the cases that have been mentioned, the imperative mood is inflected for person. As Sag noted, if a Sanskrit verb ends in *-tu* or a Greek verb in *-tō*, it is necessarily third person. If the subject is omitted, a third person subject is necessarily implied. This is not a peculiarity of the old Indo-European languages, but is shared by others that have pro-drop and inflection for person, such as Hungarian (Bánhidi et al. 1965). This constitutes a major hole in the HBS generalization. It must be revised to exclude the case where verbs are explicitly marked for person. Or its notion of explicit subject could be broadened to include subject agreement morphemes on the verb.

The question becomes thornier if one looks at the cases where a single verb form can be used in different persons. The implications of the grammars I consulted is that the default assumption is 2p. But few grammars were as helpful as Beyer's grammar of Classical Tibetan, which says of imperatives (1992:362-3): 'an omitted participant is processed as recoverable from context; in conversation, a second-person addressee is inherently recoverable.' This not only pins down the facts for Tibetan—imperatives with omitted subjects may have non-2p interpretations, contra the HBS hypothesis—but also gives a valuable clue about how to interpret the facts cross-linguistically. The implication is that the special status of the 2p comes not from some invisible *you* present as an inherent subject of imperatives in DS, but from normal discourse implicatures. In face-to-face conversation without context, which is the sort of context one tends to think of when contemplating sentences, a bald imperative would be interpretable only as a command to the hearer. With some context, or in a different discourse situation (such as written laws) the possibilities multiply and it becomes easier to see how a third party might be meant to be the actor of the command. Of course, this would apply only to languages where a single imperative form can take 3p as well as 2p subjects and where there is pro-drop in the third person, and so would exclude languages like English or indeed most modern European languages.

To investigate this matter just a little bit farther, I first looked at Chinese with the help of a native speaker, Vivienne Fong. Chinese does not inflect for person, number, or mood. The ordinary imperative is a bare verb, although *ba* may be added at the end of the sentence as a sort of exhortatory particle. Such bare imperatives are normally 2p or 1p pl; the subject *nǐ* 'you' or *wǒmen* 'we' may be added (Li and Thompson 1981:451-62). Third person imperatives are normally formed with the help of specific subjects and auxiliaries (such as the Mandarin verb *ràng* or the Cantonese particle *lāw*). I was unable to get my informant to accept a third person reading for a bare verb phrase like *chī táng* 'eat candy' given a general context. If given a very specific prompt, such as the sentence *lián fàn dōu chī bù de*, approximately '(they) don't even have rice to eat', she might interpret *chī táng ba*, with the exhortatory particle, as meaning 'let them eat candy', being elliptical for the preferred response *ràng tāmen chītáng ba*, with an explicit subject and jussive auxiliary.

A more interesting case is Japanese, since it has explicit marking for imperatives (*-ro* is added to vocalic stems, *-e* to consonantal ones), which can regularly take third-person subject (Martin 1975:959-63)—*hikari are*, for example, means 'let there be light'—but no inflection for person. Japanese is also well-known for dropping subjects, which it regularly does in 2p imperatives, so I tried to determine to what extent subjects could be dropped in third-person imperatives. With a native informant (Masayo Iida) I set up a situation where a minister informs the Empress that the peasants have no rice, and then the Empress exclaims *Keeki o tabero*, literally, *eat cake* in the imperative. My informant rejected that sentence and corrected the verb to *tabesasero*, the causative, apparently so that it could be second person imperative but still have the obviously intended pragmatics. Curiously enough, however, she accepted the sentence *wara demo tabero* as meaning 'let them eat straw or something'. This use of the imperative suggests a sneering attitude to her; she took (rightly I think) 'let them eat cake' as showing indifference or sheer obliviousness rather than blatant cruelty. The experiment shows that imperatives in the right context can be interpreted as third person without a subject, but there clearly is a strong preference for a second person reading.

