



Title	The imperative in English: The Six-Parameter Approach to Analyzing its Force
Author(s)	Takahashi, Hidemitsu
Citation	Journal of the Graduate School of Letters, 6, 1-13
Issue Date	2011-03
Doc URL	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/2115/44944">http://hdl.handle.net/2115/44944</a>
Type	bulletin (article)
File Information	JGSL6-1.pdf



[Instructions for use](#)

# The imperative in English: The Six-Parameter Approach to Analyzing its Force

Hidemitsu TAKAHASHI

**Abstract:** It has long been acknowledged that imperatives in English may vary a great deal in the degree of force exertion depending on context. The present paper discusses the strength of force of the imperative *Tell me about it* in such different conversational interactions as: (i) “A: I’m having a bad day - B: *Tell me about it* (standard directive use)” and (ii) “A: Don’t buy anything in downtown Tokyo - B: *Tell me about it*. A single cup of coffee can cost 10 dollars! (ironical use).”

To the best of my knowledge, no previous theory is able to specify exactly how imperative utterances like these differ in the strength of force. This paper is a preliminary attempt to do just that. It proposes a formula for specifying the degree/nature of imperative force. The proposed formula is comprised of six separate components, which are DESIRE, POWER, CAPABILITY, COST, BENEFIT, and OBLIGATION. The values for these parameters are added together to determine the overall value of FORCE EXERTION, which is calculated to be numerical ranging between [+10] (plus maximum) and [-7] (minus maximum). The basic idea is that any imperative utterance is analyzable as to its force given context sufficient to determine the score of each of these parameters (i.e. who is speaking to whom in what social situation).

Within the proposed framework, the imperative *Tell me about it* would be analyzed in terms of [+5]~[+4] score in Interaction (i) above but in terms of [0]~[-3] in Interaction (ii). This contrast results directly from the differences in the scores assigned to the parameters of DESIRE, COST, BENEFIT and OBLIGATION. This global description of the six parameters for specifying the imperative force is expected to provide a basis for characterizing and differentiating a wide array of imperative utterances.

(Received on November 29, 2010)

## 1. Introduction

One of the most important aspects of human coexistence is that people need to share information with others and get others to carry out some action. Directive speech acts are communicative acts that are universal.

In English and all the other languages, people make directive speech acts either indirectly or

directly. In studies of pragmatics, sociolinguistics and experimental psychology as well as linguistic philosophy, a great deal of attention has been devoted to the issue of how different surface forms of indirect directives vary as to the degree of “directness” of imposition and/or politeness (cf. Seale 1969; 1975, Ervin-Tripp 1976, Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984, Blum-Kulka, Danet & Gherson 1985, Brown & Levinson 1987, Clark & Schunk 1980, Gibbs 1986, Givón 1990, Hori 2006, Leech 1983: chap. 5, to name a few). Thus, variants of directive strategies are located on the continuum of directness in numerous works—from *Give me a hand* (simple imperative) to *Will/Would you give me a hand*, *Can/Could you give me a hand?*, and to *Would you mind giving me a hand?* (interrogative request) or *I wonder if you could give me a hand* as well as *I'd appreciate it if you could give me a hand* (declarative request).

Despite the richness of the literature on this subject, however, there have been surprisingly few studies that have addressed the issue of how imperative utterances may vary as to the strength of force, although important exceptions include Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 931) as well as Takahashi (1994; 2004). This functional disregard of the availability of varying degrees of imperative force may be ascribed to the wide-spread assumption that an imperative is the most direct directive strategy, hence an “impolite” variant of directives. For example, Searle (1979: 36) states that “ordinary conversational requirements of politeness normally make it awkward to issue flat imperative sentences (e.g. “Leave the room.”).” According to Clark & Schunk (1980: 111), when English speakers make requests, “they generally avoid imperatives like *Tell me the time*, which are direct requests. A similar point was made in Wierzbicka (2003: 30), who stresses the existence of “heavy restrictions on the use of the imperative in English.”<sup>1</sup>

