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A Usage-Based Analysis of Imperative Verbs in English (2)

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1 Introduction

This article continues my previous article (Takahashi 2007), which is a quantitative analysis of frequent verbs in English imperatives and their usage patterns.

Imperative constructions have long fascinated grammarians and syntacticians due to a wide range of peculiar features and structural possibilities clearly distinct from declaratives and interrogatives. It was revealed, for example, that imperatives are normally restricted to verbs (or predicates) having “self-controllable” or “dynamic” properties (cf. Kuno 1970, Quirk et al. 1985: 827–828). Akmajian 1984 observed some syntactic parallels between imperatives and what he calls “Mad Magazine sentences (or MMs)” — a class of exclamatory sentences quite frequent in informal styles such as *What, me worry?*, *My boss give me a raise?!*, or *Him wear a tuxedo?!*. That is, just like MMs, imperatives have either optional grammatical subjects or subjects that are obligatorily intonation centers (e.g. *You leave!* but **Ya leave!*); tense and modals never appear (**Are nice* or **Must leave!*); perfective HAVE is normally odd (*?Have finished your homework by 5!*); and topicalization applies only when there is no overt subject (**That book, you read!* but *The first*

*forty problems, (*you) solve by next week!*). Furthermore, Zwicky (1988: 440-442) provided a list of syntactic differences between imperatives and declaratives, including but not limited to the absence of tense/person marks in imperatives (*Be/*Are quiet!*), the absence of modals (**Must respond!*), the failure of negation to be located after *be* (**Be not/*Ben't sluggish!*), a restricted class of expressed subjects (**Many people/*She/*A boy come back in!*).

While a great deal is known about the structural possibilities and peculiar semantic features of verbs in isolated imperative sentences, very little is known about how verbs that occur frequently in imperatives are actually used. Based on a survey of 1738 tokens of imperative utterances collected from four contemporary American fictions, Takahashi (2007) reported the following findings. First, the English imperative is most frequent with the verbs *let's*, *tell* and *let* — more than 100 tokens, followed by *look* (95 tokens). Other frequent verbs include *come*, *get*, *take*, *be*, *go*, *give*, *do*, *forget*, *listen*, *wait* and *make*. Presented below in Table 1 is a revised list of top 15 frequent verbs.²

Next, four most frequent verbs exhibited the following grammatical features. (i) Simpler syntax (i.e. simpler argument structure) is preferred with *tell*, *let* and *look*; (ii) *let* and *tell* (in monotransitive syntax) strongly favor *me* as an indirect object; and (iii) interjectional use is frequent with *look*. It is then argued that many of these results are directly linked with the fundamental discourse-pragmatic functions of imperative utterances in English. Included are “tact” (or politeness strategies), discourse organization/manipulation, as well as desirability to (or benefit for) the speaker and/or the addressee (cf. Searle 1969: 66-67, Wierzbicka 1991: 205, Sadock 1994: 401, among others). While it is true that the imperative can be imposing and hence impolite, two of the most frequent imperative verbs *let's* and *let (me)* are strongly associated with

Table 1: 15 most frequent imperative verbs in 4 stories

(1774 tokens)

(1) let's	133 tokens (7.5%)
(2) tell	109 (6.1%)
(3) let	105 (5.9%)
(4) look	98 (5.5%)
(5) come	78
(6) get	74
(7) take	64
(8) be	60
(9) go	55
(10) give	48
(11) do	45
(12) forget	34
(13) listen	35
(14) wait	29
(15) make	22

“tact” (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987) — a pragmatic means for allowing the speaker to say what s/he wants to say or do what s/he wants to do with modesty and politeness.

The aims of this paper are: (i) to clarify the usage patterns of some of the other frequent verbs characteristic of imperative use; and (ii) to explain why these verbs behave the ways they do in imperatives. The analysis is made on the basis of a survey of the same data source as used in Takahashi 2007: *The Sky is Falling* (Sidney Sheldon, 2000), *The Pelican Brief* (John Grisham, 1992), *Malice* (Daniel Steel, 1997) and *The Deception*

(Barry Reed, 1997).

