

Modern Greek Imperative Subjects in the Syntax-Information Structure Interface

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Περίληψη

Η παρούσα εργασία εστιάζει στα υποκείμενα των προστακτικών στην Κοινή Νέα Ελληνική (ΚΝΕ) όσον αφορά το διεπίπεδο της σύνταξης-πληροφοριακής δομής. Αρχικά, θα αναφερθώ στις διαφορές των βασικών ειδών προτάσεων ως προς την πληροφοριακή δομή, ενώ στη συνέχεια θα χρησιμοποιήσω συντακτικούς όρους όπως σειρά όρων, εστίαση και θεματοποίηση, προκειμένου να περιγράψω τα βασικά χαρακτηριστικά των υποκειμένων των προστακτικών στην ΚΝΕ. Πιο συγκεκριμένα, η παρουσία ενός φωνολογικά εκπεφρασμένου υποκειμένου επιβάλλει περιορισμούς στο πώς ορίζονται οι συμμετέχοντες που θα φέρουν την προστακτική εις πέρας, ενώ η αντιθετική εστίαση – προρηματικά ή μεταρηματικά– προϋποθέτει κάποιο υποσύνολο ή εναλλακτικό σύνολο των ακροατών που αντικαθίσταται.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: υποκείμενο, θεματοποίηση, εστίαση, διεπίπεδα, σειρά όρων

1 Introduction

Imperatives are one of the three main clause types along with declaratives and interrogatives (see Sadock and Zwicky 1985, König and Siemund 2007 for a general introduction). Typically, true (i.e. morphologically marked) imperatives encode directive force, refer to the Addressees or a subset thereof, and are usually subjectless, even in non-pro-drop languages, like English (for their main morphosyntactic and semantic properties see Aikhenvald 2010, Alcázar and Saltarelli 2014, Isac 2015, as well as the edited volume by Aikhenvald and Dixon 2017).

A true imperative in Modern Greek (MG) belongs to the special imperative morphological paradigm with a null subject, thus qualifying as a command to a single Addressee, as in (1a) or the entirety of the Addressees (1b):

(1) a Πέρασε έξω!
go-imp.2sg outside
'Go (=2sg) outside!'

(1) b Περάστε έξω!
go-imp.pl outside
'Go (=2pl) outside!'

Different approaches have treated null imperative subjects, as *pro*, PRO or an A-bar trace bound by an operator. However, since MG is a null-subject language, the natural assumption is that the imperative inflection licenses *pro* which is identified as the Addressee(s). So, *pro* is both licensed and identified (Rizzi 1986).

MG true imperatives, as in English and other languages, may also allow for an overt subject, either preverbally or postverbally. The overt subjects include – but are

not limited to – overt pronouns, referential DPs, free choice elements and Quantifier Phrases:

- (2) Εσείς/ οι απόφοιτοι/ όσοι θέλετε/ κάποιои περάστε έξω!
 you-pl the alumni whoever want-2pl some go-imp.pl outside
 ‘You/ the alumni / those who want / some go(=2pl) outside!’
- (3) Περάστε έξω εσείς/ οι απόφοιτοι/ όσοι θέλετε/ κάποιои!
 go-imp.pl outside you-pl the alumni whoever want-2pl some
 ‘Go(=2PL) outside you/ the alumni / those who want / some!’

In order to analyze the properties of imperative subjects, like the ones presented in (1)-(3), we need to take a series of factors into consideration.

The first factor concerns the structural differences between imperatives and other clause types. The second one has to do with the interpretation of imperatives in the syntax-information structure interface. The third one concerns the interpretation of the imperative subject depending on its position as well as its prosody.

The next section introduces the background that relates to the above factors. Section 3 introduces the main empirical data with an overt subject in different positions. Section 4 introduces an analysis that is based on the mapping of an overt subject to discourse participants. Finally, section 5 summarizes the main findings.

2 Background Assumptions

Concerning word order, MG seems to be quite flexible, as all 6 subject (S), verb (V) and object (O) combinations manifest, yielding 12 possible alternatives if object clitics (Ocl) are also considered (see from Philippaki-Warburton 1985:113 for discussion). Kotzoglou (2013) summarizes the discussion that was initiated in the 80’s, mainly starting with Philippaki-Warburton (1985), and presents the main arguments for the VSO word order as the basic or unmarked one. According to Kotzoglou (2013), VSO involves fewer steps and does not force a special interpretation of the subject in sentence-initial position. For the purposes of this paper, I side with Kotzoglou (2013), as sentence-initial positions in MG seem to be reserved for topicalized or focused phrases. Another thing that one must consider is that the position of the imperative verb is higher than the position of the verb in declaratives and so preverbal imperative subjects are more likely to be in an information-structural position.

