

## IMPERATIVES IN MALAYALAM: STRUCTURE, TYPOLOGY AND RELATIONS

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper is a descriptive and typological study of the structure and type of imperative constructions (henceforth IMC) in Malayalam. Based on the description of the rich glossed data it found that the canonical IMC in Malayalam is unmarked for gender, number and person. The root forms of the verb with and without lengthening of the final vowel is the morphological realisation of imperative. The gendered vocative particle is copied towards the post verbal position in IMC. Verb initial constructions are found in the IMC of Malayalam against the general word order of SOV in Malayalam. IMC in Malayalam can be embedded and it can be reported without altering the imperative content in reported speech. There are definite seeking and indefinite seeking types of Wh- imperative in Malayalam. More than one verb can be included in IMC with imperative suffix only on the main verb. Negative IMC is formed by lexical word and negative clitics. The subject of IMC in Malayalam can be in nominative, accusative, dative, genitive and vocative cases.*

**Keywords:** Typology, Imperatives, Malayalam

### **1. Introduction**

Imperative is a speech act with directive meaning. It is the mood of a sentence expresses by the verb. Imperative conveys an intention of the speaker to the addressee. The addressee should perform the action which the speaker intended. The intended action is expressed as the main verb in the imperative sentence. The imperative verb variably marked across languages with silent subject, overt subject, pronominal, negation, tense, subject agreement, clitics, topics, and focus etc. Despite of this structural richness of imperative

construction (*henceforth IMC*), imperative is relatively one of an underexplored grammatical element of languages across the world except the case of English. Dravidian family of languages is not an exception for this lacuna. Structure and types of IMC in Malayalam (*henceforth Mal*), and its relation of with other grammatical categories have examined in this paper.

First part of the paper gives a brief profile of IMC in Dravidian language followed by a discussion on the structure and type of IMC in Mal. Third part discusses the relation of IMC with other grammatical categories. Based on the described data and discussion I have reached few conclusions about the IMC in Mal which can be further examined in the other languages in the Dravidian family.

**1.1. Imperative in Dravidian:** Root form of the verb in Dravidian is in imperative singular mood intrinsically refers to non-past time and its distribution in an imperative construction is unmarked (Caldwell 1856: 588-91, Krishnamurti 2003: 357-61, Schiffman 1983: 122-23, Krishnamurti & Gwynn 1985: 163-66, Asher 1991:32-36). Therefore, it is generally observed that verb base itself functions as the imperative in Dravidian languages (Subrahmanyam, 1971: 453-503, 2013:597-613). As advancement to this standard view, this study demonstrates that such generalization is not enough to deal the diversified structural and functional evidence of the imperatives in Mal.

Most descriptive grammar treat imperative as a verbal mood in Morphology. However, in the recent studies, imperative has been treated as clause and a sentence type in syntax (Sadock & Zwicky 1985, Xrakovskij 2001, Aikhenvald 2010, 2014, 2015, Johan van der Auwera 2013, Alcazar and Mario 2014).

The recent advancement of Dravidian languages also treated imperative only up to the level of morphology (Subrahmanyam 2013: 597-613). Therefore, this study is advancing the present view on imperative in Dravidian family of languages based on Malayalam.

**2. Structure and Type:** Different types of IMC in Mal have been given below followed by discussion on each structure.

### 2.1. Gendered construction:

- 1    *nī*     *ivīṭe*    *Vā*  
       you   Here    come.imp  
       ‘You come here’

The sentence (1) is a canonical form of IMC in Mal with second person as the subject and imperative at the end of the sentence. Imperative in Mal is unmarked for number, gender and person. Even then, there observed instances of pronominal copying of gender of the subject to the imperative verb (2&3).

- 2    *nī*     *ivīṭe*    *vā-ṭī*  
       you   here    come.imp-fem  
       ‘You come here’
- 3    *nī*     *ivīṭe*    *vā-ṭā*  
       you   here    come.imp-mas  
       ‘You (masculine) come here’

In (2&3) the gender of the subject is expressed with the verb, *-ṭā* for masculine and *-ṭī* for feminine. This is a peculiar evidence of expression of gender of second person on verb in Mal. against the fact there is no gender agreement in Mal. The same expression of gender observed in the sentence initial imperative in too (4&5).

- 4    *vā-ṭā*                    *nī*     *ivīṭe*  
       come.imp.mas    you   here  
       ‘You (masculine) come here’

- 5    *vā-ṭī*                      *nī*    *ivīṭe*  
       come.imp.fem.    you    here  
       ‘You (fimine) come here’

**2.2: Sentence initial IMC:** Asher (1991:32) observed that “the unmarked position for an imperative form, whatever the length of the sentence, is sentence final”. However, see the below expression (6);

- 6    *vā*                      *nī*    *ivīṭe*  
       come.imp    you    here  
       ‘You (feminine) come here’

On the contrary to the above observation, in the sentence (6) imperative form *vā* “come” is at the sentence initial position. This phenomena of post verbal subject is against the general pattern of word order in Mal i.e. VSO instead of SOV.

