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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE VALUE OF SOCIAL CONTEXT IN THE USE OF IMPERATIVE SENTENCES IN ENGLISH AND ALBANIAN LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a comparative view of the imperative sentences in English and Albanian language in the aspect of pragmatic use. Imperative sentences have recently drawn the attention of scholars due to their specific characteristics and also simple syntactic structure. They can have diverse interpretation and imply an array of directive meanings in different social contexts. Imperatives are typically too direct in usage and they are mostly avoided in formal contexts and situations where politeness should predominate. Linguistic devices that serve to soften the typical commanding force of imperative sentences in English are different and numerous. Some of them are also used in imperative sentences in Albanian, while others do not have corresponding forms, such as *tag-questions* found at the end of the structure of imperatives in English. The context of speech situations is an important element in expressing the appropriate imperative meaning and making the right interpretations.

Key words:

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INTRODUCTION

“*The dish is tasted with a spoon, man with language*”, (Gj., Shkurtaj, 2009).

Simple sentences may be divided into four major syntactic types differentiated by their form. Their use correlates largely with different discourse functions. The types of sentences are: declarative, interrogative, imperative and exclamatives. Imperatives are sentences which normally have no overt grammatical subject, and whose verb has the base form (R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum *et al*, 1985). This division is also relevant in many Indo-European languages. In Albanian languages most studies coincide concerning the classification of sentences according to their discourse functions. In Albanian, sentences are divided into three main groups: declarative, interrogative and imperative (Gramatika e gjuhës shqipe II, 2002). According to different approaches, all types can be exclamative in various contexts due to intonation and contextual factors. Consequently, exclamative sentences are not classified in a separate group. This is one of the distinctions English language displays concerning the classification of sentences.

Anyhow, imperatives share a lot of similarities in both languages under study, as far as the semantic aspect is concerned. Thus, in this paper we are going to focus on the role of context in the interpretation of imperative sentences in

English and the corresponding interpretation in Albanian language.

The diversity of meaning nuances is closely connected with the contextual factors and also other factors such as: intonation, tag-questions, particles, parentheses, body language (defined frequently by the scholars as non-imperative directives.), etc. Aikhenvald defines these lexical or grammatical devices as command strategies, underlining their important function in the reduction of the commanding force (imperative degree), not very appropriate in certain situations (A. Aikhenvald, 2010). The semantics of imperative essentially expresses the meaning of “command or order”, which in various contexts slides off into a request, demand, permission or an expression of a wish or earnest desire. Imperative mood is the commonest way of expressing commands in many languages of the world and we do not notice big differences in the semantic diversity in English and Albanian language. Through the grammatical category of mood, it is expressed the connection between the action expressed by the verb and the objective reality. The category of mood is the essential device to express the modality (Gramatika e gjuhës shqipe I, 2002). Imperative sentences are orders or commands par excellence (A. Aikhenvald, 2010). The difference and degree of imperative strength varies from the situations they are used. This broad spectrum of meanings is a cross linguistic feature and imperative sentences display this characteristic in many languages. The interpretation of imperative depends on numerous factors. One of these factors

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is the *interpersonal relationship* in the communicative situation of two interlocutors: *speaker* and *listener* or the *addressee*.

An order issued to the subordinate will have the following structure:

1. *File all the necessary documents!*
(Boss - subordinate) (Fut në dosje gjithë dokumentet e nevojshme!)
2. *You'd better, could you please, or please, file all the necessary documents.*
(Subordinate - boss)
 - a. (Më mirë t'i vendosësh në dosje të gjitha dokumentet e nevojshme.) (*Mund/ A mund t'i vendosësh në dosje të gjitha dokumentet e nevojshme?*)
 - b. (*Ju lutem vendosini në dosje dokumentet që duhen.*)

In the case of sentence 2, in which the subordinate makes an utterance to his boss, we observe a clear transformation of the meaning from a too direct utterance into a soft command, indirect and more polite. In contexts where the participants intend to express politeness and demonstration of interpersonal relationship stemming from the respective hierarchy, we observe the use of many particles (which express doubt, emotion, attitude etc.), paratheticals, intonation and possibly the body language, as additional devices or command strategies. Let's mention some of the lexical devices that help softening the command and overtones of obligation expressed by the directive imperative sentence. Imperative forms are commonly accompanied by *please*, as in sentence 3.