The next section (section 2) reports findings about the usage patterns of four other frequent verbs that are antonymic in some way — *come* and *go* in 2.1 and *give* and *take* in 2.2. In section 3, I identify a specific class of verbs and *be* adjectives that strongly prefer overt negation in imperatives, followed by conclusion (in section 4).

The main findings of the present paper include the following. First, the verb *give* (but not *take*) strongly favors *me*, but repel *you*, as an indirect object — exactly like *tell* (in monotransitive syntax) and *let*. Second, interjectional use is frequent with the verbs *come* (*on*), *listen* and *believe* (*me*) as well — like *look*. Second, metaphorical expressions are strictly limited with *come* and *go*, although they abound in declaratives. Third, overt negation is prevalent with a particular class of verbs (*worry*, *bother*, *mind*) and *be* adjectives (e.g. *rude*, *hard* (*on oneself*), *naïve*, *stupid*, *silly*, *ridiculous*, and *angry*).

It is argued that these results are also directly linked with the discourse-pragmatic functions and semantic structure of the imperative construction in English, some of which do not necessarily reflect the common wisdom that an imperative utterance can be imposing and impolite (cf. Wierzbicka (2003: 32-34)). Included are “tact” (as a politeness strategy), expressions of the speaker’s emotion and discourse interaction/organization, as well as the (implicit) “you” subject and the consideration of benefit (cf. Searle (1969: 66-67), Wierzbicka (1991: 205), Sadock (1994: 401), among others).

2 Findings about other frequent verbs

This section reports findings about four other frequent verbs in the imperative construction. I discuss the asymmetry between *come* and *go*

(4.1) and between *give* and *take* (4.2).

2.1 Come and go

Come and *go* are both basic verbs in English, which denote deictically-anchored movement and are mutually antonymic. *Come* was fifth-ranked and *go* ninth-ranked in my survey.

Come and *go* are among a class of verbs that are first learned and most frequently used (cf. Miller & Johnson-Laird 1977: 527). In addition, the two verbs are extremely rich in metaphorical expressions, in that they both involve a motion schema that has all the qualifications to serve as the source domain of a metaphor, since it is pervasive in everyday experience, well-understood, simply structured, hence well-motivated (cf. Lakoff 1987: 278 and Johnson 1987: 150). It was once argued in Clark (1974: 317) that *come* in metaphorical use denotes entry into a normal state (e.g. *come to a consensus*, *come true*, and *come alive*) and *go* departure from such a state (e.g. *go mad*, *go wrong*, and *go bad*). It was later revealed in Radden (1996: 432-433) that contra Clark's claim, *come* can also be used to carry negative connotations (e.g. *come to harm*, *come into conflict*, and *come apart*) and *go* to carry positive connotations as well (e.g. *go free*, *go straight*).

Come and *go* in imperatives tell a somewhat different story. First, let us look at *come*. The verb *come* is seldom used as a metaphor in imperatives. In the four stories I investigated, *come* appeared 78 times in imperatives, used in its original deictic movement sense in 37 tokens (47.4%), non-deictic (movement) sense in 41 tokens (52.6%), as shown in table 2 below.

Table 2: The imperative use of *come*: 78 tokens

DEICTIC MOTION	NON-DEICTIC MOTION
37(47.4%)	41(52.6%) = <i>come on</i>

All the latter tokens (=non-deictic motion *come*) appeared in the combination *come on* used for “an exclamatory exhortation to act” (such as *Come on, let Andy do it!*) (Biber et al. 1999: 410), which is both interjectional and directive. Except this use, there was no token of *come* that can be interpreted in terms of metaphor.

The examples in (1) below illustrate the deictic motion sense of *come* and those in (2) non-deictic senses:

(1) DEICTIC MOTION *COME*

- a. “Dana? **Come** in here,” Matt yelled. (*Sky*, p. 129)
- b. “**Come** in, Doctor.” (*Deception*, p. 8)
- c. “**Come** back in a week,” he said casually, eyeing her again with obvious interest. “And let me know if you move, or find a job. Don’t leave the state…” (*Malice*, p. 140)
- d. “But of course. It would be our pleasure. **Come** this way, please.” (*Sky*, p. 78)
- e. “You **come** nosing around here again, Sheridan, and you’re going to end up as part of the Jersey Turnpike.” (*Deception*, p. 267)

(2) NON-DEICTIC MOTION *COME ON*

- a. “…You guys are already doing background checks, aren’t you? **Come on**, Gavin, you can tell me. Who’s on the list? I’ll never tell.” (*Pelican*, p. 75)
- b. “How’s the girl?”
“Which one?”

