70. The Morphological Imperative

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1. Definition of values

This map shows to what extent languages have second person singular and plural imperatives as dedicated morphological categories.

@	1.	The language has morphologically dedicated second singular as well as second plural imperatives.	292
@	2.	The language has morphologically dedicated second singular imperatives but no morphologically dedicated second plural imperatives.	42
@	3.	The language has morphologically dedicated second plural imperatives but no morphologically dedicated second singular imperatives.	2
@	4.	The language has morphologically dedicated second person imperatives that do not distinguish between singular and plural.	89
@	5.	The language has no morphologically dedicated second person imperatives at all.	122
		total	547

The first type shown on the map includes languages that have **special morphological marking both for the imperative second singular and for the imperative second plural**, as in example (1) from Limbu (Tibeto-Burman; Nepal).

(1)   Limbu (van Driem 1987: 188)

     a.   *Ips-Ø-ɛʔ!*

          sleep-2SG-IMP

          'Sleep!'

     b.   *Ips-amm-ɛʔ!*

          sleep-2PL-IMP

          'Sleep!'

As (1a) illustrates, zero markers count as markers, too.

The second type shown is that of languages that possess **morphologically specialized imperative forms for the second singular but not for the second plural.** In Lingala (Bantu; Democratic Republic of Congo), the imperative only exists in the second singular. To address an order to more than one addressee, speakers have to resort to another form, for instance, a subjunctive form.

(2)   Lingala (Meeuwis 1998: 28)

     a.   *Sál-á!*

          work-EPV.IMP.SG

          'Work!'

     b.   *Bó-sál-a!*

          SBJV.2PL-work-EPV

          'Work!'

An alternative analysis would say that Lingala shows syncretism between its imperative and subjunctive in the second person plural. For the purposes of this chapter, however, the debate is not relevant. Either way, it is correct to say that Lingala lacks a specifically imperative second plural. *Ceteris paribus*, this remark is relevant to languages of type three and four also.

The third type shows languages with **dedicated morphology for the second plural imperative, but not for the second singular imperative**, as in Latvian. To address an order to

a single addressee, Latvian speakers use the morphological indicative present.

(3)   Latvian (Holst 2001: 139)
     a.   *Runā!*
          speak.IND.PRES.2SG
          'Speak!'
     b.   *Runājāt!*
          speak.IMP.2PL
          'Speak!'

Languages of the fourth type have a **specialized second person imperative that does not distinguish between singular and plural**, as in Paiwan (Austronesian; Taiwan)

(4)   Paiwan (Egli 1990: 282)
     Kan-u!
     eat-IMP.2
     'Eat!'

The final type shows languages that have **no morphologically dedicated second person imperative at all, neither for the singular nor for the plural.** In Nunggubuyu (Australian, Gunwinyguan; Northern Territory, Australia) the forms that are typically used for expressing orders are morphological future indicatives.

(5)   Nunggubuyu (Heath 1984: 339, 343, 344, 348)
     a.   *Ba-bura:!*
          2SG-sit.FUT.IND.CONT
          'Sit!' *or* 'You will sit.'
     b.   *Numburu-bura:!*
          2PL-sit.FUT.IND.CONT
          'Sit!' *or* 'You will sit.'

In some languages the presence or absence of dedicated imperative morphology is dependent on the type of verb. A language will be classified as having specialized imperative morphology only if this morphology is available for a large set of verbs. Languages often have small sets of irregular verbs; if the imperatives of these verbs are also irregular, their properties will not be taken into account. In Georgian, for instance, most imperatives have the same form as indicative aorists or subjunctive presents (see 6a–b). However, the verb 'come' has a specialized imperative form (see 6c).

(6)   Georgian (Vogt 1971: 196, 198)
        a.   *Dac'ere.*
              write.IND.AOR.2SG
              'You wrote.' *or* 'Write!'
        b.   ... *icode*   *rom* ...
              know.SBJV.PRES.2SG   that
              '... that you know that ...' *or* 'Know that ...'
        c.   *Modi!*
              come.IMP.2SG
              'Come!'

Thus, Georgian is classified as belonging to the fifth type (no morphologically dedicated imperative at all).