3. *Please, sit down at the front.*
[*Ju lutem ulu / uluni përballë / në fillim (p.sh. të rreshtit, varet nga konteksti).*]

In some contexts the structure of imperative sentences comprises often the word *thank you* (*faleminderit*), but the meaning of *thank you* from the pragmatic view implies the expression of gratitude for a performed action, a thing which does not comply with the meaning of imperative sentences in which the addressee should do what the request entails. We know that the time reference of imperative is the future and not a performed action, moreover an action that is asked to be performed by the addressee. *Please* and *thank you* in these sentences obviously express the function they bear in the sentence. In other contexts, where we should underline the level of politeness, we can use the adverb *possibly* (*ndoshta*).

4. *Could you please write me back?*
(Mund të më kthesh përgjigje, të lutem?)
5. *Could you possibly fax him the data?*
(Mund t'ia dërgosh atij me faks të dhënat?)

Thus, the use of *possibly* and *please* carries softened directive meanings.

Let's analyze the respective sentences 1 and 2 in Albanian language:

(Vendosi në dosje të gjitha dokumentet e nevojshme!)

(*A mund t'i vendosni të gjitha dokumentet e nevojshme në dosje?*)

(*Ju lutem, vendosini në dosje dokumentet që duhen.*)

In the respective sentence 1, the intonation serves to communicate an utterance in which the speaker gives an order. In sentence (2a) in Albanian, we observe the use of semi-auxiliary verb *mund* (can, could) and the particle *a*, which semantically does not indicate the capability of the subordinate to place the documents in the file, but on the contrary, they soften and reduce the degree of commanding and ordering in this utterance. From the formal view, the sentence is transformed into an interrogative (question), which in fact is not intended to ask a question, but to make a request that is characterized by polite overtones. In the other equivalent sentence (2b), we notice the use of the adverb *ju lutem* (please), as softening means of the commanding effect. In Albanian these devices are present in the imperative sentences that express a commanding meaning, as well as in other languages in which the politeness forms are numerous and diverse.

English language can also use the *questions* which are initially structured by modal verbs *could* (*mund*) and *would* (*a do të*), or *is it possible* (*është e mundur*), *are you able* (*jeni në gjendje të*), *will / would you be able* (*do të jeni / ishit në gjendje të...*), as a possibility to express polite requests. The modality is marked by the modal verbs *could* (*mund*) and *would* (*do të + folje = e ardhme e së shkuarës*) that do not only function as softening means of the commanding force, but they also reduce the social distance present in the interpersonal relationships between two participants: speaker-listener in the communicative situation.

6. *Could you file all the necessary documents?*
(Mund t'i vendosësh në dosje dokumentet e duhura?)
7. *Could you fill in the form before you leave?*
(A mund ta plotësosh formularin para se të largohesh?)
8. *Would you turn to previous pages?*
(A do të kthehesh te faqet më përpara? A nuk kthehesh në faqet e kaluara?)

Even in the corresponding sentences in Albanian, we observe the use of questions, modal verbs and particles. The negative particle *nuk* is commonly used in the conversations in various situations. In most cases, it is characterized by an 'empty' meaning, because it does not give a negative meaning to the respective utterance, but in fact it lessens the degree of commanding force in the sentence. However, in English language negation would not express the same meaning as in Albanian case, but we would possibly have the opposite meaning compared to the equivalent utterance in Albanian language. In all sentence pairs, the semantics of questions that have an imperative meaning appears to be closer to the semantics of requests and softened orders.

One of the specifics of English language is the use of *tag questions* for various stylistic purposes, of which we can mention the aim of the speaker to express politeness, a friendly request and offer etc. The occurrence of these structures at the end of imperative sentences comprises one of the most

common strategies to express a more polite meaning and narrow somehow the social “gap” between participants in the conversation.

9. *Call the doctor for me, can you / could you?*
(Telefonoje / telefojoni doktorin. / A mund ta telefonosh doktorin? / Ma telefonon pak doktorin, mundesh?)
10. *Don't tell anyone, will you?*
(Mos i thuaj njeriu, dakord, në rregull, apo jo...?)

The speaker can use other constructions to express a much more indirect imperative sentence than meaning expressed by *questions* with modal verbs. The speaker utters a *declarative* sentence, which is indirectly encoded to the listener as an order or request, pronounced with the relevant intonation:

11. *I can't find the car keys, which can be understood as:*
(Help me find the car keys.)
12. *Nuk po i gjej çelësat e makinës, which can be understood as an imperative sentence:* (Ndhimomë të gjej çelësat e makinës.)

Cross linguistic tendencies to use declarative sentences instead of imperative in direct speech acts, avoid the commanding or imposing effect that verbs in imperative mood convey.