However, there is no sound empirical basis for any of these claims. If it were true that the imperative in English is truly restricted due to its alleged rudeness, this sentence should occur only rarely in conversational interaction. Exactly the opposite is true. My recent survey of four mystery novels (written by four different contemporary American authors) reveals that bare imperatives occurred 1774 times while by contrast there were only 113 tokens of indirect strategies of all kinds (cf. Takahashi 2007a and 2007b; in preparation). That is, bare imperatives were fifteen times more frequent than all the variants of indirect directive forms in the data examined. Given this result, it would be reasonable to suppose that imperatives in English are far widely used than it is commonly assumed and thereby involve a far richer variety of force exertion than indirect directives.<sup>2</sup> The impoliteness of the imperative utterance *Leave the room!*, for instance, arises not so much from the choice of imperative form per se as from the inherent impoliteness of the propositional content. For that matter, neither *Can you leave the room?* nor *Would you mind leaving the room?* would be “polite” enough—a far better alternative would be to say *Would/Could you excuse us?* Compare the imperative *Feel free to interrupt me (if you have any question)* issued in a conference presentation, which is perfectly “polite” despite the use of bare imperative.

Consider, for example, the imperative utterance *Tell me about it* made in two different contexts:

(1) [Context: two coworkers (A and B) conversing in a workplace]

A: Hi, what's up?

B: I'm having a bad day.

A: *Tell me about it.*

(2) [Context: Teacher (A) and pupil (B) are conversing in a classroom]

A: What's up?

B: I'm having a bad day.

A: *Tell me about it.*

Speakers of English would sense a subtle difference in the nature/degree of force of the imperative. If the two contexts are compared, the force of *Tell me about it* would be interpreted as somewhat greater in (2) than in (1).

Next, consider (3):

(3) [Context: the same as (1)]

A: Don't buy anything in downtown Tokyo.

B: *Tell me about it.* A single cup of coffee can cost 10 dollars!

Here, the same imperative communicates irony; the implicit message is that "I know it too well—you don't have to preach me." The imperative here radically differs in meaning/function from the one in both (1) and (2). To the best of my knowledge, no previous theory is able to specify exactly how an imperative utterance like *Tell me about it* differs in the degree of force exertion across different contexts such as those in (1) through (3). The present paper is a preliminary attempt to do just that. It sketches a theory of how imperative utterances can be analyzed in terms of its strength and nature of force, which is a theory I have recently developed (Takahashi, in preparation). Specifically, a formula is proposed for calculating the degree of imperative force in context, which involves six parameters: DESIRE, POWER, CAPABILITY, COST, BENEFIT, and OBLIGATION. The values for these six parameters are added together to determine the overall value of FORCE EXERTION (or FE), which is calculated to be numerical ranging between [+10] (plus maximum) and [-1] (minus maximum). The idea is that any token of imperative utterance is measurable given ample context sufficient to determine the score of each parameter: i.e. who speaks to whom in what social situation.

Section 2 discusses the main findings of relevant research. By integrating insights from previous studies as well as making necessary modifications, section 3 sketches a formula for calculating the imperative force. Section 4 demonstrates the way in which the proposed formula, "Six Parameters for FORCE EXERTION," is applicable to examples (1) through (3). Section 5 is the conclusion.

## 2. The Background to Studying Direct and Indirect Directives

This section restricts its discussions to summarizing the main findings made in two distinct types of studies directly relevant to the present paper. One is Quirk et al (1985) as well as Huddleston & Pullum (2002), both of which offer a comprehensive pragmatic or illocutionary act classification of the English imperative. The other is Pérez Hernandez & Ruiz de Mendoza

(2002), which proposes an ICM-based analysis of indirect directives, by integrating the pragmatic notions of *cost-benefit* and *politeness* from Leech 1983 into Thornburg & Panther's (1997) (as well as Panther & Thornburg's (1998)) idea of directive scenario and conceptual metonymy.