- “**Come on**, Thomas. The girl?” (*Pelican*, p. 75)
- c. “When can we go to bed?”
“Are you sleepy?”
“Anything but. **Come on**, Darby, it’s been three nights.” (*Pelican*, p. 87)
- d. “You’re gorgeous when you’re drunk.” She lay back and closed her eyes then, and his tongue trailed tantalizingly down her stomach to her underwear, and then forced its way inside it, licking lower and lower, until suddenly her eyes flew open, and she jumped. She couldn’t. “**Come on**, baby … please…” How long did she expect him to wait? “Please … Grace … I need you…” (*Malice*, p. 185)
- e. “Can you pull over to the side of the road?”
“What? I’m in four — lane traffic—he height of the rush hour. … What is it, Judy?”
“Keep your eyes on the road, Dan. What I’ve got to tell you isn’t —”
“**Come on**, Judy, for chrissakes!” (*Deception*, p. 299–300)

This use of *come on* here is both emotive and discourse-interactive as much as directive.

I found only two examples of *come on* used for indicating deictically anchored movement or “pre-departure summons to move” (Biber et al. 1999: 410) as follows:

(3) DEICTIC MOTION *COME ON*

- a. Dana took a deep breath. “All right. We’ll look for a school that’s more understanding. **Come on**, Kemal.”
Kemal got up, glared at Mr. Henry, and followed Dana out of the office. (*Sky*, p. 119)

- b. Dana stopped the car in front of the house. She looked at Kemal.
 “You’re coming in with me.”
 “Why?”
 “Because it’s cold out here. **Come on.**”
 Dana went to the front door and Kemal reluctantly followed her.
 (*Sky*, p. 120)

Next, the verb *go* in imperatives is also limited in metaphorical usage — in a way somewhat different from *come*. *Go* occurs 54 times, and the most remarkable difference between *come* and *go* in imperatives is that quite unlike *come*, the deictic motion is the most frequent use of *go*—in 42 (out of 54) tokens (77.7%). In only 9 tokens (16.6%) is *go* unambiguously used in non-deictic motion sense, plus 3 ambiguous tokens, as demonstrated in table 3 below.

Table 3: The imperative use of *go*: 54 tokens

DEICTIC MOTION	NON-DEICTIC MOTION	AMBIGUOUS
42(77.7%)	9(16.6%)	3

The examples in (4) below illustrate the most frequent, deictic motion usage, and those in (5) the less frequent non-deictic motion use:

(4) DEICTIC MOTION *GO*

- a. “Don’t **go** anywhere unless you tell me.” (*Malice*, p. 140)
- b. “**Go** shopping. **Go** to school. Find a charity you like and sit on a committee. **Go** to the movie...” (*Malice*, p. 304)
- c. “Well, **go** get him.” (*Sky*, p. 10)
- d. “**Go** right in, please.” (*Sky*, p. 60)
- e. “**Go** to the service tomorrow.” (*Pelican*, p. 179)

- f. “You **go** home and take care of Mrs. DiTullio.” (*Deception*, p. 110)

(5) NON-DEICTIC MOTION *GO*

- a. “Sorry we woke you up. **Go** back to sleep.” (*Sky*, p. 19)
- b. “Joan Sinisi is still living in Washington. I have her unlisted number for you, if you want it.”
“Wonderful,” Dana said. She picked up a pen. “**Go** ahead.”
“Five-five-five-two-six-nine-zero.” (*Sky*, p. 91)
- c. Jeff’s cell phone rang. “Excuse me, honey.” He pressed a button and talked into the phone. “Hello? … Oh…” He glanced at Dana. “No … It’s all right … **Go ahead** …”
Dana sat there, trying not to listen. (*Sky*, p. 148)
- d. “Yes,” Samuels said, “if you think you need to explain it, **go right ahead**.” (*Deception*, p. 358)
- e. He beat Sexton to Greenbriar by ten minutes, took the back stairs, slipped into Donna’s room without being noticed, and hid in the bathroom. He had figured it right.
“**Go on**, you haven’t much time.” Sheridan stuck the gun back up into Sexton’s neck.
“I haven’t got a dime, believe me. I’m mortgaged to the hilt…” (*Deception*, p. 408)

