Introduction

If language is a toolbox, then imperative sentences are what we reach for when we want to leave our hearer in no doubt that we want him to do something and what we want him to do. This is not to say that this is the only thing they are good for, nor that there is nothing else in the toolbox that will do the job, but simply to state that imperatives appear in some way designed for the job of getting the hearer to do something. We'll have plenty to say in Chapter 1 about just what an imperative sentence is, but, for the moment, we can make do with a few examples:

(1)   Stand by your man.

(2)   Mind the gap.

(3)   Love thy neighbour.

(4)   Do not go gentle into that good night.

(5)   Please try to be good.

(6)   Somebody call a doctor!

(7)   Do help yourself to more tea, vicar.

(8)   Don't anyone move.

What these examples show is that we take imperatives to be of a certain morpho-syntactic type. That a sentence can be used to get someone to do something does not suffice to make it an imperative. That is why we do not count (9) and (10) as imperatives. Again, we'll have much more to say on this in Chapter 1, where we'll also examine imperatives in languages other than English.

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(9)   All children must be accompanied by both parents.

(10)   Can you pass the salt, please?

For now, we'll just say that the imperative is a morpho-syntactic type and note that what counts as an instance of that type in a particular language is determined by its function. That is to say, when we want to identify an imperative form in a particular language, we look for a form that typically has the function of getting someone to do something. Importantly, what we don't do is look for a form that has particular formal properties (although, as we will see, across the world's languages, imperatives do tend to display a number of common formal properties).

In this book, we are concerned with the meaning of imperatives. For the moment, we can think of this in terms of the following question: Why is it that imperatives are good for getting people to do things? We make the assumption that a full understanding of the meaning of imperatives requires an account of what imperatives encode and how this interacts with considerations such as the situation of utterance and the speaker's intentions, such that imperatives come to have the communicative and practical significance that typifies them. In other words, we are concerned with the semantics and pragmatics of the imperative form, with how its encoded meaning interacts with the principles that govern its use.

From a semantic/pragmatic point of view, imperatives are interesting for a number of reasons. One is that, although they are built from the same stuff as declaratives, they exhibit very different 'semantic' characteristics. Most notably, imperatives cannot be judged true or false. Given that most approaches to semantic theory analyse meaning in terms of truth conditions, it is not obvious how imperatives should be analysed. As we will see in Part II, a range of approaches has been suggested in order to overcome this obstacle. These include reducing imperatives to declaratives, postulating a common propositional core shared by declaratives and imperatives and denying that all meaning needs to be analysed in terms of truth conditions.

Another reason that imperatives are of particular interest is that they typify the doing side of the contrast that was highlighted by Austin when he attacked the dominant tendency in philosophy of language to focus exclusively on the use of words to *say* things. Language, Austin famously pointed out, is also good for *doing* things. Imperatives are good for ordering, commanding, begging, advising, requesting and many more speech (or 'illocutionary') acts that don't

appear to involve making a statement. Given the distinction between semantics and pragmatics, this raises the question of how much of this 'doing' needs to be accounted for by what is encoded by the form, and how much needs to be left to the pragmatics. Again, various positions on this are taken in the literature, and we review the most significant in Part II of the book.

A major aim of the book, then, is to provide the reader with an overview of the theories that have been put forward to explain the idiosyncratic semantic and pragmatic characteristics of the imperative. However, before we can do this we need to establish just what it is that such theories must account for. Part I of the book is devoted to this task, as we set out to identify the functional characteristics that define the imperative and to list the uses to which it can be put. In doing so, we give a great deal of consideration to the typological data on imperatives. This is because, generally, accounts of the semantics and pragmatics of the imperative assume, either tacitly or explicitly, a high degree of universality. Consequently, it is important to establish just what such theories have to explain, in particular in terms of any cross-linguistic variation that might be identified.

As the function that identifies imperatives is their ability to issue directives such as commands and requests, we also spend a good deal of time considering just how the notion of a directive illocutionary act should be defined. We then consider the extent to which attested uses of the imperative can be considered directives. Of particular interest in this respect is the apparent occurrence of the imperative in conditional-like constructions such as 'Catch a cold and you won't be able to train for a week'. Here, the apparent imperative 'Catch a cold' can hardly be considered an attempt to get the hearer to catch a cold. Such data thus present an important challenge for theorists, as they either have to deny that such constructions contain imperatives, or come up with an account that explains both their directive and conditional-like uses. It is important, then, to establish whether the apparent imperatives in these conditional-like sentences are indeed imperatives, and this is a question to which we devote considerable time.