Both Quirk et al (1985) and Huddleston & Pullum (2002) present a long list of illocutionary acts available with the English imperative. Quirk et al (1985: 831–832) identify no less than 20 different illocutionary acts associated with the English imperative including order, command, prohibition, request, plea, advice, recommendation, warning, suggestion, instruction, and others. More recently, Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 929–931) divided up the wide variety of illocutionary acts into seven major categories. Included are (a) orders, commands, demands (e.g. *Release all detainees! / Keep off the grass*); (b) requests, pleas, entreaties (e.g. *Please help me tidy up / Open the door, will you?*); (c) advice, recommendations, warnings (e.g. *Keep your options open / Mind the step*); (d) instructions and expository directives (e.g. *Take the first road on the right after the post office*); (e) invitations (e.g. *Come over and see my etchings*); (f) permission (e.g. *Yes, go ahead*); and (g) acceptance (e.g. *Ok, buy it if you insist—it's your money, after all*). In so doing, they also spell out a set of useful guidelines for differentiating one subtype of speech act from another. For example, (a) and (b) can be distinguished by the notion of *compliance*, which is required with (a) but not with (b). These two subtypes both classify as “willful directives,” although, they add, the distinction is gradient rather than categorical. The subtype (c) is a kind of “non-willful directive”; compliance is not for the speaker's benefit but normally for the addressee's, and so forth. They find the last subtype (g) (i.e. acceptance) to be “the weakest kind of directive,” where compliance is hardly wanted at all:

- (4) a. Say what you like, it won't make any difference.  
 b. Double your offer: I still won't sell.

Huddleston & Pullum observe concerning (4) that “it is arguable that imperatives here have lost all directive force.” (2002: 931).

Pérez Hernandez & Ruiz de Mendoza's (2002) analysis builds upon Panther & Thornburg's (1997) (or Thornburg & Panther's (1998)) cognitive theory of illocutionary scenarios and conceptual metonymies as applied to grammatical and pragmatic phenomena. Panther & Thornburg as well as Thornburg & Panther explained a certain general cognitive mechanism through which the speaker's intended meaning (i.e. request) is so readily understood by the addressee through the use of interrogative sentence. However, Pérez Hernandez & Ruiz de Mendoza observe that some of the important features of directive speech acts are left unexplained. Included are: (i) the difference between subtypes of directives such as the one between orders and requests; and (ii) the higher degree of prototypicality of certain utterances—for example, why does *Can you hold this for a second (please)?* normally strike us as a better example of request than *Can you hold this?*, which is more ambiguous between inquiry about one's ability and request.

Space does not allow me to offer a full illustration of the ICMs of indirect directives, so let me point out their merits most relevant to the present paper. First, they combined the information contained in P-T's illocutionary scenario (i.e. CAPACITY, DESIRE and OBLIGATION) with the following three parameters: COST-BENEFIT, OPTIONALITY and POWER. Accord-

ing to their model, requests and orders are characterized and differentiated from each other as follows. Both acts are completely identical in the parameter of COST-BENEFIT; the addressee's action represents a certain cost to himself/herself and a certain benefit to the speaker. The difference resides in OPTIONALITY and POWER. Requests involve high optionality but orders don't. In addition, orders consistently involve speaker's stronger power or social status.<sup>3</sup>

Next, the reason why *Can you hold this for a second (please)?* is a better request than *Can you hold this?* can be explained in terms of the number of activated components. The general principle is that the greater the number of components of ICMs, the more prototypical the instance of speech act (in this case, request). The sentence *Can you hold this?* activates the addressee's CAPABILITY (or the BEFORE component in Panther & Thornburg's scenario) only, whereas *Can you hold this for a second (please)?* may activate not only CAPABILITY but also COST-BENEFIT as well as OPTIONALITY. First, the appearance of the time adverbial *for a second* can be construed as an attempt on the part of the speaker to minimize the COST of the action for the addressee. As a consequence, the number of activated components of ICM of requests is greater in the interrogative *Can you hold this for a second (please)?* than in *Can you hold this?*. Second, the appearance of *please* increases the degree of OPTIONALITY (hence, politeness). As a result, the interpretation of simple question is completely ruled out.

What do these findings imply for the present analysis of the imperative? Quirk et al's and Huddleston & Pullum's illocutionary act classifications are extremely useful in characterizing the English imperative in pragmatic terms. However, when one attempts to analyze actual data from this perspective alone, one would be faced with serious difficulty, since, as Quirk et al and Huddleston & Pullum both admit, there is normally no one-to-one correspondence between imperative utterance and illocutionary act category. For example, consider example (1) again in section 1:

(1) [Context: two coworkers (A and B) conversing in a workplace]

A: Hi, what's up?

