On the interpretation of pronouns in Spanish imperatives

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1.   The pronouns in imperatives in Spanish

There are two forms of the Spanish imperative: imperatives marked with imperative morphology, (1), and bare form imperatives (infinitives), (2). In this paper I will discuss the interpretation of the pronoun associated with each type of morphology.[1]

I will assume that both types of morphology in imperatives are associated with silent pronouns. The morphology in the two types of imperatives identifies different pronouns. In the case of imperatives with imperative morphology, we find verb forms with second person singular and second person plural features:

(1)   a. ¡ Cierra   las ventanas !
          close.2.sg.Imp the windows
          'Close the windows!'

     b. ¡ Cerrad   las ventanas !
          close.2.pl the windows
          'Close the windows!'

The difference between the singular and plural examples can be observed in a situation in which the window in a classroom is open and the professor wants them closed. Looking at student B, the professor utters (1a), and so requests to that particular student that he close the windows. If the professor utters (1b), he is asking a particular group of students (either the whole audience or maybe a group of two or more) to close the windows.

[1]In this paper I assume that both imperatives with imperative marking and imperatives with bare forms are true imperatives (cf. Han 2000). They have the same analysis, the difference being in the interpretation of the pronouns in Spec$v$P. See Biezma (2007) for the details.

In the case of bare form imperatives, the verb appears in the infinitive form. An example is given below:

(2)   ¡ Cerrar   las ventanas !
         close.Inf the windows
       'Close the windows!'

The example in (2) could be uttered by the professor in the situation described above, without expectations about the students who should carry out the order. The professor simply wants the windows to get closed. I will show that the pronoun in these cases has neither person nor number features. We will treat the pronoun as a pronoun with default person features (3rd person) that is not specified for number.

We will assume that the pronouns that appear in imperative constructions are regular pronouns that enter the derivation as variables and are interpreted by means of a variable assignment. Features on pronouns are treated as presupposition triggers (following Heim and Kratzer 1998). The denotation of some relevant features is given below:

(3)   a. $[\![\mathbf{2nd}]\!]^c = \lambda x : x$ includes the addressee and excludes the speaker of c. x
      b. $[\![\mathbf{pl}]\!] = \lambda x : x$ is a plurality. x
      c. $[\![\mathbf{sg}]\!] = \lambda x : x$ is an atom. x

In §2 I will discuss the semantic characterization of pronouns in Spanish imperatives. We will see some data pointing out the differences between bare form imperatives and imperatives with imperative marking. We will see that pronouns in bare form imperatives lack 2nd person features and are not specified for number. In §3 I will compare my proposal with other potentially alternative analyses. We will discard an analysis in which pronouns in bare form imperatives are Heimian indefinites or free-choice items.

2.   Pronominal features in Spanish Imperatives

The proposal we make here is that the pronoun associated with imperatives marked with imperative morphology bears second person morphology and singular or plural number, while the one associated with bare form infinitives receives a 3rd person interpretation and is neutral with respect to number. In this section we provide support for this semantic characterization of pronouns associated with imperatives.

2.1   Second Person Feature

In imperatives with imperative morphology, the pronoun has second person features. In the case of bare form imperatives, there are no second person features. Below I present three examples to examine this distinction in the context of imperatives.

Example 1:
(4)   Scenario: Regular day in high school in Springfield. Some students are absent from
        class today. At the end of the class, the teacher says:

a. Para mañana, ¡ traer   cartulina !
   for   tomorrow   bring.Inf cardboard
   'For tomorrow, bring cardboard!'

On the next day of class, one of the students who had been absent the day before, says to the teacher that he does not have the cardboard requested for that day. The teacher says to him:

b. Ése es TU problema, yo dije "¡ traer   cartulina !".
   that is your problem,   I   said   bring.Inf cardboard
   'That is YOUR problem, I said "bring cardboard!".

In the scenario above, the agent pronoun is interpreted as making reference to the entire class. There is a contrast with the equivalent forms with imperative morphology *traed*. The teacher would never tell the student:

(4') b. # Ése es tu   problema, yo dije "¡ traed   cartulina!".
          that is your problem   I   said   bring.2.pl.Imp cardboard

   .   'That is your problem, I said "bring cardboard!" '

In this case, the student could easily answer "But I wasn't there."