When *go* is used metaphorically (i.e. non-deictically) in imperatives, the combination *go on* or *go ahead* are frequently used to instruct the addressee to continue his or her ongoing (verbal or nonverbal) activity and/or provide the speaker with some information, although there are cases denoting entry into a normal state as in (5a) “Sorry we woke you up. **Go** back to sleep.”

Biber et al. characterize both *come on* and *go on* in imperatives as

“an exclamatory exhortation to act” (1999: 411). However, there is a subtle difference. Although the two imperative forms are both essentially discourse-interactive in communication function, *come on* acts more interjectional than *go on*.

As is the case with declaratives, a few instances of *go* in imperatives were ambiguous between deictic motion and non-motion usage:

- (6) a. “Let me give you some advice. Don’t **go** looking for trouble, or you’re going to find it. That’s a promise.…” (Sky, p. 62)
- b. “Hollywood?” Jeff had repeated.
“It will be a lark, Jeff.”
He nodded. “All right. **Go** for it. You’ll probably be great.”
(Sky, p. 150)

Let us summarize this section. First, the verb *come* in imperatives is used either in deictic motion or non-deictic motion sense with roughly the same degree of frequency, while *go* is used predominantly in deictic motion sense. Second, all the non-deictic uses of *come* take the form of *come on*, expressing “an exclamatory exhortation to act,” which is both interjectional and directive in reading. Finally, metaphorical usage is generally restricted with *come* and *go* alike.

Why aren’t *come* and *go* allowed to fully exploit their metaphorical potentials? I suggest that at least the following two factors are responsible: here again, the agentive “you” subject as well as desirability (of ordinary imperative utterances). Consider metaphorical idioms common in non-imperative constructions such as *come true*, *come to a consensus*, *come to my mind*, and *come to my attention*. These expressions characteristically denote non-deliberate events involving non-agentive (third-person) subjects as in *her dream (came true)*, *the two parties (will come to*

a consensus), or *this new device (came to my attention)*. The semantic imports of these events are generally at odds with the aspect of benefit associated with prototypical imperatives mentioned above. As for the metaphorical use of *go*, though expressions like *go free* and *go straight* are allowed to occur, those like *go mad*, *go wrong* and *go bad* are normally at odds with the conception of benefit, although there is a remedy—interpreting it negatively as in “pseudo-imperatives.”

The observed restrictions on metaphorical applications are open to further investigation, but the above discussions should suffice to show that *come* and *go* in imperatives do not behave the ways they do in declaratives.³

2.2 Give and take

Give and *take* are also two basic verbs, which are mutually antonymic in some way, acquired early and used frequently in everyday speech. *Give* was tenth-ranked and *take* seventh-ranked in the data.

First of all, the most remarkable feature of the verb *give* in imperatives is closely parallel to that of *tell* and *let*. That is, *give* occurs predominantly with *me*, and repels *you*, as an object argument. Being a typical ditransitive verb, *give* in the majority of cases occurs with two (direct and indirect) objects in my data—43 out of a total of 47 tokens (91.5%), which was not unexpected. Here are such examples:

(7) GIVE WITH TWO OBJECTS

- a. “Give me a chance, kid.” (*Malice*, p. 67)
- b. “Give me a specimen.” (*Malice*, p. 139)
- c. “Gimme the short version.” (*Pelican*, p. 58)
- d. “Give me a break.” (*Pelican*, p. 136)

