**Imperative Constructions in English: A Syntactic Analysis**

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**What are imperatives?**

- “Wash the dishes.”
- “Please take a seat.”
- “Listen carefully.”
- “Be on time tomorrow.”
- “Don’t be a fool.”

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**Why do we care?**

- English does not provide specific morphological markers to differentiate between imperatives and other constructions.
- In the study of syntax, our goal is to find a consistent way to document the structures of human language.

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**What’s the problem?**

- How can we account for these types of utterances in syntactic theory?
- According to the Extended Projection Principle (EPP), every sentence needs a subject to be acceptable. How can we explain why imperatives seem to work without overt subjects?
- So, are subjects optional in imperatives?

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**The Solution?**

There must be some kind of movement occurring in these constructions that does not conflict with the established syntactic rules (X-bar theory), but still allows us to generate grammatical imperatives.

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**Movement in X-bar theory:**

- In other types of constructions, syntactic theory has already had to devise certain kinds of features in order to explain consistent ‘movement’ in the sentence.
- [+wh] for interrogative sentences that start with words like ‘what’ ‘where’ and ‘why’
- [+Q] to show that a sentence has become a question

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**Explanation:**

There is movement from the specifier position of the VP to the specifier position of the TP, which fills the subject position of the sentence (satisfying the EPP). The movement of the main verb from V to eventually C explains why imperatives start with the base form of the verb.

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**Theta grid requirements:**

- In both syntactic and semantic theory, every verb has a theta grid, that explains what other things in the sentence is required in order for the verb to be complete.
- Below is an example of a theta grid for the verb give that is in an imperative sentence.

**The Solution:**

- V → T movement
- T → C movement

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**Conclusion:**

- In order to comply with syntactic theory, they must have an additional [+imp] feature to provide for the seemingly missing subject. It absorbs the theta role requirement for an agent and satisfies the EPP by providing something in the subject position of the diagram.
- Since this [+imp] feature explains how imperatives can work in English, we can now be one step closer to finding a consistent way to document the structures of human language.

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**References:**


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