B: I'm having a bad day.

A: *Tell me about it.*

In (1), speaker A's imperative utterance *tell me about* can be a request (in the sense of "Can you (please) tell me about it?"), permission (i.e. "Go on, you can/are free to tell me about it."), suggestion or advice (i.e. "You should tell me about it" or "Why don't you tell me about it?") and possibly more.

Next, Pérez Hernandez & Ruiz de Mendoza's (2002) ICM-based approach is extremely appealing. This theory offers a set of specific parameters, which allows us to not only characterize and distinguish various subtypes of directives but also identify the prototypicality of requests based on the number of activated parameters. In this regard, I consider that the ICMs of indirect directives serve as a workable model for the analysis of imperatives. However, a couple of features unique to English imperatives need to be taken into account. One is, as we have already pointed out, the fact that it is the norm rather than the exception that imperative utterances are associated with multiple illocutionary acts at once, as Leech correctly observes that "... the

imperative cannot be associated with any particular illocution such as an order, nor even with a general illocutionary type such as impositives.” (1983: 117).

The other feature is that imperatives vary as to the nature and degree of force a great deal more than indirect directives. Consider:

- (5) a. Tell me about it—it won’t make any difference.  
 b. ? Can you tell me about it?—it won’t make any difference.

Only the imperative in (5a) can convey the idea of concession, a sense not available with the interrogative variant of (5b). An adequate theory of the imperative should be able to accommodate both standard uses (i.e. examples (1) and (2)) and non-standard (i.e. (3) and (5a)).

What we need then is a new formula for analyzing the strength of imperative force in context—*independently of illocutionary act classifications*. Such a model should be able to capture, first of all, cases in which imperative force is in full operation but also a variety of other cases in which the force is applied only moderately, completely lost or even negatively exerted. I argue that one promising approach would be to adopt what I term as “the six-parameter approach to imperative force” in which each parameter is analyzed with a numerical score.

It might be objected that nonphysical forces, unlike physical, are not subject to numerical analysis. Johnson (1987), for example, observes that where there is power, there exists the possibility of measuring the force it generates. However, he states that only physical forces can be measured precisely and quantitatively. In cases of nonphysical forces, he assumes, “we may be able to give only a relative ranking, such as saying that force X is stronger than force Y.” (Johnson 1987: 44).

I agree that absolute quantification is not attainable when the nature of force is interpersonal and/or psychological forces as in the case of directives. However, I believe the adaptation of what I call “relative quantification” is not impossible—it is not only possible but also necessary. By this I mean a minimum range of quantification, which is sufficient to characterize and differentiate a wide variety of imperative utterances. The next section will illustrate the structure of this formula.

### 3. The Six-Parameter Approach to Calculating Imperative Force

The term FORCE EXERTION is used here to refer to the conception of varying degrees of illocutionary force associated with imperative utterances (some being directive but some non-directive).

The idea that imperatives have varying degrees of (directive) force is nothing new. What *is* new is that departing from a single conception of imperative force (or imposition) that has guided the great majority of work, I have broken down the notion of FORCE EXERTION into six separate components, each of which is analyzed with a numerical score. Table 1 below demonstrates this formula.

This table is a model of utterance interpretation exclusively designed for the analyses of imperatives. Of the six parameters in this formula, (i) DESIRE, (ii) CAPABILITY and (vi)

**Table 1 Six Parameters for Calculating FORCE EXERTION**

<b>FORCE EXERTION:</b>	HIGH	LOW	ZERO	MINUS LOW	M. HIGH
i. DESIRE	[+2]	[+1]	[0]	[-1]	[-2]
ii. CAPABILITY	/	[+1]	[0]	/	/
iii. POWER	/	[+1]	[0]	[-1]	/
iv. COST	[+2]	[+1]	[0]	/	/
v. BENEFIT	[+2]	[+1]	[0]	[-1]	[-2]
vi. OBLIGATION	[+2]	[+1]	[0]	[-1]	[-2]
<b>Total Score:</b>	[+10] ~~~~~ [-7]				

(Based on Takahashi (in preparation): chap. 3)

OBLIGATION are due to Panther & Thornburg's speech act scenarios—(i) and (ii) from the BEFORE component and (iv) from the AFTER component of requests. By contrast, the components of (iii) POWER, (iv) COST and (v) BENEFIT are indebted to Pérez Hernandez & Ruiz de Mendoza's ICMs for indirect directives. Note that the notion of *distance* is not included because the social distance (or closeness) does not have a direct impact on the strength of imperative force, although this notion does affect the choice of an indirect strategy—as when one has to choose between *I'd appreciate it if you could come right now and pick up your son* vs. *Can you come right now and pick up your son*.