We have written the book with two main audiences in mind. First, we see the book as providing a way into the data and literature for scholars who are not familiar with the field. These may be established scholars from other areas of linguistics, scholars from cognate fields such as philosophy of language, cognitive science and psychology, or students looking for a bridge between textbooks and the primary literature. Our second – but by no means subsidiary – aim is that the book make a contribution to the field, as we provide a critical

review of the key literature to date. We do not see these goals as in conflict, but complementary. Writing for students and non-specialists forces us to fully explicate assumptions made by the theories we discuss, which can only benefit our critical agenda. That said, we encourage students, in particular, to adopt the same critical stance that we bring to the literature, when considering the criticisms we level at the theories we discuss. Established scholars, we trust, will need no such encouragement.

This book can also be seen as part of a larger project, in that we have our own ideas about what form a theory of the imperative should take. We want to develop a theory that is philosophically defensible, psychologically plausible and semantically tractable, and we intend to publish the results of our endeavours in this respect in the near future. The book also serves, then, to lay the ground for that project.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I (Chapters 1–3) deals with issues that relate to identifying the imperative, while Part II (Chapters 4–6) looks at attempts to explain its semantics and pragmatics. Chapter 1 is concerned with defining the term 'imperative'. It begins by discussing issues associated with the word 'imperative' and its range of uses, then examines issues relating to directness and indirectness. It also considers the bearing of the distinction between verbal and sentential mood on the problem of defining the term 'imperative' as we intend to use it in the book. This chapter also considers what should be said of languages that do not have an imperative form, and discusses patterns that arise when one examines which forms either replace the imperative or are employed to complete a defective imperative paradigm.

Chapter 2 looks in detail both at the question of how best directive force should be analysed and at the semantic characteristics of the imperative. The analysis of directive force becomes a crucial issue after, in Chapter 1, we define the imperative form in terms of directive force. If we are to evaluate the theories of the imperative in terms of their ability to explain its typical directive force, then we must be clear as to exactly what we mean by 'directive'. But imperatives demonstrate other 'meaning characteristics' besides their association with directive force. For example, they appear to have a close relationship with addressee agency, and to be restricted to describing what the speaker takes to be non-actual yet potential states of affairs. To be sure, these features might be said to be a result of the imperative's association with directive force, but, equally, they might be argued to be independent features that permit that association. Consequently, in the second part of Chapter 2, we examine these characteristics as semantic features of the imperative in their own right.

Part I ends, in Chapter 3, with a discussion of apparent conditional-like uses of the imperative, such as the 'Catch a cold and you won't be able to train for a week' example we mentioned above. It is important to establish whether these in fact contain imperative sentences as their first conjunct, because, if imperatives are found in these constructions, then they serve as crucial data for those seeking to identify the encoded meaning of the imperative. The fact that many conditional-like uses are non-directive might well provide us with an environment in which the imperative can be divorced from its typical directive use, and we might thereby gain insight into how it comes to serve its directive function. Moreover, if these constructions do contain imperatives, then an important feature of any adequate theory of imperative semantics is that it is able to explain this conditional-like use.

Part II begins in Chapter 4 with a discussion of theories that tie the imperative very closely to directive force. These include those such as Searle and Vanderveken (1985) and Han (2000), who argue that imperative encodes directive force. Others, such as Barker (2004) and Mastop (2005) go further and argue that the imperative and directive force cannot be pulled apart. For these authors, imperatives, rather than encoding directive force as an element of meaning, simply are directives.

In Chapter 5 we consider the polar opposite to the views put forward by Barker and Mastop when we examine claims that the imperative is best analysed as having a declarative-like semantics, or even as being reducible to the declarative. Such accounts take a variety of forms. Davidson (2001a) wants to analyse the imperative as consisting of two declaratives, one being about the other, while Kaufmann (2012) analyses the imperative mood as a modal, that is, as something like a covert 'must'-sentence. Others want to analyse imperatives in terms of compliance conditions, with these defined in terms of truth conditions for a 'declarative core' argued to reside inside the imperative.

Chapter 6 ends the book with a discussion of theories that seek neither to reduce the encoded meaning imperative to a declarative core, nor to relate it closely with directive force. Rather, these theorists argue either that the imperative should be seen as being related to the presentation of a proposition with a particular psychological attitude, or that it is a distinct semantic type altogether. In the first group we find the Grice-inspired pragmaticists Wilson and Sperber (1988) and Bach and Harnish (1979), while in the second we find both formalists such as Huntley (1984) and the more traditional grammarian approach of Davies (1986).