With bare form imperatives, the agent is the entire class. With imperative morphology, it is the addressee.

Example 2:

(5)   Scenario: In order to coordinate a course, two students, A and B, are in charge of helping the professor. The professor sends them the following email.
      Dear A and B,

   a. Para mañana, ¡ leer   la tesis de Heim !
      for   tomorrow   read.Inf the thesis of Heim
      For tomorrow, read Heim's thesis!'

The students receiving this email will understand that they are supposed to contact everybody in the class to tell them to read Heim's thesis. The command is for all the class. However, if the command had been expressed with the verb with imperative morphology, as in (5'), the students would understand that just the two of them have to read Heim's dissertation:

(5') a. Para mañana, ¡ leed   la tesis   de Heim !
         for   tomorrow   read.2.pl.Imp the dissertation of Heim

   .   'For tomorrow, read Heim's dissertation'

The students receiving this email would have understood that it was only they who had to read Heim's thesis for tomorrow.

Again, we see that the choice of a verb with imperative morphology ties the command specifically to the addressee.

<u>Example 3</u>:

(6) <u>Scenario</u>: Semantics seminar. The class will be split in two, and each group will be assigned a different task. Half of the class will read Heim's thesis, and half will read Chierchia's thesis. The professor looks towards one half of the class, and says:

    a. ¡ Leed   la tesis de Heim !
        read.2.pl.Imp the thesis of Heim

       'Read Heim's thesis!'
       And then looks at the other half, and says:

    b. ¡ Leed   la tesis de Chierchia !
        read.2.pl the thesis of Chierchia

       'Read Chierchia's thesis!'

By looking at different groups, the professor changes the addressee, and different individuals need to read different thesis. The same would not happen with a bare form imperative. A professor would not say *Leer la tesis de Heim! Leer la tesis de Chierchia!* looking at different groups of people. With bare forms, the agent would stay the same.

In this section we have seen that there is a difference in terms of 2nd person features between the pronouns associated with imperatives with imperative marking and with bare imperatives. The pronoun in (5), for example, makes reference to the class as a whole. It does not semantically encode reference to the addressee (it involves the addressee indirectly since she is a member of the class). On the other hand, the pronoun in (5'), does make reference to the addressee. As we saw, there are subtle effects showing that there is a difference between the two cases. In order to understand better what is going on we would need further research to investigate the speaker's pragmatic reasoning in uttering a third person command (there should be some relation between the addressee and the third person pronoun).[2]

2.2   Reflexive pronouns

It is worth noting that the pronouns in Spanish imperatives can never be spelled out. The examples below simply illustrate this. Even though the verbal morphology spells out the presence of the pronoun, the pronoun cannot be overt:

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[2]Even addressed with a pronoun that does not have a second person feature, the addressee(s) still understands that he/they is/are requested to take the command upon himself/themselves.

(7) a. *¡ Tú   cierra   las ventanas !
         you.sg close.2.sg.Imp the windows

    b. *¡ Vosotros cerrad   las ventanas !
         you.pl   close.2.pl.Imp the windows

    c. *¡ Tú   cerrar las   ventanas !
         close.Inf the   windows
         'Close the windows!'

Given the absence of overt pronouns, it could be thought that pronouns were lacking completely in imperative constructions. The hypothesis would then be that there is no pronoun in the specifier of *v*P, and the effect of identifying an agent results from pragmatic mechanisms that concern imperatives as a whole. The identification of the addressee as the agent could be the result of the speech act associated with imperatives. However, examples like (8) show that it is necessary to have a pronoun in this position.

(8) Clean yourself!

(9) ¡ Límpia   -te   !
     clean.Imp -reflx.2.sg
     'Clean yourself!'

(10) ¡ Limpiar-se las   manos antes de comer !
     clean.Inf   -reflx.3.sg the   hands   before eat

In the examples above, the reflexive pronouns need to be bound. Therefore, we need to have a pronoun in the specifier of *v*P.

It is important to point out that the reflexive pronoun in bare form imperatives is in third person, whereas the reflexive pronoun in imperatives with imperative marking is a second person pronoun. This is consistent with the claims made in the previous section.[3]

2.3 Number

In imperatives with imperative morphology, the pronoun has number features marking a difference between singular and plural. In bare form imperatives, it is unspecified. The pronoun in bare form imperatives can refer to singularities or pluralities. In this section I present two examples to illustrate this distinction.