The following two features distinguish this formula from any previous analytic model of imperatives, or more generally, directives as a whole. First, quite unlike Pérez Hernandez & Ruiz de Mendoza or Leech (1983: chap. 5), COST and BENEFIT are treated separately, on the grounds that the two components are not necessarily coextensive, though in many cases intimately related. The single COST-BENEFIT component would be insufficient to capture the precise force exertion of a given imperative utterance.

Second, the conceptions of minus as well as zero score are integrated into the formula. This move is to capture the cases of lost directive force as in concessive or genuine conditional imperatives (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 931), on the one hand, and to handle the cases of imperatives used to communicate irony, dare, and warning, on the other.<sup>4</sup>

The idea of FORCE EXERTION is essentially speaker-based. By this I mean analysts' ratings of what the speaker assumes to be the case with an imperative utterance in a given context. In other words, the value of each parameter is intended to reflect the speaker's intention and his/her perception of the situation of context in which a given imperative is issued. In this sense, the presence of ample context is crucial to quantifying the force exertion of imperative defined here. Without information concerning who is speaking to whom and in what social situation the conversation is taking place, there is no measuring the value of FORCE EXERTION.

Let us turn to a brief discussion of each parameter. First, (i) DESIRE is concerned with the degree of wanting, which are interpreted in terms of five scores, [+2] (plus high) through [-2] (minus high). In the vast majority of imperative utterances, DESIRE is interpretable in terms of either [+2] or [+1], which would apply to examples like *Come on in* or *Tell me more*. In relatively few cases, however, DESIRE can be interpreted in terms of [0] or a minus score, as in *Touch me (and I'll call the police)* or *Well, mock me all you like, but I've never fancied being up this high* (Ohashi 2006: 422, 425).<sup>5</sup>



Second, CAPABILITY is a matter of whether the addressee has the ability to realize what is said. In the majority of cases, [+1] applies—this is when the addressee is in a position to carry out the designated action as in *Come on in* or *Clean up this mess*. The few cases to which the score [0] applies include imperative utterances such as *Get well soon* or *Have a nice day*.

Third, POWER deals with the speaker's assessment of the relative power/social status of S and A. I suggest that POWER be analyzed in three ways: [+1] (S are more powerful than A), [0] (S and A are equal) or [-1] (S is less powerful than A). The great majority of imperative utterances would be the cases of [+1] or [0]. The cases of [-1] are expected to be rare but the act of begging as in *Please take me to the zoo, Dad—please!* would be one such instance.

Fourth, COST deals with the degree of burden imposed on the addressee, which is analyzable in three ways, [+2], [+1] and [0]. The value [+2] applies to the cases of high cost such as *I've lost my wallet. (Please) lend me some money* or *(Shoplifter!) Grab him!*. The score [+1] applies to cases such as *(I have some important news for you)—Oh, go ahead* or *(Responding to knocking on the door) Come on in*. Sifianou (1992: 121–122), for example, makes an interesting distinction between requests for information and requests for action and finds the latter to involve a greater degree of imposition, which would correspond to the degree of COST in the present framework. I generally agree that COST is normally heavier with requests for action than with those for information, although the division between high vs. low cost is hardly clear-cut and some types of information, notably those of confidential nature, would be costly. Finally, the [0] score applies to cases in which the addressee is not pressured into doing anything at all as in *Have a nice day* or *Enjoy the show*.

