

## The development of the imperative with a subject construction

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In Modern Danish as well as in Modern Swedish, imperatives express directive speech acts like ‘command’, ‘advice’, ‘request’ etc. They usually appear without subjects. Yet, they may appear with a subject in which case they semantically differ from the subjectless imperative, presupposing that the addressee has an interest in the realization of the state of affairs expressed (Christensen 2007: 89-91; Hansen & Heltoft 2011; Telemann et al. 1999). This means that the semantic potential of the construction is restricted, primarily expressing speech acts like ‘invitation’, ‘advice’ and ‘permission’ like in (1). Similarly, (2) cannot be uttered felicitously by a bank robber:

- (1) Tag-Ø    du    en    kage    til!  
Take-IMP<sup>1</sup> you    a    cookie to  
‘Go ahead and take another cookie!’  
(2) Giv-Ø    du    mig    pengene!  
‘Give-IMP you    me    the money  
‘You may give me the money!’

In Old Norse, there is no comparable semantic difference. Imperatives appear with and without subjects (Faarlund 2007: 228). It should be noted that in modern Danish imperatives also can appear with contrastive subjects (Mikkelsen 1911: 10).

The development of the construction has not been investigated previously. I will present a scenario for the semantic and formal development of the construction. Based on corpus studies, I argue that the development of the construction consists of three main stages.

Stage I: The imperative occurs in embedded context like (3):

- (3) ac    bith    thæc    at    thu    tac-Ø    min    sial  
I    beg    you    that    you    take-IMP    my    soul  
‘I beg you to take my soul.’  
(cited in Brøndum-Nielsen 1973: 170)

In these embedded contexts, the presence of a subject comes close to being obligatory, while the non-embedded imperative nearly never appears with a subject (Delsing 1999). Semantically, the embedded imperative has a strong tendency to cooccur with matrix verbs expressing speech acts like ‘advice’ and ‘prayer’ as in (3). I argue that the construction is being chunked (Gobet et al. 2001; Bybee 2010; Christiansen & Chater 2016) and hypoanalysed (Croft 2000: 126) in these contexts: The meaning of the matrix verb is being associated with the combination of imperative and subject.

Stage II: The new construction is actualized (Timberlake 1977) and starts appearing in main clauses from around 1500, but still almost only with the pronoun *du* (‘you’) confirming the chunking-hypothesis:

- (4) tag-Ø    du    bort    den    daarlighed (...)  
take-IMP you    away    the    wickedness  
‘Please take away the wickedness’

The construction does not yet express the meaning it does in modern Danish and Swedish. Instead, it expresses directives without a threat of negative consequences if the state of affairs is not realised. Thus, confirming the hypoanalysis-hypothesis, it primarily expresses the speech acts ‘prayer’ as in (4) and ‘advice’; ‘commands’ seem not yet to be allowed.

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<sup>1</sup> IMP=imperative

Stage III: The construction is reanalysed and from no later than 1800 it appears with its modern meaning and other types of subjects than *du*.

### Source:

Sthen, Hans Christensen *Christelige oc vdkaarne Bøner, for alle Stater, oc for allehaande nød oc trang i den gantske Christenhed, vddelte at bede, paa huer besynderlig dag vdi Vgen, met Tacksigelser, oc Guds paakaldelse, om Velsignelse oc Beuaring Morgen oc Afften. Tilhobe sæt, aff den hellige Scrifft, ved D. Iohannem Auenarium. Oc nu nylige fordanskede, oc igien paa ny corrigerede, aff Hans Christensøn Roschildense, Predickere oc Guds ords Tienere vdi Helsingør.*, 1577. Hans Christensen Sthen, *Hans Christensen Sthens Skrifter*, Jens Lyster (edited in collaboration with Jens Højgård), Copenhagen, Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, 2003. Bd. 2, s. 14-149.

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