Example 1:

(11) Scenario: Old country home. Summer time. A group of novices is spending the weekend there, doing spiritual exercises. The old house has a lot of windows, and being summer, they are all open. Suddenly, it begins to rain heavily. The priest in charge says:

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[3] See Biezma (2007) for an explanation of why it is not possible to have overt pronouns in Spanish imperatives.

    a. ¡ Cerrar   las ventanas !
           close.Inf the windows

         'Close the windows!'

    b. ¡ Cerrad   las ventanas !
           close.2.pl.Imp the windows

         'Close the windows!'

If the priest utters (11a), the command is fulfilled as soon as the windows get closed. It doesn't matter who closes the windows, nor how many of the novices help. If one novice closed all the windows, the order would be fulfilled. If the priest utters (11b), on the other hand, he expects more than one of the novices to close windows (though not necessarily all the novices). If only one novice closed all the windows, the priest would get upset. The other novices did not fulfill the command.

Example 2:

(12)   Scenario: Female boarding school run by nuns. It is study time. The students are all in one room, and the nun in charge is in the next room. At some point, the whispering in the girls' room gets too loud. The nun does not know who nor how many people are talking. She utters:

    a. ¡ Callar   !
           shut up.Inf

         'Shut up!'

    b. #¡ Callad   !
            shut up.2pl.Imp

         'Shut up!'

If the nun considers it possible that just a single person is talking, she will use the bare form instead of the form with imperative morphology. The form with imperative morphology requires more people (we will see details of this later). By using the bare form, the nun indicates that she wants 'whoever is talking' (number unspecified), to shut up.

What happens with bare form infinitives when the order is not obeyed? For example, what happens when a priest utters (11a) or (11b), and the windows do not get closed? Does the difference in number mean that there is a difference in terms of who is to be blamed? Not really. In both cases there is what I will call 'plural responsibility'. The difference is that in the case of (11a), a collective action is not required. But plural responsibility does not mean that plural agency is grammatically encoded.[4]

To summarize, in imperatives marked with imperative morphology, the pronoun has features marking a difference between singular and plural. However, in bare form

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[4]For space reasons I cannot show how an analysis of plurals like Schwarzschild's (1996) can easily account for the interpretations of imperatives with plural agents. The claim is that any analysis accounting for pluralities should explain plural agency in bare form imperatives.

imperatives, number is unspecified. The pronouns in bare form imperatives can refer to singularities or pluralities.

2.4   Summary

I have argued that bare form imperatives and imperatives with imperative morphology vary with respect to number and person features. The pronouns associated with imperatives with imperative morphology bear second person features and singular or plural number. The pronoun associated with bare form imperatives receives a 3rd person interpretation and is neutral with respect to number. Small differences in the feature make-up of the pronouns can have subtle effects in the interpretation, and the underspecification of features in bare form imperatives opens up interpretative possibilities unavailable to imperatives with imperative marking.

3.   Further discussion: Alternative accounts

In this section we will present (briefly) proposals that treat pronouns as indefinites. The main interest in this section will be to investigate this option for the interpretation of the pronoun associated with bare form infinitives. Such pronouns bear no information regarding person nor number, and appear to have an 'arbitrary' (indifferent) interpretation.

3.1   Condoravdi (1988) Kim (1991)

There are several proposals that give an analysis for pronouns that do not have a specific referent or an overt controller.[5] These pronouns are usually referred to as pro_{arb} in the literature. Here we will review some of the discussion, to establish whether the agent in (11a) or (11a) is pro_{arb} (characterized as an indefinite). The conclusion will be that it is not.

A small point: Condoravdi and Kim consider pro_{arb} in tensed clauses, in which there is overt finite morphology indicating tense and aspect, and which receive a third person interpretation. In bare form infinitives, there is no (overt) person morphology, there are no person features at all. Following the idea that the absence of person features results in a third person interpretation, the agent in bare form imperatives is comparable to the pro_{arb} subjects discussed by Condoravdi and Kim.