Finally, I turn to the classical Indo-European languages that Sag adduced in his challenge to HBS, and find that indeed the data become sharper. As was mentioned earlier, the more basic imperative formation in Latin is strictly 2p. But Latin has another form, often called a future imperative. In the active singular, it ends in *-tō* (Old Latin *-tōd*), and this form can be used both for 2p and 3p. The plural distinguishes the two persons, with *-tōte* for the second and *-ntō* for the third (Gildersleeve 1895:71-84, 89, 174-8.) The singular forms, where the person is ambiguous, are a serious challenge to the HBS generalization, since Latin can in general omit 3p subjects. If this was the case also for the imperatives, then the HBS generalization does not hold. In Classical Latin, the second person seems to have been the ordinary assumption, since third person imperatives were not in fact used very often (the subjunctive was more common then). But in Old Latin, there seems to have been a real formal ambiguity. Sometimes the *-tō(d)* form without a subject is clearly second person. For example, an oracle bronze has the inscription *Laetus lubens petito, quod dabitur gaudebis semper* (Warmington 1940:248), where the presence of the 2p future indicative in the apodosis makes it certain that the protasis is also second person: literally, 'Seek thou happy and free, thou shalt rejoice because it shall be given'. On other occasions, it must have been third person. In a third-century inscription found at Spoletium (Warmington 1940:154-5), in a text that is consistently third person (*honce loucom nequs violatod* 'let no one damage this grove'), there is the line *seiquis violasit, Iove bovid piaclum datod*, which must in context mean 'if anyone does damage, let him/her make a sin-offering to Jupiter with an ox'. But the subject of *datod* is omitted. One may argue that there is an explicit 3p subject to the preceding embedded clause (*quis*), but there is no reason at all to assume that the subject of protasis and apodosis should be the same; certainly a sentence like *If anyone does damage, you shall make a sin-offering* is perfectly reasonable (imagine it addressed to the guard whose duty it might be to protect a sacred spot). An even more compelling case is found on a public works contract (Warmington 1940:274-9), where the contract begins *qui redemerit praedes dato* 'let the one who shall have taken out the contract provide guarantors', clearly establishing a 3p context. The contract continues for about fifty more lines, virtually every sentence including at least one command in the future imperative singular, such as *Insuper simas pictas ferro offigito*, 'on top he shall fasten up, with iron, engraved ogee mouldings.' To convince us that the contract has not switched to the second person, the subject *eisdem* 'the same person' is occasionally thrown in. Such evidence is easy to multiply. It seems clear that the HBS generalization cannot hold in any significant sense for the future imperative singular, although it is worth investigating to what extent the interpretation is bound up with genre. For example, it may well be that the imperative has primarily a 3p interpretation in legal documents, but a second person one in private correspondence.

In Vedic Sanskrit there was an imperative in *-tāt* that was quite analogous to (and cognate with) the *-tōd* form in Latin, in that it seems to have expressed a future sense—a command to be carried out later—and in that it was used for more than one person. Mostly it was 2p, but there are examples where it was used with 3p sing. verbs, and one instance where it was used with *ahám* 'I'. According to W. Whitney (1889:214), these forms occur only about 150 times in all of the Vedic literature. The examples he gives are all (except for the *ahám* in the Atharvaveda) either second person without a subject, or third singular with a subject. Looking through the Rigveda, most of the (few) examples I found are subjectless second persons, e.g., *Úṣo yád adyá bhānúnā ví dvā́rāv ṛṇávo diváḥ | prá no* **yacchatād** *avṛkáṃ pṛthú chardíḥ ...* (RV 1.48.15; Rigveda texts are taken from the edition of the Vaidika Saṁśodhana Maṇḍala) 'O Usas, when today with (thy) light thou openest the doors of heaven, bestow on us a safe broad enclosure'. Similar examples with vocatives in the same verse may be found at 1.174.5, 2.30.5, 3.18.1, 3.23.2 and 4.50.2. On the other hand, 10.154 is a clear example of a hymn where the future imperative is to be taken in the third person.

sóma ékebhyaḥ pavate
ghṛtám éka úpāsate |
yébhyo mádhu pradhā́vati
tā́ṃś cid evā́pi *gacchatāt* ||
tápasā yé anādhṛṣyā́s
tápasā yé svàr yayúḥ |
tápo yé cakriré máhas
tā́ṃś cid evā́pi *gacchatāt* ||
yé yúdhyante pradháneṣu
śū́rāso yé tanūtyájaḥ |
yé vā sahásradakṣiṇās
tā́ṃś cid evā́pi *gacchatāt* ||
yé cit pū́rva ṛtasā́pa
ṛtā́vāna ṛtāvṛ́dhaḥ |
pitṝ́n tápasvato yama
tā́ṃś cid evā́pi *gacchatāt* ||
sahásraṇīthāḥ kaváyo
yé gopāyánti sū́ryam |
ṛ́ṣīn tápasvato yama
tapojā́ṃ ápi *gacchatāt* ||