- e. “Give me the number.” (*Pelican*, p. 136)
- f. “Give me 48 hours.” (*Pelican*, p. 291)
- g. “Give me one good reason why this man, who obviously is not a street bum, would be doing this.” (*Pelican*, p. 394)
- h. “Oh, don’t give me that, Dan.” (*Deception*, p. 258)
- i. “Of course, if Sheridan succumbs to your Vineyard invitation, Janet, give me a call.” (*Deception*, p. 183)
- j. “Give her the keys.” (*Pelican*, p. 125)
- k. “Just give it some thoughts.” (*Pelican*, p. 238)
- l. “Give it a thought.” (*Malice*, p. 174)
- m. “Give them all the limo treatment.” (*Deception*, p. 114)
- n. “Mary, give Don the tape in cassette.” (*Deception*, p. 258)

What was not expected is the finding that the verb *give* strongly prefers *me* as its indirect object in imperatives. As the *a* to *i* examples above reveal, the combination of *give me* is very frequent, occurring in 29 out of 47 tokens (61.7%). Conversely, there was no instance of *give you/yourself X*, which is structurally possible as in *Give yourself a break*. In other cases, the indirect object of *give* was in the third-person, as examples *j* to *n* above illustrate.

The strong association between *give* and *me* is found only in imperatives—so is the *dissociation* between *give* and *you*, as the table below demonstrates.

Table 4: The verb *give*'s object in imperatives vs. declaratives

	IMPERATIVE	DECLARATIVE
<i>give</i>	48	124
<i>give me</i>	29 (60.4%)	23 (18.5%)
<i>give you</i>	0 (0%)	29 (23.4%)

In declaratives, the percentage of the combination *give me* drops sharply — to 18.5% (23/124). By comparison, the combination *give you* appears in 29 tokens (23.4%).

Next, being a typical monotransitive verb, *take* occurs predominantly with one (=direct) object — in 64 out of 67 tokens (95.5%), which is hardly unpredictable:

(8) *TAKE* WITH DIRECT OBJECT

- a. “**Take** care of him.” (*Malice*, p. 22)
- b. “**Take** good care of it.” (*Malice*, p. 107)
- c. “At least **take** a cab.” (*Malice*, p. 250)
- d. “**Take** your time.” (*Malice*, p. 404)
- e. “Just **take** the elevator to the penthouse.” (*Sky*, p. 93)
- f. “So **take** it easy.” (*Sky*, p. 140)
- g. “You **take** care of yourself.” (*Sky*, p. 185)
- h. “**Take** her out to Rock Creek Park.” (*Sky*, p. 349)
- i. “**Take** me to jail.” (*Sky*, p. 359)
- j. “But Jesus, Manny, if they certify me as crazy, never **take** me to the St. Anne’s psych department.” (*Deception*, p. 27)

Otherwise, *take* occurs as intransitive, which is rare—only 3 tokens (examples (9)):

(9) TAKE WITHOUT OBJECT

- a. “Take off.” (*Sky*, p. 393)
- b. “You **take** off, Manny. I’ll finish up here.” (*Deception*, p. 321)
- c. “Betsy,” she addressed the intercom, “please **take** over for fifteen.” (*Deception*, p. 273)

With few exceptions, *take* prefers a third-person object—in 57 out of a total of 64 tokens (89%), as demonstrated in (8a) to (8h) above.

The most remarkable difference between *give* and *take* in imperatives is then that quite unlike *give me*~, the combination of *take me*~ is very infrequent. Only two instances were found, *Take me to jail* (8i) and … *never take me to the St. Anne’s psych department* (8j). By contrast, there were more (i.e. seven) instances of *yourself* or *yourselves* as the object of *take* as in *You take care of yourself* or *Take care of yourselves*.

What are the motivations for the strong association between *give* and *me* in the imperative construction? Here again, the crucial factor pertains to the “you” subject” as well as a consideration of benefit associated with prototypical imperatives.⁴ Recall that *give* is basically a three-place predicate, requiring an agent (=GIVER), a theme (=THING), and a recipient argument (=RECIPIENT) (cf. Newman 1996: 33), so the semantic structure of *give* in imperatives involves the addressee (as GIVER) a thing transferred (as THING), and the speaker (as RECIPIENT) In such a case, the imperative utterance *Give me*~ is conceptualized as a transfer of the addressee’s possession to the speaker, although the nature of this transfer is more often communicative or mental than purely physical.⁵ To the extent that the speaker normally benefits from a transfer of possession to himself or herself, it is quite understandable that the combination *give me*~ has developed into a common set phrase in English; in fact, its shortened form *Gimme*~ (7c) is quite common in vernacular speech.