Support for an indefinite analysis of the pronoun (pro_{arb}) comes from examples with quantificational variability effects. Illustrations from Condoravdi (1988) are provided in (13), where we see that the silent pronoun appears to be intepreted differently in different contexts:

(13)   (Greek)

      a. *Existential reading in episodic sentences:*

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[5]Jaeggli 1986, Rizzi 1986, and Cinque 1988 a.o.

       pro$_{arb}$ skotosan   ton Yani
            killed.3.pl the John

       'They killed John'

b. *Generic interpretation in generic sentences*:
      S afto to   meros *pro$_{arb}$* trone   omo kreas
      in this the place   eat.3.pl raw meat

      'In this place they eat raw meat'

c. *Quantificational force derived from adverb of quantification*:
      Stin   Ameriki, sihna, otan *pro$_{arb}$* odigoun stin   ethniki odo, *pro$_{arb}$*
      in-the America often when   drive.3.pl in-the national road
      pirovoloun trigiro
      shoot.3.pl around

      'In America, often, when they drive on the highway, they shoot around'

                                 (Condoravdi 1988:71)

Condoravdi suggests that pro$_{arb}$ is interpreted as an indefinite, introducing a variable that is bound by the operators in the context:

- killed(x, j), person(x)

- G[person(x), be-in-this-place(x)][eat(x, m), raw(m)]

- $Often$[be-in-america(x) drive-in-highway(x)][shoot-around(x)]

Kim (1991) concludes that these pronouns are indefinites independently, specifying that their only restrictive features is [+human]. Kim points out that there is no number restriction on the interpretation of the pronoun, even though the verb shows plural morphology. Kim uses the Spanish data in (3.1) to support the argument ((14b) is fine even if there is a single individual knocking at the door):

(14)   *Pro* llamaron a la puerta
       Pro call.3.pl to the door

    a. 'They$_{def}$ were knocking at the door.'
    b. 'They$_{arb}$ were knocking at the door.'
       (or 'There was a knock at the door.')

                                [Kim 1991: 148, (1)]

(Since Kim's proposal is very close to Condoravdi's, we will not spell out any details).[6]

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[6]Alonso-Ovalle (2001), also discusses pro$_{arb}$, and reviews Condoravdi and Kim. This author reviews the arguments presented by Condoravdi and Kim, raising several objections. Amongst the problems, the author notes that pro$_{arb}$ does not exhibit the same scope options available for indefinites (Alonso-Ovalle also

Condoravdi and Kim's arguments in favour of an indefinite analysis of pro$_{arb}$ are primarily based on variability in quantificational force due to the context in which the indefinites show up. Regardless of the adequacy of that analysis for the cases they consider, it does not seem correct for the agent of bare form imperatives. In order to see that, look at (15):

(15)   a. ¡ Callar   !
               shut up.Inf
               'Shut up!'

         b. ¡ Cerrar   las ventanas !
               close.Inf the windows
               'Close the windows!'

In (15) we see a contrast between an intransitive verb (15a), and a transitive verb with a definite (plural) object (15b). There is a difference in the interpretation of the agent(s). In (15a), everybody (in the context) must shut up. However, in (15b) not everybody in the context has to close the windows. Indeed, as we saw before, if one person closes every window, it is fine.

Intuitively, the difference between (15a) and (15b) has to do with the telicity of the events. This translates in different ways of interpreting the agent. The quantificational force of the agent does not depend on the quantificational force of some other operator in the context.[7] Intuitively, whatever is responsible for the imperative force in (15a) will be responsible for the imperative force in (15b), yet the quantificational force of the agents differ.

It does not help to add an overt adverb of quantification: There is a contrast between (16b) and (16a). Imagine we are talking again about the novices in the country home.

(16)   a. Un novicio siempre cierra las ventanas (cuando llueve en la   capilla).
              a   novice always   closes the windows (when   rains in the chapel)
              'A novice always closes the windows (when it rains in the chapel).'

         b. Ellos siempre cierran las ventanas (cuando llueve en la   capilla)
              they   always close   the windows (when   rains in the chapel)
              'They always close the windows (when it rains in the chapel).'

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has a series of objections made on the basis of second person 'arbitrary' pronouns in finite sentences, which will not be discussed here). Alonso-Ovalle proposes an alternative analysis, distinguishing a second person pro$_{arb}$ and a third person pro$_{arb}$. We saw in §2.1 that the agent is not second person. With respect to the third person pro$_{arb}$, under Alonso-Ovalle's account it must be plural, and must be 'new' in the discourse. However, as we have seen, these two features, newness and plurality, are not appropriate for the agent of bare form infinitives (there is no commitment to plurality or 'newness'), and we will not adopt Alonso-Ovalle's proposal.

