

Learning from commands in contact situations: southern African case studies

That positive and negative imperatives frequently exhibit quite different syntax has often been noted (see Isac 2015 for a review). The significance of this fact and the potential role of (child-directed) imperative input in establishing foundational syntax in first language acquisition and in shaping further language learning, and, by extension, syntactic variation and change, has never been systematically probed, however. Focusing on contact varieties in southern Africa – spoken Afrikaans, including understudied varieties like Kaaps; Namibian German/NG; Kroondal German/KG; and South African English/SAE – I demonstrate the central role that imperatives seem to have played in establishing both core respects in which these varieties continue to resemble their European relatives (Dutch, German and British English), and some of the striking respects in which they have come to differ.

Consider, for example, some of the structural cues Afrikaans' innovative negative imperatives provide. The obligatory use of prohibitive *moenie* (<*moet nie* - 'must not') or, in certain modulated contexts - e.g. in the presence of *asseblief* ('please') or modal particles - *moet ... nie* means that Afrikaans negative imperatives will always contrast with their positive counterparts as regards lexical-verb placement. As (1a) illustrates, unmarked positive imperatives require lexical verb-raising, as in Dutch (2a), which is systematically blocked in negative imperatives owing to the presence of *moenie/moet ... nie* (1b,c). Between them, Afrikaans positive and negative imperatives therefore signal V-to-C (*moenie* clearly being a verbal Force-element), OV, and Negative Concord, the first two "conservative" properties which have remained remarkably stable throughout the history of Afrikaans, despite intensive contact with numerous SVO systems (English, Arabic, various Bantu languages), and the latter a contact-mediated innovation, which has likewise remained stable under contact. Significantly, the fact that objects of all kinds necessarily follow *moenie/moet ... nie* (1b,c) in negative imperatives has produced a hybrid scrambling system in Afrikaans in terms of which direct objects in non-negative adverbial and modal particle-containing structures surface in the expected West Germanic scrambling positions (3), but all objects neutrally surface in post-*nie*/negative adverb position (4). Where definite objects neutrally precede Dutch *niet*, then, they neutrally follow Afrikaans *nie* (5). Further, the obligatory presence of *moenie/moet ... nie* also precludes the use of *geen* with negated nominal objects in negative imperatives (6c), in contrast to Dutch and German where *geen* and *kein(e)* are unmarked (6a,b). This markedness pattern carries over to declaratives, where *nie* 'n constitutes the unmarked negated nominal object marker in modern Afrikaans (6d), while Dutch and German use *geen/kein(e)* (6f); *geen*-marked negative indefinite objects are necessarily discourse-marked in Afrikaans (6e).

Comparative patterns of this kind, then, suggest that it may be productive to approach imperatives as a salient component of the input that we might expect to shape early syntax in first language acquisition. Strikingly, evidence from NG, KG and SAE additionally points to the significance of imperatives in contact situations. In both NG and KG, contact with Afrikaans *moenie* has produced *muss(t) nicht* ('must not') as an imperative option, with differing knock-on effects: both NG and KG exhibit overuse of modal *müssen* (in place of *dürfen*; (7)), and NG speakers additionally have *nicht ein* ('not a') alongside *kein(e)* (8). SAE, likewise, stands out among Englishes world-wide as a variety in which modal *must* has not declined (see Smith 2003, Leech 2011 on the decline elsewhere, and Wasserman & van Rooy 2016 on SAE). The influence of Afrikaans - where *moet* ('must') is the form associated with *asseblief* ('please') in negative imperatives (1c), and more generally has a much weaker meaning than in Dutch and German - is clear: *must* features not only in SAE polite imperatives (*You must please take your keys with you!*), but also in friendly exhortations that cannot be construed as entailing obligation of any kind (*You must sleep well!*); *should* has become the strong obligation modal in SAE (see again Wasserman & van Rooy 2016). Both in first language acquisition and in contact situations, then, imperatives seem pivotal.

Data

- (1) a. **Maak** die deur **toe!** [Afrikaans]
 make the door closed
 ‘Close the door!’
 b. Moenie die deur **toemaak** nie!
 must.not the door closed.maak not
 ‘Don’t close the door!’
 c. Moet asseblief nie die deur **toemaak** nie! (*asseblief* = ‘please’)
- (2) a. **Doe** de deur **dicht!** b. **Doe** de deur nie **dicht!** [Dutch]
 do the door closed do the door not closed
 ‘Close the door!’ ‘Don’t close the door!’
- (3) a. Adv — O_{NON-SPECIFIC/“NEW”} — V
 b. O_{SPECIFIC/“OLD”} — Adv — V
- (4) a. *Moenie* O_{NON-SPECIFIC/“NEW”} & SPECIFIC/“OLD”
 b. *nie/nooit/nêrens* O_{NON-SPECIFIC/“NEW”} & SPECIFIC/“OLD”
- (5) a. Ons het **nie** die boek gekoop nie. (neutral)
 us have not the book bought POL
 ‘We haven’t bought the book.’
 [Contrast Dutch: We hebben dat boek **niet** gekocht.]
 b. Ons het die boek **nie** gekoop nie. (marked)
 us have the book not bought POL
 ‘The book we didn’t buy.’ (contrast, etc.)
 [Contrast Dutch: We hebben **niet** dat boek gekocht.]
- (6) a. Draag **geen** stropdas! [Dutch] b. Trage **keine** Krawatte! [German]
 wear no tie wear no tie
 ‘Don’t wear a tie!’ ‘Don’t wear a tie!’
 c. Moenie **‘n/*geen** das dra nie!
 must.not a no tie wear POL
 ‘Don’t wear a tie!’
 d. Hy het **nie** **‘n** das gedra nie. (neutral)
 he has not a tie worn POL
 ‘He didn’t wear a tie.’
 e. Hy het **geen** das gedra nie. (marked)
 he has no tie worn POL
 ‘He did NOT wear a tie (denial)’
 f. Er trug **keine** Krawatte.
 he wore no tie
 ‘He didn’t wear a tie.’
- (7) a. Wir dürfen **unseren Humor** **nicht** verlieren. [standard German]
 we must our sense.of.humour not lose
 ‘We mustn’t lose our sense of humour.’
 b. Wir müssen **nicht unsern sense of humor** verlieren.
 c. Wir müssen **nicht unsern gees** verlieren.
- (8) Ich hab **nicht ein** Ticket gekriegt. (= Ich habe **kein** Ticket ...) [Namibian German]
 I have not a ticket got
 ‘I didn’t get a ticket.’