- 7    *aṭi*                      *nī*    *avaṇ-e*  
       beat.imp    you    he-acc  
       ‘You beat him’

The above sentence is a (V)erb initial (S)ubject medial and (O)bject final imperative construction. Therefore, it can be argued that IMC in Mal. can be verb initial.

**2.3. Subject dropping without agreement:** Subject dropping is a generally observed feature in IMC in languages with rich verbal agreement (Bennis 2006). However, in Mal subject in an IMC can be dropped without agreement on verb.

8    *nī*    *ivīṭe*    *vā*  
       you    here    come.imp  
       ‘You come here’

9    *ivīṭe*    *vā*  
       here    come.imp  
       ‘(You) come here’

10   *ivīṭe*    *vā*            *nī*  
       here    come.imp    you  
       ‘(You) come here’

11   *ivīṭe*    *Vā*  
       here    come.imp  
       ‘(You) come here’

Subject can be dropped in IMC in Mal irrespective of the position; see ( 9&11). It should be specially emphasized that the pro-drop phenomena occur in Mal without inflectional features of gender, number and person in verb. The absence of lexical subject does not imply that the subject is absent. The non realized subject is the addressee. Whenever it is necessary to be emphasized, the addressee the subject will be realized.

12   *nāḷe*            *ṭōkio*    *lēkku*    *pōk-ū*  
       tomorrow    Tokyo    loc.dir    go-imp  
       ‘Go to Tokyo tomorrow’

**2.4. Embedded imperative:** IMC in Mal can be embedded and transformed into reported speech.

- 13 *jōṇ innale mēri- ōṭə para- ṇṇu*  
 John yesterday Mary- soc say- pst  
*ṭōkyō- lēkku pōk-ū ennə*  
 Tokyo loc.dir go.imp qp  
 John told Marry yesterday - 'to go to Tokyo'

Here the imperative sentence (12) can be reported as present tense in an embedded clause with a QP *ennə* (13)

- 14 *vīṭṭ-ilēkkə pōk-āṇ paraṇṇa ta*  
 house-loc.dir go-noml say-pst- Pp  
 'I have told him to go to home'

The above expression (14) is reported imperative by the first person itself. This construction is the restating of the stated imperative. Therefore, these types of imperative can be called restated imperative.

**2.5. Wh imperative:** Two types of wh- imperatives have identified. They are definite seeking type and indefinite type. The (15&16) are definite seeking type.

- 15 *eṭṭa vila āṇ-ennə paṭ-(y)ū*  
 how much price be-qp say-imp  
 'Tell how much price'
- 16 *paṭ-(y)ū eṭṭa vila*  
 say-imp how much price  
 'Tell how much price?'

Wh-imperative may be verb initial or verb final. This construction is often used as an alternate to interrogative;

- 17 *vila etṛa?*  
price how much  
'How much the price?'

- 18 *paṛ-(y)ū vila etṛa- enna*  
say-imp price how much- qp  
'Tell how much price?'

By choosing the imperative for interrogative it can be specially been observed that the addressee is directed to tell the price instead of been asked the price. This alternation can be possible only for Wh imperative. Whereas, the below expression (19&20) are indefinite seeking type;

- 19 *āreṅkilum var-ū*  
some one come-imp  
'Come someone'
- 20 *enteṅkilum tar-ū*  
some thing give-imp  
'Give something'

**2.6. Verb sequence imperative:** There are IMCs in Mal which direct the addressee to more than one action.

- 21 *pō-(y)iṭṭə Vā*  
 go-pp come.imp  
 ‘Go and come back’
- 22 *eṭu-ttu koṇṭə Pō*  
 take-pp carry-pp go.imp  
 ‘Take and go’
- 23 *pō eṭuttu koṇṭə*  
 go.imp carry-pp carry  
 ‘Take and go’

Here in (21, 22&23) the addressee is directed to perform more than one action. The imperative is marked only with the main verb.

- 24 *pō-(y)i kiṭa-nnə uraṇṇ-ū*  
 go-pst lay-pp sleep-imp  
 ‘Go, lay and sleep’

Here in (24) there are three imperative verbs. Imperative is marked only for the final verb.

**2.7. Negative imperative:** Imperative can be negated by adding lexical word *arutu* and negative particle *kūṭā* as expressed in (25& 26).