Notice that the majority of “give me” examples above in (7) denote activities directly beneficial to the speaker in one way or another, in which the addressee’s act is providing the speaker with a “chance,” “specimen,” “break,” “a certain number”(=information), “48 hours” (=time), “one good reason” and “a call” — but no such bad things as a “pain” or “headache.” Interestingly, in one instance of *give me*, the imperative form *give me a pain* is employed. However, it occurs in the “pseudo-imperative” construction as a warning/ threat: *You give me a pain and I’ll kick your ass from here to D Block (Malice, p.103).*⁶

The notion of desirability accounts for the low frequency of the combination *take me* ~ as well. To begin with, the *me* of *take me* is a direct object, so this combination in imperatives is normally limited to causal motion usage as in *Take me out (to the ball park)* or *Take me to the zoo*, although *take* itself is a highly polysemous verb (cf. Norvig and Lakoff 1987). It follows then that the addressee’s act of physically taking the speaker to some location does not by any means straightforwardly bring about any benefit for the speaker (or others).

In this regard, one interesting case is *Take me to jail* in (7i) above, an imperative presenting a situation normally considered terribly undesirable. However, in this specialized contest, it is completely beneficial for the speaker, since the speaker (Dana Evans, a Washington anchorwoman) is in an airport dress shop when two menacing-looking men are standing at each side of the entrance, probably trying to kidnap or assault her. The speaker desperately wants to get out safely, so she grabs a dress off the rack and starts to walk away in order to attract the attention of the clerk and the guard: the preceding discourse goes like this:

(8i) “Just a minute, miss,” the guard said. “You’ll have to come back inside the store with me.”

“Why should I?” Dana protested.

“Why? Because shoplifting is against the law.”

The guard took Dana’s arm and pulled her back inside. The men stood there, frustrated.

Dana smiled at the guard. “Okay, I admit it. I was shoplifting. **Take me to jail.**”

In this subsection, we have observed a sharp contrast between *give* and *take* in object alignment. Quite unlike *take*, the verb *give* prefers *me* as its object, but repels *you* — a usage pattern closely parallel to *tell* and *let* in imperatives. This preferred argument pattern can directly be attributed to the agentive “you” subject of imperatives, as well as the consideration of benefit.

3 Imperative verbs in overt negation

Finally, I would like to refer to a class of verbs or predicates which strongly prefer to be overtly negated in the imperative construction.

First, according to Stefanowitch and Gries (2003: 233), *worry* occurs exclusively in the phrase *don’t worry* in the imperative construction. This holds true in my data. All the 10 tokens of *worry* occurred in the form *don’t worry*. In addition, it was found in my data that *mind* and *bother* exhibit the same tendency. The verb *mind* occurred exclusively in the combination *never mind* in its all 5 tokens, despite the fact that the positive version such as *Mind your business* is equally possible, while all the 3 tokens of *bother* occurred in the form *don’t bother*.

Closely parallel is the finding that the verb *be* tends to be overtly negated when it is followed by a class of adjectives denoting attributes or attitudes generally considered undesirable and/or socially inappropriate.

They include *rude*, *hard* (*on oneself*), *naïve*, *stupid*, *silly*, *ridiculous*, and *angry* as in (10) below:

- (10) Don't be **rude**. (*Sky*)
 Don't be **hard on yourself**. (*Malice*)
 Don't be **naïve**. (*Malice*)
 Don't be **stupid**. (*Malice*)
 Don't be **silly**. (*Malice*)
 Don't be **ridiculous**. (*Malice*)
 Don't be **angry**. (*Pelican*)

This overwhelming tendency was observed not only concerning adjectives but also nominals as well:

- (11) Don't be **a jerk**. (*Malice*)
 Don't be such **a cynic**. (*Malice*)