13. *You are leaving for America next week.*
(Ti do të ikësh/ikën/ do të nisesh për në Amerikë javën tjetër).

The above sentence is formally declarative, but in the context it is uttered does not perform the communicative act of stating, informing etc. It realizes the speech act of order, advice or a request intended by the speaker. Anyhow, not in all cases declarative sentences can express softened commands or orders. Let's analyze the following sentence

14. *You will join your friends immediately!*
(Ti do të bashkohesh me shokët menjëherë!)

In the above declarative sentence, it is expressed an authoritarian order given by the teacher, principal or parents in certain contexts. Intonation and tone of voice are significant and also indicators in such an utterance.

Another case where the commanding force of imperative sentences is lessened is the use of a declarative sentence with a passive verb and an unexpressed agent. The semantic value of a passive sentence serves the expression of an instruction not only to one addressee, but a group of addressees.

15. *Everyone is invited to attend the English classes.*
(Të gjithë janë të lutur të frekuentojnë orët e mësimit të gjuhës angleze.)

The context is a very important factor in this sentence, because it defines the meaning of an utterance in which we do not have a specific agent. Anybody can be the addressee. Concerning the meaning intended in this sentence, expressed by a passive verb form, it is related to a request, instruction or a suggestion on the

verge of a polite invitation. The *expression* of a request or an order indirectly (versus an imperative which is in fact too direct) and the *issuing* of order towards a group of addressees soften or reduce the commanding effect that imperative sentences entail.

Another grammatical device that is used in a discourse to express a polite request, is the auxiliary verb *do*, not with its essential grammatical function of being used in imperative sentences (function of emphasis in imperative utterance), but in situations where a request is made with overtones of politeness or will, in terms of asking the fulfillment of something by the listener. *Do* is traditionally defined as an emphasizing particle, use in present and past tense of indicative mood verbs (*do – did*), to emphasize the reality of events expressed in the respective sentence. Let's see the sentences:

16. *Do have another bar of chocolate.*
(Merr dhe një çokollatë tjetër.)

The use of *do* is a specific feature of English language and emphasizes the meaning of the above sentence. *Do* preceding the verb is semantically “empty” and there is no corresponding particle or word in Albanian language. Albanian is a free word order language. Some of the devices that function as meaning emphasis are the free word order, intonation etc. The corresponding sentence in Albanian (16) allows the use of the copulative conjunction *dhe* (and), which we think reinforces the will and insistence of the speaker to offer a chocolate to the interlocutor. Some scholars distinguish two essential functions of *do* in imperative sentences: reminding and emphasis or reinforcement. For this reason, the auxiliary verb *do* used in imperative sentences, adds to the sentence overtones of non-commanding and non-ordering elements.

Levels of politeness are encoded or signaled in the grammatical form of the sentence, particularly in the verb as the core of the sentence. In imperative sentences it is the verb that possesses the main load of communication aim and structure, because we know that these sentences are characterized by a simple syntactic structure based on the significance of the verb. In the world there are many languages and varieties, in which the levels of politeness are included in the grammatical structure of the sentence, like number, tense or aspect. The systems of speech levels and honorifics in Korean are among the most complex in the world (A. Aikhenvald, 2010). This language has six speech levels, which are grammatically marked for verbal endings. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning the Indian languages which encompass special forms of politeness and respects. These forms are grammaticalized. In Indo-European languages and many other languages in the world, the plural of verbs and pronouns (T – vs. V – forms) is another grammatical category that marks respect and politeness in a communicative act. The use of inherently polite V-forms may also have a softening effect. The more polite the form, the less forceful the command (A. Aikhenvald, 2010). The presence of more formal markers to express politeness reduces the commanding value of imperative sentences. The way of addressing to a person with *you* (in plural), is not a specific feature of imperative, but is commonly used in other types of sentences as well as in various social contexts. The category of plural in English

language can not have the value of politeness, because this language lacks the inflections which differentiate the persons, plural of pronouns or plural of verbs. Tense forms of (T and V-forms) are relevant in Albanian, French, Italian, Spanish, Greek language etc.

Among the range of used strategies in different communicative situations, we can mention a set of other devices that assist the demonstration of politeness and the realization of a much more formal communication. *Tact* is the core of semantics of imperative sentences in politeness situations, which should not always verge towards maximal limits of making an indirect utterance (F. Meyer, 2009). The point of being rather indirect will lead to an utterance that does not express the intended meaning of the speaker or otherwise is going to be misunderstood from the listener.