We should add here that in our grouping of theories and theorists, we do not claim to have carved the field at its joints. Rather, the field

has none, and we have tried to reflect this by highlighting similarities
in approaches across theoretical divisions, rather than grouping
theorists according to the traditions in which they operate. Thus, we
have resisted the temptation, for example, to lump 'formal semantic'
accounts together in one chapter, preferring to look at the fundamen-
tals that underlie distinct formally rendered treatments. We have
attempted to keep our discussion as theory and formalism neutral as
possible, in order to make the book accessible to scholars and students
from a range of fields. However, to facilitate our discussion of formal
treatments, we have included three appendices that readers less than
familiar with these approaches may find useful. These deal, respect-
ively, with model–theoretic semantics, possible world semantics and
Stalnaker's common-ground treatment of assertion. There is also a
short glossary. The book ends with a conclusion in which we look back
at the ground covered, and forward to the way ahead.

PART I
The data

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1   What is the imperative mood?

This book is about the semantics and pragmatics of imperatives. That is to say, it is about the interaction of linguistic meaning and contextual factors, including speaker intentions, in the interpretation of utterances of a particular type of linguistic form. To undertake to write such a book is to presuppose that the term 'imperative' picks out a distinct linguistic type with a meaning consistent across different instantiations, such that interesting things can be said about its contribution to utterance interpretation. In this chapter, we justify this assumption by showing that, cross-linguistically, the 'imperative form' can be identified by virtue of its function in communication. For now, we will just say that this function is to signal the performance of directive speech acts such as commands, orders, requests and pleas. However, as we will see in later chapters, the uses to which the type of linguistic form we are investigating can be put goes beyond this narrow range. Moreover, we will also see that identifying the form by virtue of this function in no way commits us, nor any other theorist, to claiming that this function is *encoded* by that form.

In any interesting sense of 'encode', if a form encodes a function, then it does more than merely indicate that that function is its most prototypical use. Rather, if a form encodes a function, then no literal and serious use of that form is possible without its performing the function at hand, so that comprehension of the form is nothing more than relating it to its typical function. This point is very important, as we will see again and again that one of the central issues about the imperative is whether or not every literal use of it necessarily corresponds to the performance of a directive speech act.

Before we can look in detail at the variety of ways the imperative manifests itself across languages, we need first to consider the ways in which the term 'imperative' has been used, so that we can be explicit and precise in our use of the term. We address this issue at the start of section 1, before going on to discuss a series of complications that arise when one seeks to provide a functional definition of the imperative.

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The definition we arrive at is expressed in terms of a covariance between prototypical function and form. Such a functional definition takes the imperative to be a sentence type: that is, an instance of sentential, rather than verbal, mood. And we thus define the imperative as a sentence type whose sole prototypical function is to perform directive speech acts.

A consequence of this definition, as we will see in section 2, is that imperative may be realised in a variety of ways across the world's languages. In this section, we will consider the variety of ways the imperative can be realised, paying special attention to languages where a morphologically marked imperative extends to the first and third person, as well as to the ways the imperative may be negated. This survey will inform our discussion of English, a language which has been claimed by some not to have an imperative.

We will argue that English does have an imperative. But our definition of the imperative as a form whose *sole* prototypical function is to perform directive speech acts does leave open the possibility that there are languages that do not have this sentence type. We consider some such cases in section 3, paying particular attention to associated methodological issues, before going on, in section 4, to examine which forms commonly replace the imperative, also asking what properties they have in common with it.

1   DEFINING 'IMPERATIVE'

1.1   Sentence types

Put yourself in the position of a linguist describing a 'new language', i.e. one that has never before been studied by linguists. (This is, by no means, a thought-experiment: around 90 per cent of languages spoken today across the world still await description; see, for instance, Levinson and Evans (2009).) In giving the meaning of the basic lexical vocabulary of that language, you will try to relate words to objects in the world. When it comes to describing some recurrent and specific sentence forms in that language, though, you will not try to relate these to objects in the world, but rather to things that speakers do when speaking, such as stating, requesting and asking. Just as we have a tendency to think of the meaning of words in terms of what they relate to in the world, so we tend to think of the meaning of kinds of sentences in terms of acts performed in speaking, or moves made in 'language games'. That is, what one does in