Conversely, the verb *be* was not negated in imperatives when it occurs with the following class of adjectives:

- (12) Be **careful**. (*Sky*)
 Just be **yourself**. (*Sky*)
 ... and above all be **fair** to both sides and be **true** to yourselves and to each other. (*Deception*)
 Be **consistent**. (*Deception*)
 Be **seated**. (*Deception*)
 Be **ready**. (*Deception*)
 Be **good** to your Dad. (*Malice*)
 Be **careful**, Grace. Be **smart**. ... Be someone. (*Malice*)

… and be **glad** you're not here. (*Malice*)

You guys be **careful**. (*Pelican*)

Be **assertive**. (*Pelican*)

Be **patient**. (*Pelican*)

Be **cautious**. (*Pelican*)

Obviously, these adjectives generally refer to attributes/attitudes considered desirable or socially appropriate.

The strong association between overt negation and these classes of verbs, adjectives and nominals is restricted to the imperative construction. In other constructions, these classes of items comfortably occur in the positive form as in *You worry too much* or *I worried about you* as well as *She was rude*, *This is silly* or *He is stupid*, all of which are not only structurally possible but quite common in everyday speech.

Stefanowitch and Gries attribute the exclusive occurrence of the negative imperative form *don't worry* to the imperative's "desirability to the hearer" (2003: 233). This consideration is generally applicable to all the examples above. In my terminology, given the feature of benefit inherently tied with prototypical imperative constructions, there is no wonder that predicate expressions representing negative social values prefer to be overtly negated in imperatives.

4 Conclusion

As a continuation of Takahashi (2007), this paper has focused on four frequent verbs in English imperatives, as well as a specific class of verbs and *be* adjectives that strongly prefer overt negation. The main findings can be summarized in the following points:

- (i) Metaphorical use is restricted with both *come* and *go* in imperatives, despite the fact that it abounds in declaratives.
- (ii) Interjectional (i.e. non-literal) use is frequent with the form *come on*.
- (iii) The verb *give* strongly favors *me*, but repel *you*, as an indirect object, just like *tell* (in monotransitive syntax) and *let*. The combination *give me* accounts for 60.4% of all the tokens (29/48) of *give* in imperatives, while by contrast this combination constitutes only 18.5% of those (23/124) in declaratives.
- (iv) Overt negation is prevalent with a class of verbs (*worry*, *bother*, *mind*) or *be* adjectives (*rude*, *hard (on oneself)*, *naïve*, *stupid*, *silly*, *ridiculous*, and *angry*) denoting undesirable or socially unacceptable state-of-affairs.

The following were offered as possible motivations for these findings:

- (i) The heavy restriction on the metaphorical use of both *come* and *go* can be directly attributed to the (implicit) agentive “you” subject as well as the aspect of benefit of prototypical imperative utterances.
- (ii) The frequent interjectional use of *come on* (as well as *look*) reflects a discourse-interaction as well as emotive function of some imperative utterances, which has gone largely unnoticed in previous studies.
- (iii) The high frequency of the combination *give me* is reflective of benefit for the speaker, one fundamental pragmatic function of prototypical imperative utterances.
- (iv) The strong attraction between overt negation and a particular class of *be* adjectives as well as verbs denoting undesirable or socially unacceptable state-of-affairs also arises from the aspect of benefit (in this case, more for the addressee than the speaker) associated with prototypical imperative utterances.

The above analyses show that there are differences in the syntactic and semantic properties of verbs between imperative and non-imperative (such as declarative) uses. There is direct link between the behavior of imperative verbs and discourse pragmatics, so it is expected that the preferred grammatical and semantic patterns of verbs might vary a great deal depending on different clause types, which in turn are directly linked with different discourse pragmatics.