In the translation of A. Bergaigne (Varenne 1967:143), the refrain is consistently rendered as 'qu'il arrive chez ceux-là même', treating the form *gacchatāt* as a 3p imperative, even though no subject is ever present. The intended subject in fact is never directly spelt out in this hymn, and has been a matter of some contention (Lanman 1884:391). But the fact that Yama is being directly addressed (in the vocative form *yama*) in the last two stanzas right before the refrain shows that if the verb is taken to be 2p, it must be addressed to Yama. But it would be absurd to think that Yama, the archetypal Deceased Ancestor, is being urged to go to the land of the Deceased Ancestors. Lanman is undoubtedly correct in asserting that the subject is the soul of the deceased, who is being ritually wished a safe journey to that abode with appeals to Yama; such ritual is found throughout the Vedic literature. Therefore the imperatives are to be interpreted as having an implied 3p subject, contra the HBS generalization.

It would appear therefore that in Latin and Sanskrit, the interpretation of imperatives that are ambiguous for person depends entirely on the context. In this respect they behave no differently from any other verb whose subject is omitted in a pro-drop language. Ultimately the interpretation depends on what makes sense in terms of discourse factors, not syntactical ones. Surely there is a default assumption that imperatives are 2p, for the same reason that one would expect statements to be largely non-2p or questions to be non-1p: the situations giving rise to such utterance types must simply be more common in human discourse.

So it seems at this point that one aspect of the HBS generalization is best worded as follows. Cross-linguistically, if an imperative form is ambiguous between different persons, the default assumption will be that it is to be given a 2p interpretation, but context factors may prevail if the language allows pro-drop in the other person(s).

4 The unmarkedness of the second person singular

Looking at the cross-linguistic data, there is one further sense in which the HBS generalization may be construed as true. Cross-linguistically, the 2p sing. imperative appears to be unmarked in a literal sense, in that there is a tendency not to overtly express the subject. Previous sections showed that imperatives in general and therefore subjectless ones in particular tend to have 2p interpretations; this section demonstrates the converse.

In almost all the languages I looked at, a 2p sing. subject is normally not expressed. I found only two counterexamples, and in both cases the expression of the pronoun is optional. The word for *you* is normally overtly expressed in Icelandic, but it is noteworthy that *þú* is here enclitic and seems to be perceived more as an ending than as an independent pronoun. It is regularly spelt as part of the verb, with assimilations of the thorn being regularly expressed: *talaðu* 'speak', *teldu* 'count', *lestu* 'read' (Einarsson 1945:28-9). The other example is Hawai'ian: *e hele 'oe* 'go', where *'oe* means 'you' (Elbert and Pukui 1979:60-1).

Perhaps more surprisingly, this terseness extends also to inflectional endings. When contemplating the endings in the daughter languages, it is important to distinguish ending from stem; a stem vowel appears throughout the conjugation, before different endings. In languages where person on verbs is expressed by suffixes, there is a tendency to have no suffix at all on the 2p sing. imp. This was surely the case in PIE for thematic stems (but not for athematic stems, where the ending was -*dhi*), and while a few old languages continued the PIE distinction (Greek, Buck 1933:302-4; Old Persian, Elwell-Sutton 1941:25; Sanskrit, W. Whitney 1889:234), the ultimate outcome was a levelling in favour of omission. So in English, including Old English (Millward 1971); Old High German and German, although the latter also has an optional but less frequent -*e* ending (Donhauser 1985:60-70), continuing an original thematic vowel; Yiddish (Birnbaum 1979:269-270); Dutch (Shetter 1973:33); Scandinavian languages (Haugen 1982:123, 136-142); Latin, where the final vowel in the basic (present) imp. *amā* 'love', etc., is part of the stem (Gildersleeve 1895:71-89); Catalan (Gili 1974:55-78); Italian (Speight 1962); Spanish (Ugarte 1958:67-68); Portuguese (Hills et al. 1925:155); Rumanian (Nandris 1953:106-7); Farsi (Elwell-Sutton 1941:25); most of the modern Indo-Aryan languages (Masica 1991:260); Irish, Old (Thurneysen 1946:372-5) and Modern (Gramadach 1958:46-71). In Slavic, this is the outcome even though its imperative was rebuilt on the PIE optative, which did have a personal ending in the 2p sing. (-*s*). While it would be attractive to see this as a drive toward a universal, the fact that Slavic regularly lost final -*s* in other paradigms makes such a conclusion impossible. In the Semitic languages, the 2p sing. masculine imp. has no personal ending, but the feminine and plural forms do (Biblical Hebrew, Weingreen 1959; Modern Israeli, Rosén 1966:17, 20; Arabic, W. Wright (1898:61); Akkadian, Ungnad 1964:69-83; Tigré, Prospero 1935:334; Amharic, Prospero 1935:341; Syriac, Robinson 1962:58). The same is true for Mongolian (Bosson 1964: 27, 88-90), Turkish (Mardin 1961:38-41), Finnish (A. Whitney 1956:101), the Dravidian languages (Caldwell 1856:351, 420), and the Niger-Congo languages (Zulu, Nyembezi 1972:6-15; Yoruba, Wolff 1961:43-6; Swahili, Ashton 1947:25-6, 118-20; Igbo, Williamson 1972:xxxiii). In Hungarian, the 2p sing. ending is optional and usually omitted in the indefinite form (the inflection of verbs not taking a definite object; Bánhidi et al. 1965:232-9).