     [7]I am assuming the presence of a functional head responsible for the imperatives force on the top of the syntactic structure. See Biezma (2007a) for details.

The example in (16a) has an interpretation that says that every novice closes the windows (here we see a true indefinite, with the force given by the adverb of quantification). However, the example in (16b) does not refer to every novice. This would be the expected reading if the adverb of quantification affected the pronoun. The sentence in (16b) means that whenever it rains the windows get closed, and they get closed by novices. However, (16b) does not commit to the fact that every novice closes windows when it rains. Bare form infinitives behave like (16b).

(17)   ¡ Cerrar   las ventanas siempre !
         close.Inf the windows always
       'Always close the windows!'

(17) is an order that requires that the windows always be closed. It does not order everybody to close the windows (as might be expected if the subject introduced a variable bound by the adverb of quantification).

The discussion above indicates that the pronoun in bare form imperatives is not an indefinite bound in the usual way by adverbs of quantification or operators taking scope over the entire construction.

3.2   Portner (2004, 2007)

The discussion of person features on pronouns in imperatives is important because one influential proposal for imperatives in the literature (Portner 2004, 2007) assigns 2nd person feature a crucial role in explaining imperative force. An imperative like *Leave!* would have the denotation in (18).

(18) $[\![leave!]\!]^{w^*,c} = \lambda w.\lambda x : x = addressee(c).x \ leaves \ in \ w$

Imperatives are properties by virtue of abstracting over the subject position. According to Portner, imperatives denote properties restricted to the addressee. The restriction makes sure that the properties end up in the addressee's To-Do list, and helps to explain imperative force. However, the discussion of 3rd person imperatives shows that what we intuitively think of as imperative force cannot be restricted to 2nd person cases. We have seen that bare form imperatives in Spanish have a pronoun lacking a 2nd person feature. Under Portner's theory bare form imperatives lack an explanation.

3.3   Indifference?

Indefinites in imperative contexts can signal the indifference of the speaker.

(19)   Pick an apple!

Speakers can make their indifference explicit as in (20):

(20)   Pick whatever apple you want! (von Fintel (2000))

When using an indefinite, or explicitly with *whatever*, the speaker indicates that the choice of apple does not matter. The indifference in (20) has been captured via a free-choice analysis.

Given the 'indifference' flavour we observed in (11a) and (12a), we could imagine that the phenomena are the same (the agent of the bare form imperatives is an indefinite indicating indifference on the part of the speaker about who obeys the order). This seems supported by examples like (21):

(21)   a.   ¡ Cerrar   las ventanas !
              close.Inf the windows

           'Close the windows!'

      b.   ¡ Alguien cierre   las ventanas !
              someone close.Subj the windows

           'Someone close the windows!'

In (21b) we find a form that is not marked as an imperative, but can function as an order, and has an overt indefinite agent. Both orders, in (21a) and (21b), would be satisfied if some listener or other, whoever, closed the windows. These examples show the same flavour of indifference of (19) and (20). However, looking at the examples in (22), we see that indifference is not generalized:

(22)   a.   ¡ Callar   !
              shut up.Inf

           'Shut up!'

      b.   ¡ Alguien calle   !
              someone shut up.3.sg.Subj

           'Someone shut up!'

(22b) could be said in a context in which three violinists are playing, but we only need two (we don't care which one stops). The order would be satisfied if one, whichever violinist, stops. (22a) does not have the 'whoever' interpretation, all violinists must stop. So, we see that the agent in bare form imperatives is not a "somebody whoever" agent.

3.4   Conclusion

In this section I have discussed possible alternative analysis for the agent of bare form imperatives. This has been important because bare form imperatives indicates that the speaker does not care about which addressee obeys the order. It is a bit similar to the case of arbitrary pronouns discussed in the literature. However, we have seen some differences with arbitrary pronouns.

4.   Conclusion

In this paper I have discussed the features of the pronouns that show up with different kinds of imperatives, and argued that second person features are not always present in imperatives. The pronoun in Spec$v$P in bare form imperatives have a default 3rd person interpretation. This is particularly important, since several theories of imperatives strongly relay in the presence of a 2nd person feature to explain imperative force.

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