Next, BEFEFIT is somewhat complex to deal with. This parameter is concerned with the extent to which S assumes the proposed action to be beneficial (or adversatively beneficial) to either S or A, or both. I suggest that when S benefits (from the future act) and when A benefits receive separate treatments, since the former involves a greater degree of imposition. I consider that the value of BENEFIT normally covaries with that of DESIRE when the action is beneficiary to S alone. In this case, there are five possibilities, [+2] through [-2], and the majority would involve either [+2] or [+1]. Let me add, however, that when the action is considered mutually beneficial, the score would be lowered because the intensity of imposition is softened.

I suggest that unlike the case of BENEFIT for S, the case of BENEFIT for A be analyzed in three ways—[0], [-1] or [-2]. One case of the score [0] would be an instruction such as *(If you want to go the airport) take this bus* (conversation between strangers). The reason for the absence of plus scores (i.e. [+1] or [+2]) when the required action is beneficiary for A resides in the fact that in such a case, there is no need for S to pressure A into carrying out the action. Minus scores apply when the action is adversatively beneficial to the addressee; one such case would be a threat as in *Say that again (and I'll knock your head off)*.

Finally, OBLIGATION is concerned with the extent to which S assumes A is obliged to comply. Just like DESIRE and BENEFIT, OBLIGATION can be analyzed in five ways ranging between [+2] and [-1]. Obligation can be of more than one kind—legal, moral, employment and others (cf. Brown & Levinson 1987: 77). One clear-cut case of [+2] would be an imperative utterance like *Submit this report by Friday morning* made by a boss to his/her subordinate in a business setting, where A is put under a strong obligation to comply. Studies have found that

when the required action is not within A's normal (and/or mutually agreed-upon) duties, speakers tend to resort to indirect means of some kind.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout this paper, I treat an imperative utterance as more prototypical when the parameters of DESIRE, BENEFIT and OBLIGATION involve [+1] or a higher score. The rationale is that such an imperative utterance conforms to English speakers' introspective and/or pretheoretical judgment of the best member of imperative category: i.e. "an imperative is a kind of utterance with which speaker attempts to get addressee to do something."

#### 4. Applications

We are ready to demonstrate the ways in which the formula in Table 1 applies to specific examples. Let us begin with example (1), a kind of "standard" imperative:

(1) [Context: Speakers A and B are coworkers]:

A: What's up?

B: I'm having a bad day.

A: *Tell me about it.*

The force exertion of the imperative *tell me about it* in this context can be analyzed as in (1') below.

(1') The force exertion of *tell me about it* in the context of (1):

DESIRE: [+1] or [+2]

CAPABILITY: [+1]

POWER: [0]

COST: [+1]

BENEFIT: [0]

OBLIGATION: [+1]

---

TOTAL: [+4]~[+5]

Notice that four components are given a plus score. First, DESIRE is either [+1] or [+2], because in contexts like this one, the speaker normally wants the addressee to tell him or her the problem, but the actual intensity of desire is unknown. Second, CAPABILITY is analyzed as [+1], because the requested action is something the addressee is capable of carrying out on his or her own will (Compare, for example, *Get well soon*). Third, POWER is immaterial (i.e. [0]), since the two speakers are equal in social status. Next, COST is considered low (i.e. [+1]) because what is requested is information. Moreover, the compliance would normally be beneficial for the addressee. Fifth, BENEFIT would be calculated as [0], since it is the addressee (rather than the speaker) that benefits from the action. Finally, OBLIGATION is interpreted as low (i.e. [+1]). The rationale is that it is unclear whether or not the requested action is strictly work-related, on the one hand, and, via social convention A is more or less obliged to respond to this kind of inquiry in this particular exchange, on the other. As a result, we obtain a total

score of either [+4] or [+5].

Next, the force exertion of this imperative in (2) would be something like (2'):

(2) [Context: Speaker A (teacher) and Speaker B (pupil) conversing in a classroom]

A: What's up?

B: I'm having a bad day.