Languages may have more than one imperative paradigm, distinguished along parameters like tense (most typically present vs. future), aspect (e.g. perfective vs. imperfective), politeness, movement towards or away from the speaker, voice or transitivity. If these strategies differ with respect to the morphological dedication of the second singular and plural, we have only taken the most general type into account, e.g. the present imperative rather than the future one. In the few cases in which both would seem equally general and only one shows morphological dedication, we have coded the language on the basis of just one of the two strategies. An illustration comes

from Nkore-Kiga (Bantu; Uganda), in which the intransitive second singular imperative is morphologically dedicated while the transitive one, comprising an object clitic, is not, resorting to a subjunctive strategy and changing the stem-final *-a* into *-e.*

(7)   Nkore-Kiga (Taylor 1985: 163, 12)
       a.   *Kora!*
             work.IMP.2SG
             'Work!'
       b.   *Ki-reete!*
             it-bring.SBJV
             'Bring it!'

In many languages the second person imperative, especially the imperative second singular, employs a bare stem. This form may be employed elsewhere in the verbal paradigm. Dutch has a second person imperative that does not distinguish between singular and plural. This same form is also used as a first person indicative present.

(8)   Dutch
       a.   *Zing!*
             sing.IMP.2
             'Sing!'
       b.   *Ik   zing.*
             I   sing.IND.PRES.1SG
             'I sing.'

Since there is no plausible semantic connection between a second person imperative and a first person indicative present, we consider Dutch as having dedicated imperative morphology.

       In Ingush (Nakh-Daghestanian; northern Caucasus) most verbs have an imperative that is homophonous with the infinitive.

(9)   Ingush (Nichols 1994: 106)
        Dieš–a!
        read–IMP   *or*   read–INF
        'Read!'   *or*   'to read'

The syncretism would allow one to say that the form in (9) is not a morphological imperative at all, but only an infinitive, which, when occurring by itself, serves an imperative function (see Guérin 1998: 261). It is furthermore uncontroversial that languages do indeed employ infinitives to express commands – see Dutch (10).

(10)   Dutch
        Zingen!
        sing.INF
        'Sing!'

Under this analysis, Ingush could be taken to lack a simple morphological second person imperative. However, for the purposes of this chapter, we have followed the rule that if the form used for a second person imperative is identical to another second person form elsewhere in the verbal paradigm, with the same number, then we do not speak of morphological dedication. Thus the Latvian second singular imperative was not considered morphologically dedicated. If, however, the form used for a second person imperative is identical to a form other than a same-number second person, then we do speak of morphological dedication. Thus Dutch *zing* and Ingush *dieša* will be considered to be morphologically dedicated.

2.   Geographical distribution

The most common strategy worldwide is to morphologically dedicate both the imperative second singular and plural. The only area where morphological dedication is absent is Southeast

Asia; the reason is that the languages in this area are overall lacking in morphology. Another area with a good many morphologically non-dedicated imperatives is sub-Saharan Africa. The lack of morphological dedication may be typical for Khoisan languages; in the equatorial area it is found in various Niger-Congo families, perhaps most often in the Adamawa-Ubangi languages. It is found in the Americas, New Guinea and northern Australia. In Eurasia it is vary rare, and in Europe it is found only in English and Hungarian. To some extent, the absence of a morphological imperative correlates with the language's general lack of morphology, e.g. English, Trumai (isolate; Brazil) or Ewe (Kwa, Niger-Congo; Togo and Ghana).

Number-specific morphological dedication comes in two subtypes. Either the second plural is morphologically dedicated or the second singular. The former is found only in Latvian and in Apurinã (Arawakan; Brazil). The latter is more common, but is on the whole concentrated in Europe, less so in West and Central Africa. Morphological dedication that is not number-specific is found in small numbers across the globe. It seems typical for the Tibeto-Burman languages of northeastern India. In Europe, it is typical for Dutch and mainland Scandinavian. The latter languages have only recently developed from the type that is most typical for Europe, viz. morphological dedication for singulars only. In some cases the imperative's insensitivity to number is in harmony with the fact that the verbs in the language are generally insensitive to number, e.g. in the Scandinavian languages or in Canela-Krahô (Macro-Ge; Brazil). But sometimes the imperative codes number to a greater extent than non-imperatives, e.g. in Nivkh (isolate; Sakhalin Island, Russia).

3.   Theoretical issues

The morphology of the imperative has not attracted that much attention from grammarians, perhaps in part because there is relatively little morphology to start with. The most important study is Xrakovskij's *Typology of Imperative Constructions* (2001) — earlier also in Russian (1992).