- 25    *nī*            *Pōkarutā*  
          you          go-neg.imp  
          ‘You should ‘
- 26    *nī*    *atā*    *cey-tā*    *kūṭā*  
          you    that    do-pp    neg  
          ‘You should not do that’

**3. Relations:** Relation of IMC with other grammatical categories like, case, person and etc is examined in this section.

### 3.1. Third person subject/addressee

- 27    *avaṛ*    *pōk-āṇ*    *para*  
          they    go-nom    say.imp  
          ‘Tell them to go’

Here in (27) two verbs are expressed in this construction. The first verb *pōk-āṇ* “to go” is directed not to the second person as usual in IMC. On the contrary, the third person is the potential actor of the carried verb. Therefore, two types of verb can be distinguished in an IMC with third person. Those are directed verb and the carried verb. The *para* “tell” is the directed verb and the *pōk-āṇ* “to go” is the carried verb. In such construction the NP is 3<sup>rd</sup> person and its referent excludes both speaker(s) and the addressees (s).

**3.2. Case assignment:** Subject of the IMC can be assigned for nominative (28), accusative (29), dative (30) and genitive cases (31).

- 28    *Nī*            *aṭikkā*  
          you-NOM    take.imp  
          ‘You beat’

- 29    *ava-ṇe*      *aṭikkə*  
          he-acc      beat.imp  
          ‘Beat him’
- 30    *niṇa-kkə*    *eṭukk-ū*  
          you-dat      take.imp  
          ‘Take for you’
- 31    *niṇ-re*      *eṭukk-ū*  
          you-gen      take.imp  
          ‘Take yours’

**3.3. Pseudo-imperatives:** There observed other type of constructions in Mal which appears to be function as imperatives (32). The subjects of such construction are 1<sup>st</sup> person plural. These are not IMC by structure. Therefore, these constructions are called pseudo imperatives.

- 32    *namu-kkə*    *pōk-ām*  
          we-dat      go-hort  
          ‘Let us go’

Here the addresser and addressee of the command is 1<sup>st</sup> person plural. Such construction is pseudo imperatives and belongs to hortative in construction.

**3.4. Vocative subject:** The subject of the IMC in Mal can be a vocative subject (33).

- 33    *rāma-ā*      *iviṭe*    *vā*  
          Rama-voc    here      come.imp  
          ‘Rama, come here’

Therefore, in an IMC, subject can be replaced by a vocative subject in Mal.

**3.5. Reduplication:** Imperative in Mal is reduplicated as in Bengali to intensify the forcefulness of the direction (34).

34	pō pō	<i>Vēgam</i>	<i>pō</i>
	go,go-voc	Fast	go.imp
	‘Go, go fast’		

**3.6. Variants of imperative:** IMCs vary according to the addressee. In the (35&36) imperative is expressed *āl-um* “conditional- fut” and *aṇam* which are considered as honorific or polite imperative.

35	<i>tāṇkaḷ</i>	<i>vann-āl-um</i>
	you.pl	come-cond-conj
	(honorific)	
	‘You, please come’	
36	<i>tāṇkaḷ</i>	<i>var-aṇ-am</i>
	you.pl	come-imp-pol
	(honorific)	
	‘You, please come’	

**4. Conclusion:** The above description and discussion evidenced that a canonical IMC in Mal. is unmarked for gender, number and person. The root forms of the verb with the final long vowel as it is often functioning as the imperative. Otherwise, the imperative is marked by vowel length of -ə, ū, um and -am suffixes. Copying of gender vocative particle towards the post- verbal position is a peculiarity observed in the IMC in Mal. There observed verb- initial constructions against the general word order of SOV of Mal. The subject often dropped. IMC in Mal can be embedded and it can be

reported without altering the imperative content in reported speech. There are definite seeking and indefinite seeking types of Wh-imperative in Mal. An interrogative of seeking definite answer can be expressed by definite seeking wh-IMC. More than one verb can be included in IMC with imperative suffix only on the main verb. Negative IMC is formed by lexical word and negative clitics. The subject of IMC in Mal. can be in nominative, accusative, dative and genitive cases. Subject in IMC can be in vocative. The imperative suffix is reduplicated for intensification of the forcefulness of the direction and it varies according to the addressee.

**Note:** The system used in this paper for glossing vocabulary corresponds to the Leipzig Glossing Rules. A list of abbreviations is given below.

**Abbreviations:** acc: accusative, cond: conditional, con: conjunct, dat: dative, dir: directive, fem. feminine, gen: genitive, noml: nominalising suffix, hort: hortative, imp: imperative, loc: locative, mas: masculine, neg: negation, nom: nominative, pol: polite, pst: past, qp: quotative particle, pp: past participle, soc: sociative, voc: vocative.

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