

Free Choice Items and Imperatives in Hungarian Tamás Halm

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The aim of my talk is to propose a significant modification of current models of the semantics and pragmatics of imperatives, based on observations concerning Free-Choice Items in acquiescence imperatives.

Standard treatments of FCIs (e.g. Giannakidou 2001) regard imperatives as an environment which licenses FCIs:

- (1) *Take any dress.*

Looking at Hungarian, however, it turns out that the situation is not so clear-cut (Halm 2016). It appears that the acceptability of the FCI depends heavily on the type of imperative (or directive):

- (2) a. #*Azt parancsolom, hogy vedd fel bármelyik ruhát!*
 it-ACC command-1SG that take-SUBJ-2SG PRT any cloth-ACC
 ‘I command you to take any dress.’
- b. ?*Vedd fel bármelyik ruhát!*
 take-IMP-2SG PRT any cloth-ACC
 ‘Take any dress.’
- c. *Nyugodtan vedd fel bármelyik ruhát!*
 nyugodtan¹ take-IMP -2SG PRT any cloth-ACC
 ‘Just take any dress.’ (permission/acquiescence reading)
- d. *Meg engedem, hogy fel vedd bármelyik ruhát.*
 PRT allow-1SG that PRT take-SUBJ-2SG any cloth-ACC
 ‘I allow you take any dress.’

A well-known distinction relevant here is that between permission statements (expressing deontic possibility) and real commands (expressing deontic necessity) (Lewis (1979), Hausser (1980), Portner (2007), Varga (2014), von Fintel and Iatridou (2017)). The sentences in (2) in fact represent a continuum between the two endpoints: (2a) is a very explicit real command, whereas (2b) is a clear-cut case of a permission statement. The intuitive reading of the sentences above is that the closer the imperative (or directive) is to a real command, the less likely it is to license an FCI.

Recent literature on the semantics and pragmatics of imperatives has focused on the permissive (or acquiescence/indifference) use of imperatives. As a way to accommodate such ‘weak’ uses of imperatives, von Fintel and Iatridou (2017) argue for a minimal denotational semantics and strong pragmatics in the delivery of the command-force meaning standardly associated with imperatives. Following Portner (2007) and Hausser (1980), imperatives are taken to denote a property restricted to the addressee (semantic component), and the utterance of the imperative sentence adds the task of making this property true of themselves to the To-Do-List of the addressee (pragmatic component). Von Fintel and Iatridou refine this account by assuming that speaker endorsement behind imperatives (or indeed any speech act) can be of different strength: command-flavour imperatives are backed up by full speaker-endorsement (requiring the addressee to add the property to their TDL), whereas with permissive imperatives, the speaker merely expresses their acquiescence/indifference to the addressee’s possible adding of the property to their TDL.

¹ *nyugodtan* literally translates as ‘calmly, peacefully, in a relaxed fashion’, but in imperatives it has a grammaticalized function to indicate permission or acquiescence, cf. the very similar use of *ruhig* ‘calmly, peacefully’ in German (cf. von Fintel-Iatridou (2017), p. 10)

The fact, however, that FCIs are available in acquiescence-reading imperatives, is a serious challenge to this account. Consider the following:

- (3) a. *Nyugodtan vedd fel a kék ruhát!*
 nyugodtan take-IMP -2SG PRT the blue cloth-ACC
 ‘Just take the blue dress.’
- b. *Nyugodtan vegyél fel egy ruhát!*
 nyugodtan take-IMP -2SG PRT a cloth-ACC
 ‘Just take a dress.’
- c. *Nyugodtan vedd fel bármelyik ruhát!*
 nyugodtan take-IMP -2SG PRT any cloth-ACC
 ‘Just take any dress.’

In (3a) and (3b), it is straightforward to pinpoint the property the addressee is required to add to their TDL: the addressee can fulfill the task by ‘taking the blue dress’ and by ‘taking a dress’, respectively. In (3c), however, we are stuck: due to the dependent indefinite nature of the FC-phrase, there is no property one can add to the TDL and thus no explicit task for the addressee to fulfill.

In my talk, I will show that in imperatives containing FCIs (and in acquiescence imperatives in general), the pragmatic force of the utterance is not directed at the TDL, but rather, at a separate component of context which I will call the List of Actions Under Consideration (LAUC) by the addressee. This list contains a set of alternatives (‘taking the blue dress’, ‘taking the lilac dress’, ‘taking the pink dress’ etc.) making it possible for the FCI to be licensed in the imperative. Thus, I will propose a modification of the pragmatic component of the Hausser-Portner-von Fintel-Iatridou framework for the interpretation of imperatives, while leaving the semantic component intact. This will also help us to explain the following contrast:

- (4) a. *Állj meg!*
 stop-IMP-2SG PRT
 ‘Stop.’ (felicitous out of the blue)
- b. *Nyugodtan állj meg.*
 nyugodtan stop-IMP-2SG PRT
 ‘Stop (if you wish).’ (felicitous if the addressee is visibly tired, needs a rest etc.)

While a strong imperative is felicitous out of the blue, an acquiescence imperative is only felicitous if it is part of the common ground that the addressee is considering the action which the prejacent describes. This contrast falls out freely from my proposal: strong imperatives add a new element to the TDL and thus there is no requirement for the prejacent to be part of common ground; whereas in acquiescence imperatives, the prejacent has to be on the list of actions commonly known to be under consideration by the addressee.

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