

The grammar of imperatives and the imperatives of grammar (GIIG)

Project proposal

1 Introduction & project outline

Imperatives like *Go away!* or *Don't touch that!* are the linguistic expressions that humans use to get other humans to do, or not do, certain things (like going away or not touching something). Although imperatives are very prominent in child-directed speech (Newport et al. 1977, Vogt et al. 2015), research to date has not systematically probed their significance for language acquisition, i.e. as cues that allow the language-learning child to establish core properties of the grammar of her language. This is a peculiar omission: imperative structures are typically short, and—in child-directed contexts at least—transparently addressee-oriented (*Eat your vegetables!* = “YOU eat your vegetables!”), two properties that should facilitate processing by the child. Moreover, as we show in detail in the next sections, imperative structures are strikingly grammatically rich, showcasing properties that are key in determining the grammars of the associated languages.

The GIIG-project will address this gap in the literature, by conducting an empirically based investigation into the following research hypothesis:

(1) **Central research hypothesis of the GIIG-project:**

The grammar of imperatives is pivotal in fixing core aspects of a language's grammatical character.

We will explore this hypothesis via three case studies, each focused on the interaction between a particular type of imperative on the one hand, and a core aspect of the grammatical system on the other. In addition, each case study will be comparative in nature, focusing on different varieties of Dutch and Afrikaans. This language pair (in combination with their non-standard varieties) provides the ideal testing ground for the hypothesis in (1): on the one hand, they share many of their core grammatical properties (roughly, all the characteristic non-English West Germanic word-order patterns), while on the other there exists a lot of morphosyntactic variation both within and across these languages (see e.g. Barbiers et al. 2005, 2008, de Vos 2009, Cavarani-Pots 2020). If imperatives are really pivotal in signaling the grammatical properties of a language, they should be able to express both the fundamental commonalities between Afrikaans, Dutch, and their varieties, and the striking differences between them.

The GIIG-project is organized as outlined in Figure (1). At the center of the project is a PhD-track that explores the hypothesis in (1) in three work packages. The first focuses on negative imperatives and examines to what extent these constructions shed light on the expression of negation in the different varieties. Work Package 2 focuses on positive imperatives and the syntax of so-called 'light verbs' such as

come and *go*, and Work Package 3 examines the use of modal particles like *just* in both positive and negative imperatives. The GIIG-project is a four-year project, half of which (Y1 and Y3) will be carried out in Leuven and the other half (Y2 and Y4) in Stellenbosch.

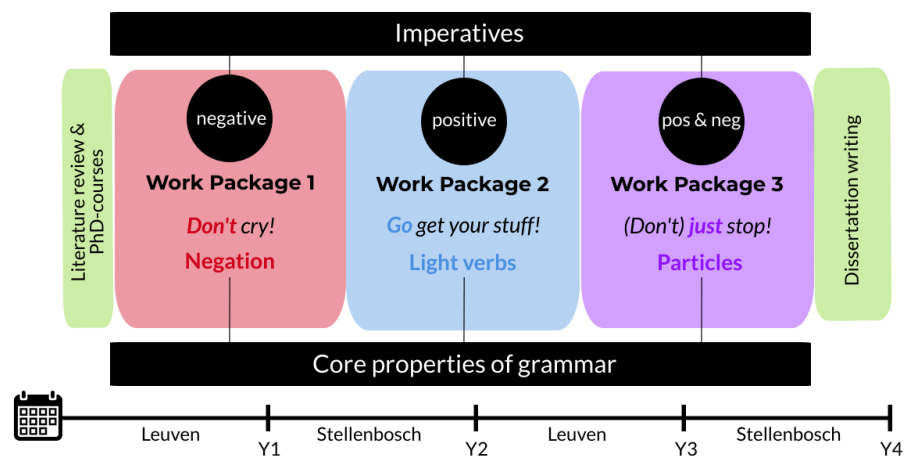


Figure 1: the GIIG-project

2 Work Package #1: negative imperatives and the syntax of negation

The first WP tests the research hypothesis in (1) through the following research question:

(2) **Research Question WP1**

To what extent is variation in the syntax of Dutch and Afrikaans negation reflected in their negative imperatives?

Negation distinguishes both Dutch and Afrikaans and their varieties. While Standard Dutch has a single negative marker (3), Afrikaans is a Negative Concord (NC) language (4), with clause-final *nie* as an obligatory second negative element (den Besten 1986, Biberauer 2015). Many of the dialects of Dutch also display various forms of complex negation (Barbiers et al. 2008), cf. West Flemish in (5) (Haegeman 2005).

- (3) Ik heb dat boek **niet** gekocht. (4) Ek het **nie** die boek gekoop **nie**. (5) K **(en)** een **niets** gezeid.
I have that book not bought I have not the book bought not I NEG have nothing said
'I didn't buy the book.' 'I didn't buy the book.' 'I didn't say anything.'