A: *Tell me about it.*

(2') The force exertion of *tell me about it* in the context of (2):

DESIRE: [+1] or [+2]

CAPABILITY: [+1]

POWER: [+1]

COST: [+1]

BENEFIT: [0]

OBLIGATION: [+2]

---

TOTAL: [+6]~[+7]

The differences in between (1) and (2) reside in POWER and OBLIGATION. In (2'), POWER is analyzed as [+1] (instead of [0]), since there is a significant power gap and S is far more powerful than A. OBLIGATION is also given a higher score (i.e. [+2]), since the addressee (pupil) is put under a strong obligation to comply and respond. Overall, the imperative in (2) obtains the [+6] or [+7] score, which is two points higher than in (1). I believe this result is in general consonant with our intuitive understanding of the difference in imperative force between (1) and (2).

Finally, the ironical imperative in (3) would be analyzed as in (3') below:

(3) [Context: Two coworkers A and B are conversing]

A: Don't buy anything in downtown Tokyo.

B: *Tell me about it.* A single cup of coffee can cost 10 dollars!

(3') The force exertion of *tell me about it* in (3)

(Speaker's) DESIRE: [0] or [-1]

(Addressee's) CAPACITY: [+1]

(S's) POWER: [0]

COST: [0]

BENEFIT: [0] or [-1]

OBLIGATION: [-1]~[-2]

---

TOTAL: [0]~[-3]

The crucial difference between (3) and (1) or (2) is the fact that three parameters, DESIRE, BENEFIT and OBLIGATION involve a minus value. In (3'), DESIRE is analyzed as [0] or [-1], since the imperative force is either completely lost or even negatively (but moderately) exerted. BENEFIT is also interpreted as [0] or [-1], since the action is considered non-beneficial or even adversatively beneficial (i.e. boring the speaker of this imperative). Finally,



## Note

- 1 In all fairness, there are writers like Fitch & Sanders 1994 as well as Lee-Wong 1994, who question this common association between imperatives and “impoliteness” and stress instead the significance of imperatives across cultures as an indispensable variant of directive strategy.
- 2 Directive speech acts are normally viewed as face threatening acts (or FTAs) across languages (cf. Brown & Levinson 1987, Leech 1983). However, some researchers consider that requests may imply closeness as well. For example, concerning the imperative in Greek, Sifianou (1992: 99) contends that “Requests can also imply closeness and intimacy, in the sense that one must feel close enough to ask somebody else to do something, and consequently positive politeness is important, too.” In fact, bald imperatives are sometimes used to indicate serious concern or even strong affection for the addressee’s positive face (Ibid: 99). This observation may hold for imperatives in English as well. See Takahashi (2007a, b) for extensive descriptive analyses of the ways in which frequent imperative verbs are actually used in English conversation.
- 3 Box (1986: 676) is of a similar view but considers that while the speaker benefits from the addressee’s act in requests, this does not necessarily hold for orders.
- 4 Some authors term these cases as those of “negative interpretations” (Wilson & Sperber 1988) or “non-literal uses” (Clark 1993).
- 5 Ohashi (2006) presents corpus data indicating that grammaticalized emphasizees such as *all you like* or *all you want* sometimes combine with concessive imperatives.
- 6 Ervin-Tripp (1976) reports a case in which surface directive forms are sensitive to whether the requested action is within or outside the addressee’s normal duties. For example, the attitudinal marker *please* tends to be added to orders by waitresses when they asked cooks to perform services *outside the cooks’ normal duties* (1976: 31, footnote)

## References

- Bax, I. Pufahl. 1986. “Spoken and written work assignments.” *Journal of Pragmatics* 10, 673–692.
- Blum-Kulka, Shoshana & Olshain, E. 1984. “Requests and apologies: A cross-cultural study of speech act realization.” *Applied Linguistics* 5, 198–212.
- Blum-Kulka, Shoshana and Brenda Danet & Rimona Gherson. 1985. “The language of requesting in Israeli society.” In Forgas, Joseph P. (ed), 113–141.
- Brown, Penelope and Stephen C. Levinson. 1987. *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clark, Herbert & D. Schunk. 1980. “Polite responses to polite requests.” *Cognition* 8, 111–143.
- Clark, Billy. 1993. “Relevance and ‘pseudo-imperatives’.” *Linguistics and Philosophy* 16: 79–121.
- Cole, Peter and Jerry Morgan 1975. *Syntax and semantics 3: speech acts*. New York: Academic Press.
- Davies, Eirlys. 1986. *The English imperative*. London: Croom Helm.
- Ervin-Tripp, Susan. 1976. “Is Sybil there? The structure of some American English directives.” *Language in Society* 5, 25–66.
- Fitch, L. Kristine & Robert E. Sanders. 1994. “Culture, communication, and preferences for directness in expression of directives.” *Communication Theory* 4–3, 219–245.
- Forgas, Joseph P. (ed). 1985. *Language and social situations*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Gibbs, Raymond W., Jr. 1985. “Situational conventions and requests,” In Forgas, Joseph P. (ed), 97–110.
- Gibbs, Raymond W., Jr. 1986. “What makes some indirect speech acts conventional?” *Journal of memory and language* 25, 181–196.
- Givón, Talmy. 1990. *Syntax: A functional-typological introduction*. vol. II. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Givón, Talmy. 1993. *English grammar: A function-based introduction*. vol. II. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Hori, Motoko. 2006. “Eigo-no kanyoteki kansetsu-irai-hyogen (Conventional indirect requesting expressions).”