17. *Please could you give me your email address, will you?*
(*Ju lutem, mund të më jepni adresën tuaj të e-mail-it, a mundesh?*)

The above conversation is characterized by the use of the following grammatical and lexical devices to mark the elements of politeness and respect: imperative sentence is transformed into a *question*, use of the *modal verb could* versus *can*, use of *please* and at the end of the utterance we notice the use of *tag question will you*. Therefore, in sentence (17) there are distinguished a series of devices and strategies. The aim to realize a very indirect speech act leads to an utterance in which the request slides off into an entreaty.

The analysis of imperative sentences in the pragmatic aspect is a very difficult undertaking, particularly because these sentences are so closely tied to conventions of politeness. This is one reason why Leech (1983) posits “principles” of politeness rather than “rules” of politeness (F. Meyer, 2009). According to him, *tact* has two polarities: negative polarity which minimizes the cost to the listener and positive polarity which minimize the benefit to the listener. The direct expressive force of imperative sentence as one of the distinctive characteristics, affects their indirect use in the discourse.

In English language the indirect form is closely linked with politeness. This connection clearly demonstrates the use of a collection of devices and strategies to utter a sentence in compliance with the codes of politeness and ethics.

18. *Merrni çfarë të dëshironi.*
(I adresuari është një person / ti) (Take whatever you want.) (The addressee is one person / you- second person singular)

Another way of avoiding the direct tones of addressing that imperative conveys in contexts, is the use of third person forms in Italian and Spanish language (In some contexts, the use third person (*lei* in Italian – *she*) can have the communicative function of an authority (for a rude behavior): – *Continua da mentire* – Continue to lie (she)).

19. *Prende la macchina dal meccanico.* (lei)(Merr makinën nga mekaniku) (Literal translation) (Merreni makinën nga mekaniku.) [(He) -Takes the car from the mechanic)] (Literal translation) (Take the car from the mechanic.) (You)
20. *Toma el coche de mecano.*
(Merrni makinën te mekaniku.)

The use of the subject in French language comes as a formula of politeness. Long time ago, in old French the subject (XVIII century) was expressed in these sentences to convey overtones of politeness.

21. *Vous soyez bienvenu.* (Ju jeni të mirëpritur.) (You are welcome.)

The speaker performs several illocutionary acts in the communication of an imperative sentence. These acts include the speaker and listener and are semantically characterized by a three-tier semantic plane: *request or order* (proposition), *communication* and *intended proposition*. (V. S. Xrakovskij, 2001). In the socio-linguistic aspect there are a number of factors that influence the appropriate communicative meaning of the utterance and in various communicative situations they reduce the commanding force of the requests. These factors include: gender, sex, geography, social historical context, education, age etc. Many scholars mention the fact that there is a distinction in the use of imperative sentences by both genders and they have come up to the conclusion that females tend to use *more* linguistic forms of politeness compared to male speech. Accordingly, language used (by its speakers) is characterized by the contextual style i.e. relationship of speaker with the linguistic sources and situations where the speaker finds himself in different periods. The skill of the speaker to express himself in a language (as his special characteristic), is an important factor in the communication of imperative utterances and the way they use the language. Studies show that female speech compared to males, uses more linguistic forms that entail politeness and ethics. The way one individual tries to expresses himself in the discourse situations and the linguistic forms he selects reflect directly his own features. The analysis of interpersonal relationships and the linguistic selection they make, have demonstrated that female speakers show much attention to *linguistic selection*, close to standard language. This occurs as a result of the status they own in the society. This speech style represents the asymmetry degree of force that characterizes the role of males within the social framework they operate. Female are more expressive and produce utterances of doubtful forms or means, repetition elements, including parts of gestures and body language. These devices transform the respective discourse in a correct, polite and vague type. The state of indirectness sometimes implicates the distance from the essential meaning of the utterance. Male discourse includes utterances with a simple syntax, correct grammatical structure and characteristics that are close to the written language.

Further devices that function as softening elements of the commanding force in imperative sentences, involve the use of declarative and interrogative sentences with additional

communicative functions (different from their typical communicative functions)

CONCLUSIONS

1. English and Albanian language do not show noticeable distinctions in the semantic and meaning range of imperative sentences, whose characteristics in general are cross-linguistic. Semantics of imperative sentences is very rich in different contexts and discourses.
2. Linguistic devices that serve to soften the typical commanding force of imperative sentences are different and numerous. Some of them are also used in imperative sentences in Albanian language, while others do not have corresponding forms, such as *tag- questions* at the end of the structure of imperatives in English.
3. The context of speech situations is an important element in expressing the appropriate meaning and in the right interpretation of the imperative utterance.

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