Significantly, these differences are transparently signalled in the imperative domain, with single negation in Standard Dutch, NC in Afrikaans, en optional two-part negation in West-Flemish:

- (6) Koop dat boek **niet!** (7) **Moenie** die boek koop **nie!** (8) **(En)** doet da **nie!**
buy that book not must.not that book buy not NEG do that not
'Don't buy that book!' 'Don't buy that book!' 'Don't do that!'

The fact that Afrikaans Negative Imperatives (NIs) necessarily require prohibitive *moenie* has numerous consequences for other components of the grammar. For example, nominal objects necessarily follow *moenie* (see *die boek* in (7)), in contrast to Dutch (6) and its dialects (8). This might explain why the neutral position for all nominal objects in Afrikaans negative declaratives is also post-negation, in contrast to Dutch (compare *dat boek niet* in (3) with *nie die boek* in (4)). In other words, the NIs in (6)–(8) not only reflect microvariational differences in the expression of negation, they also provide cues to more fundamental differences between Dutch (varieties) and Afrikaans (varieties). Object placement *vis-à-vis* negation is one such property, but we think differential object marking in Afrikaans with *vir* 'for' and the absence of the negative indefinite *geen* 'no' in this language might be other examples. A lot remains to be explored, however: neither Afrikaans nor Dutch NIs have been studied in detail, either in the standard language or in their synchronic and historical dialectal variants. This is the work taken up in WP1.

In light of the above, the **aims of WP1** are to:

- (A) examine the structural interactions of NIs in standard and child-directed Afrikaans
- (B) establish whether these (clustered) patterns are replicated in dialectal varieties of Afrikaans
- (C) probe the nature/structural interactions of NIs in Dutch dialects, child-directed and otherwise

3 Work Package #2: positive imperatives and the syntax of light verbs

WP2 focuses on positive imperatives and the syntax of light verbs. It pursues the following question:

(9) **Research Question WP2**

To what extent is variation in the syntax of Dutch and Afrikaans light verbs reflected in their positive imperatives?

Dutch and Afrikaans, particularly in their spoken forms, both feature a sizeable inventory of so-called light verbs. These are drawn from similar verbal classes, including motion and posture verbs:

- (10) Hij **staat/loopt/ligt/zit** te zeuren. (11) Hy **kom/gaan/loop** (en) koop toe sommer die boek.
 he stands/runs/lies/sits to whine he come/go/walk and buy then just the book
 'He's whining.' 'He then just came/went and bought the book.'

As Cavirani-Pots (2020) has shown, Dutch and Afrikaans light verbs exhibit quite different structural properties, despite their source similarity. Significantly, these differences are also evident in positive imperatives (PIs), a structural context where light verbs are particularly prominent:

- (12) **Ga** dat boek kopen! (13) **Gaan** (en) koop die boek! (14) **Goan** haalt e keer n pintje!
 go that book buy go and buy that book go get a time a pint
 'Go buy that book!' 'Go buy that book!' 'Go get a beer!'

While in Dutch only the light verb is moved to the front of the clause (12), Afrikaans displays so-called 'quirky Verb Second (V2)', whereby both the light verb and the main verb appear at the left edge of the clause (13). Interestingly, dialects like that of Brugge in (14) are like Afrikaans in displaying this exceptional phenomenon. Given that we believe the existence of quirky V2 has far-reaching grammatical repercussions related to the notion of finiteness, the existence of Infinitivus pro Participio, and the use of light verbs to convey affective sentiments (urgency, frustration, empathy, etc.), those effects should be visible in dialects like that of Brugge as well. Exploring this is one of the challenges WP2 will take on.

In light of the above, the *aims of WP2* are to:

- (A) consider the structural interactions of light verb-containing PIs in standard and child-directed Dutch and Afrikaans
- (B) establish whether these patterns are replicated in dialectal varieties of Dutch and Afrikaans
- (C) probe the extent to which shared light verbs have developed similar affective significance, and whether this sheds light on the notion of so-called 'pragmaticalization'

4 Work Package #3: imperatives and the syntax of sentential particles

The third and final WP examines the syntax of imperatives and that of sentential particles:

(15) **Research Question WP3**

To what extent is variation in the syntax of Dutch and Afrikaans sentential particles reflected in their (negative and positive) imperatives?

Sentential particles (SPs) contributing varying shades of speaker- and/or hearer-oriented meaning are a prominent feature of Dutch (16) (Fehringer and Cornips 2019), Afrikaans (17) (Conradie 2015), and Dutch dialects (18) (Haegeman 2014):

- (16) Ik ga **dan/toch/maar**. (17) Ek gaan **sommer/net/tog** (18) **Mo/Gow/Soei** k'een gedaan.
 I go than/really/but I go just/just/really but/go/look I.have done
 'I'm going.' 'I'm going' 'I'm done.'