There is a large body of functional literature dealing with the interaction between verb usage patterns and discourse pragmatics. Du Bois (1987) proposed the notion of preferred argument structure in actual discourse, demonstrating that two constraints combine to define the preferred argument structure across languages: “avoid more than one new argument per clause” (=quantity generalization) (cf. Du Bois 1987: 819; see also Dixon 1972, Givón 1975, and Chafe 1987) and “avoid new actors” (=given actor generalization). Goldberg (2000) found that omission of the patient argument is possible when the patient argument is construed to be de-emphasized in the discourse. It is reported in Arnold et al. (2000) on the basis of corpus and experimental data that both newness and heaviness play a crucial role in the choice of the ditransitive over the dative pattern (see also Givón 1984 and Thompson 1990). In addition, numerous research based on analyses of large electronic corpora has revealed a number of fundamental differences in the association patterns of verbs according to different constructions (cf. Stefanowitch and Gries 2003) as well as register variation-spoken vs. written, informal vs. formal, or conversation vs. academic prose (cf. Biber 2000, Bybee and Hopper 2001, Tao 2003, notably Biber et al. 1998 and Biber et al. 1999).

However, the problems of usage patterns of verbs according to **different clause types** within and across languages have, for the most part, escaped the serious attention of researchers in these fields. I see

this as an important direction for future research.

Notes

¹ Note, however, that perfective forms may become perfectly acceptable in examples like the following (cf. Bolinger (1977: 170)):

- (i) Please, do have made that call by six o'clock.
- (ii) Do have given some thought to the question, once you've decided to discuss it.

² The only difference between this table and the previous one is in the total number and the numbers of several frequent verbs. There is no change in the overall ranking.

³ Note that *go* can be used as a communication verb in informal speech (cf. Butters 1980, Sakita 2006):

- (i) She *goes*, "Stay right there. I'll be back." [=say]
- (ii) He *goes*, "Oh my God! Who is she?" [=say]

(Examples from Sakita 2006)

According to Butters (1980) cited in Sakita (2006), this use of *go* is not found in interrogative sentences:

- (iii) *What did he *go*? [=say]
- (iv) *How did he *go*? [=say]

Note that *go* in this usage is not allowed in imperatives either:

- (v) *Go, "You were pretty good, but others were better." [=say]
- (vi) *Go, "I'm your next door neighbor and do you need some help?" [=say]

Communicative *go* seems restricted to declaratives only. According to Sakita (2006), both metaphor and metonymy motivate this semantic extension of *go* from deictic motion to communication sense.

- ⁴ Benedict (1979) finds that the *give me*~ construction is among the earliest constructions to be understood by children acquiring English as a first language (see also Newman (1996) for a cognitive and typological analysis of the verb GIVE in English and other languages).
- ⁵ According to Newman (1996: 249), the communication usage of *give* is motivated by extensive metaphorical mapping between the giving act and interpersonal communication.

In the present data, *give* was used more often in non-physical sense — in 39 out of 47 tokens (83%). The physical use of *give* such as *Give her the keys* (33j) and *Give Don the tape in cassette* (33n) was not very frequent; it accounts for only 17% of the data (8/47). By contrast, *take* was frequent both in physical and non-physical senses. Nonphysical *take* appears in 35 out of a total of 67 tokens (52.2%) — 6/8 in *Malice*, 13/23 in *Deception*, 7/19 in *Sky*, and 9/17 in *Pelican*. The physical use of *take* occurs in 32 out of a total of 67 tokens (52.2%) — 2/8 in *Malice*, 10/23 in *Deception*, 12/19 in *Sky*, and 8/17 in *Pelican*. However, it is not clear yet whether these tendencies should be viewed as unique to imperative use alone.

There were several tokens of the combination *give me* used in the interrogative construction. Interestingly, many (though not all) of them instantiate an indirect directive speech act—formally an interrogative utterance conventionally conveying a request (cf. Searle 1975), as in *Could you give me a copy?/Could you give me enough money for bus fare?* (*Sky*).

- ⁶ The frequency of the combination *give me* is not an accident. There is good reason to believe that it is motivated by the consideration of benefit, which applies crosslinguistically. Japanese, for example, possesses a verb of giving *kureru*, which incorporates the conception of “me” as an indirect object, and out of this verb grew two auxiliary verbs of request, *kure* (bare form) and *kudasai* (polite form). One can say *yamete kure* (literally, “stop it, give-me!” meaning “Stop it, please!”) as well as *okane o kure* (literally, “Give me some money.”)

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