*Journal of Inquiry and Research* 84, 57-74.

- Huddleston, Rodney and Geoffrey K. Pullum. 2002. *The Cambridge grammar of the English language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, Mark 1987. *The Body in the mind: The bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, George. 1987. *Women, fire and dangerous things*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Leech, Geoffrey N. 1983. *Principles of pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Lee-Wong, S. M. 1994. "Imperatives in requests: Direct or impolite—Observations from Chinese." *Pragmatics* 4-4, 491-515.
- Lee-Wong, S. M. 1994. "Imperatives in requests: Direct or impolite—Observations from Chinese." *Pragmatics* 4-4, 491-515.
- Ohashi, Hiroshi. 2006. "The development of an English intensifier phrase: A corpus-based study." *English Linguistics* 23-2, 403-432.
- Panther, Klaus-Uwe and Linda L. Thornburg. 1998. "A cognitive approach to inferencing in conversation." *Journal of Pragmatics* 30, 755-769.
- Pérez Hernandez, Lorena and Francisco José Ruiz de Mendoza. 2002. "Grounding, semantic motivation, and conceptual interaction in indirect directive speech acts." *Journal of Pragmatics* 34, 259-284.
- Quirk, Randolph, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, and Jan Svartvik. 1985. *A comprehensive grammar of the English language*. London: Longman.
- Searle, John R. 1969. *Speech acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Searle, John R. 1975. "Indirect speech acts." In Cole and Morgan (eds.), 59-82.
- Searle, John R. 1979. *Expression and meaning: Studies in the theory of speech act*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sifianou, M. 1992. *Politeness phenomena in England and Greece: A cross-cultural perspective*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Sifianou, M. 1993. "Off-record indirectness and the notion of imposition." *Multilingua* 12-1, 69-79.
- Takahashi, Hidemitsu. 1994. "English imperatives and speaker commitment." *Language Sciences* 16-3/4, 371-385.
- Takahashi, Hidemitsu. 2004. *The English imperative: A cognitive and functional Analysis*. Ph.D. Thesis. Hokkaido University.
- Takahashi, Hidemitsu. 2007a. "A usage-based analysis of Imperative Verbs in English (1)." *The Annual Report on Cultural Science* 121, Hokkaido University, 89-129.
- Takahashi, Hidemitsu. 2007b. "A usage-based analysis of imperative verbs in English (2)" *The Annual Report on Cultural Science* (Hokkaido University, Graduate School of Letters) 122, 33-58.
- Takahashi, Hidemitsu. in preparation. *A Cognitive Grammar Analysis of the English Imperative*.
- Thornburg, Linda & Klaus-Uwe Panther 1997. "Speech Act Metonymies." In Lierbert, Wolf-Andreas, Gisela Redeker and Linda Waugh (eds.), *Discourse and Perspective in Cognitive Linguistics*, 205-219. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Wierzbicka, Anna. 2003. *Cross-cultural pragmatics: The semantics of human interaction*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Wilson, Deirdre and Dan Sperber. 1988. "Mood and the analysis of non-declarative sentences." In J. Dancy, J. Moravcsik and C. Taylor (eds.), *Human agency: Language, duty and value*, 277-291. Stanford: Stanford University Press.