The extensive inventories of SPs overlap only minimally, with Afrikaans having innovated numerous SPs, and dialectal Dutch and Afrikaans also exhibiting significant variation. Despite their hard-to-pin-down

interpretive properties, there are indications that at least a subset of SPs are early-acquired (Wies 2009). Significantly, the formal and interpretive properties of SPs are abundantly signalled in (both positive and negative) imperatives, where they modulate the affective significance of the imperative in different ways:

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| (19) Zw ijg eens/nou!
be.quiet once/now
‘Be quiet!’ | (20) Moenie net/*tog huil nie!
must.not just/really cry not
‘Don’t cry!’ | (21) Mo/*Soei geeft dat ier!
but/look give that here
‘Give me that!’ |
|--|---|---|

As the Afrikaans (20) and West Flemish (21) examples show, not all SPs are grammatically equal: some are incompatible with all imperatives (like *soei* in (21)), others with only certain types (*tog* in (20)). Once again, there are consequences for other parts of the grammar, such the possibility of pronouncing the subject or of splitting up the form *moenie* into *moet nie*. Exploring such questions will be the topic of WP3.

In light of the above, the **aims of WP3** are to:

- (A) establish the varying SP inventories for Dutch, Afrikaans, and their dialects
- (B) consider the structural interactions of SP-containing PIs and NIs in standard and child-directed Dutch and Afrikaans
- (C) establish whether these patterns are replicated in dialectal varieties of Dutch and Afrikaans

5 Data & methodology

In order to explore the grammatical structure of imperatives across varieties of Dutch and Afrikaans and its interaction with the syntax of negation, light verbs, and sentential particles, the PhD-student of the GIIG-project will have to collect new data from both languages. For Dutch, she will be able to build on the data collected in the context of the *Syntactic Atlas of the Dutch dialects* (Barbiers et al. 2005, 2008), a project in which Jeroen van Craenenbroeck was a main collaborator and which included data questions about negation, imperatives, and light verbs. Based on those data, we will select a sample of roughly 20 dialects to analyze more in depth. Informants from these dialects will be selected via the informant network of the Meertens Institute, a database of over 7,000 informants, many of whom are dialect speakers. We already have experience contacting and consulting informants via this network from the C1-project *Quality and quantity in linguistics*.

For Afrikaans, the syntax of negation has been fairly well described, and recently Cavirani-Pots (2020) has focused on the syntax of light verbs, but imperatives, particles, and especially the variation that exists within varieties of Afrikaans for all these topics, remain vastly underexplored. This means that the GIIG-PhD-student will undertake fieldwork within South Africa (mostly in Y2) in order to obtain such data. Here the most heavily contact-influenced variety, Kaaps, the historically Khoi-influenced Orange River variety, the German-influenced Namibian varieties, and the most isolated and currently completely unstudied variety spoken in the Afrikaner enclave of Orania will be of particular interest. To this end, Theresa Biberauer will introduce the PhD-student to relevant South Africa-based researchers, and Afrikaans language activists, who will be able to assist with aspects of the fieldwork and data collection. In addition, the candidate we have in mind for the PhD-position (see below, section 6) will already carry out preliminary fieldwork in the enclave of Orania in the Spring of 2020 under the supervision of Theresa Biberauer as a pilot study for the GIIG-project.

For the collection of child-directed imperatives, the PhD-student will extract examples from the Dutch and Afrikaans portions of the CHILDES-corpus (MacWhinney 2000).

6 Project team, work plan, and deliverables

The research of the G11G-project is intended to be carried by a PhD-student under the supervision of the two PIs of the project. The candidate we have in mind for this position is Ms. Engela de Villiers, who has just finished her MA in General Linguistics at the University of Stellenbosch with an MA-thesis on the syntactic analysis of imperatives in Afrikaans. This means that she is already familiar with part of the literature relevant for the G11G-project, which ensures a speedy and proficient starting phase of the project.

The G11G-project will be carried out half at KU Leuven (in Y1 and Y3) and half at Stellenbosch University (Y2 and Y4). At KUL Jeroen van Craenenbroeck will be the main supervisor, and at SU Theresa Biberauer will, though Engela will have regular meetings with both supervisors (either in person or via Skype) throughout the four years of the project. Y1 will be focused on literature review, PhD-courses, and the first Dutch questionnaires (see section 5), Y2 on the first analysis of negative imperatives (WP1, see section 2) and on data collection in South Africa (cf. section 5), Y3 on the analysis of positive imperatives and light verbs (WP2, see section 3) and on data collection related to particles, and Y4 on the analysis of those particles (WP3, section 4) and on the writing of the dissertation. The defense at the end of Y4 will take place in Leuven. For a visualization of this work plan, see the Gantt-chart that is added to this application.

We expect each of the three work packages to lead to conference presentations and a publication. At first, we will aim at local conferences (BKL-day, de Grote Taaldag, SAMWOP) and publication venues (*Linguistics in the Netherlands*, *Nederlandse Taalkunde*, *Stellenbosch Working Papers in Linguistics*), while in Y2-3 the focus will be on international conferences (CGSW, NELS, GLOW, WCCFL) and journals (*Glossa*, *Linguistic Inquiry*, *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*, *Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics*). In Q4 of Y3 we will organize a workshop on imperatives at the Brussels campus of KU Leuven as an installment in the series *Brussels Conference on Generative Linguistics* (BCGL, see <http://www.crissp.be/events/>).

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