To a certain extent the omission both of overt subjects and of personal endings can be referred to a general principle of economy: because of the previously demonstrated tendency for imperatives to be 2p, particularly 2p sing., it is more efficient to allow that to be the default and not express it. But there also seems to be an independent tendency to make imperatives as short as possible. Many languages that consistently mark moods with special morphemes build the imperative on the bare stem. This was true of PIE, and remains true in the aforementioned Indo-European languages except for the Slavic ones. In the Semitic languages, the imperative form is almost always the bare stem, and so in Mongolian, Turkish, and the Dravidian languages.

Tibetan uses the bare stem for intransitive verbs, and often omits the imp. -*s* ending from transitive ones (Beyer 1992:362-5). The Niger-Congo languages I examined use the bare stem for the imperative, as does Malay (Pino 1953:54-5). In the Polynesian languages, the imperative particle is usually optional (Maori, Smyth 1939:85-6; Samoan, Marsack 1962:32; Hawai'ian, Elbert and Pukui 1979:60-1). It will be noted that many of these same languages use no marker for the 2p sing., so that that imperative form is just the bare stem. One might expect that to be about as short a form as one can get, but it is not unusual to see languages push even beyond that limit, at least for words of high frequency. In Italian (Speight 1962), a few verbs have an imperative shorter than the stem, such as *di'* 'say' (indicative *dici*); the same is true of Rumanian (Nandris 1953:106-7) and Tamil, where for example *varu* 'to come' forms imp. *vâ* (Caldwell 1856:420). On the other hand it should be admitted that I didn't find this to hold up in the American languages I examined, where the imperatives are formed by extending the stem (Quechua adds *y*, R. Wright 1989:18-19; Maya adds -*en* or -*e*, Tozzer 1921:82-4) or an indicative form of the verb (Hopi adds glottal stop plus vowel, Kalectaca 1978:98-101; Papago adds -*iñ*, Zepeda 1983:124-8).

But in general it appears that there is a drive to make imperatives short. One might well imagine practical reasons for this: it may be especially important to express commands as quickly as possible in emergency situations, or to convey instructions to small children with limited processing skills. Whatever the reasons might be, the converse of the HBS generalization appears to be statistically true: if a form is a 2p sing. imperative, the form tends to be as short as possible, and it is especially likely that a subject will be omitted.

5 Summary

The HBS generalization captures some important statistical universals about imperatives, namely the privileged status of the second person, which might be more carefully stated as follows:

1. Cross-linguistically, if an imperative form is restricted to a single person, that will be the second person, and the subject, if omitted, is obligatorily 2p.;
2. if an imperative form is ambiguous between different persons, the default assumption will be that it is to be given a 2p interpretation;
3. and if a form is a 2p sing. imperative, the form tends to be as short as possible, and it is especially likely that a subject will be omitted.

But the last two clauses at least are not exceptionless. The old Indo-European languages adduced by Sag are particularly clear counterexamples to the claim that omitted subjects are given 2p interpretations. Indeed, it may well be a valid generalization that context will allow the recovery of omitted 3p subjects in pro-drop languages whenever the imperative form is capable of being used in that person.

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