In terms of syntactic structure, imperatives have been analysed as involving verb movement to a C position. A series of diagnostics have been used to show that. For example, in MG imperatives, the clitics follow the verb whereas in declaratives they precede it, as in (4). True imperatives cannot be negated, as negation (*mi*) acts as an intervener to movement according to Relativized Minimality and a surrogate form must be used instead, as in (5). Lastly, imperatives do not seem to be embeddable, as in (6), but their surrogate subjunctive forms are:

- (4) a Την έφερε.
 cl-fem.acc brought-3sg
 ‘pro(=he/she/it) brought her.’

- (4) b Φέρτε την!
bring-imp.pl cl-fem.acc
'Bring her!'
- (5) a Δεν την έφερε.
neg cl-fem.acc brought-3sg
'pro(=he/she/it) didn't bring her.'
- (5) b Μην του την φέρεις/ *φέρε!
neg cl-masc.gen cl-fem.acc bring-subj.2sg bring-imp.sg
'Don't bring her to him!'
- (6) Σε προειδοποίησα *πρόσεχε/ να προσέχεις!
cl-2sg. acc warned-1sg be.careful-imp.sg to be.careful-2sg
'I warned you *be careful / to be careful!'

Given the above evidence, I will assume that in MG imperatives the verb moves to the C-domain (see Roussou 2000 for a Split CP account of the movement steps involved in imperative formations, and Rivero 1994, Rivero and Terzi 1995 for discussion on the position of clitics and the unavailability of negation). With respect to their subjects' interpretation, this is regulated by the agreement inflection. As imperatives bear a 2nd person affix, the null (*pro*) subject refers to the Addressee(s) (see Rizzi 1982 and Philippaki-Warbuton 1987 on the pronominal character of inflection). On the other hand, an overt subject refers to a subset of Addressees (see Potsdam 1998 for discussion). In the latter case, a preverbal subject is assumed to occupy an information structural position in the left periphery, whereas a postverbal one occupies a lower position.

Another factor we must consider is that declaratives and imperatives differ with respect to their information structure. This property is expected to affect the subject interpretation as well (the term information structure refers to the packaging of information in a sentence, see Reinhart 1981, Erteschik-Shir 2007 and Krifka 2008 for an introduction and definitions of the main elements of information structure). To be more precise, in declaratives, the Common Ground (CG) refers to information that is mutually shared and continuously modified in communication by the discourse participants (see Stalnaker 2002 for a definition of the CG and related examples). Along these lines, the Question-Under-Discussion (QUD) is for interrogatives what CG is for assertions (see Roberts 1998 for the organization of discourse in terms of QUDs), i.e. when one of the interlocutors has inquiries about a given event, predicate or argument (see Dayal 2016 for an overview). Declaratives denote propositions that enrich the CG, whereas interrogatives, as part of the QUD, denote sets of propositions linked to possible answers to a given question.

Imperatives do not fit into either of these paradigms. They are not truth-conditional, so they cannot be part of the CG, and they do not activate alternative versions of a given proposition, so they cannot be part of the QUD either. In the semantics and information structure literature, imperatives have been analyzed as properties or proposition-like primitives that the Speaker assigns to the Addressee(s). There have been different names and implementations of this idea, such as the *Plan Set* (Han 1998, 2001), *Action Plan* (Mastop 2011) and *To-Do List* (Portner 2004, 2007, 2016 and Roberts 2015). The common denominator of these analyses is that imperatives are considered as instructions or commitments imposed to the Addressee(s). Han

(1998:155) mentions that “by performing a directive action, the speaker instructs the hearer to update a particular module which we call the plan set. A hearer’s plan set is a set of propositions that specifies his/her intentions”. According to Mastop (2011:330) an imperative constitutes “a choice between partial to do lists. Action plans figure in the semantics through practical commitments, i.e., a function mapping possible worlds to action plans [...] what a person is required to do –in virtue of accepting instructions– in a given possible world.” Portner (2004:240), on the other hand, considers imperatives as properties that the Addressee of a given context is supposed to have in a possible world different than the existing one. The null subject of an imperative is supposed to coincide with the Addressee when singular and with a set of Addressees when plural, whereas an overt subject either selects, emphasizes or quantifies over the Addressees (see Zanuttini et al. 2012 for discussion).

In the following section, I provide the MG data focusing on overt imperative subjects, thus setting the empirical background for the proposed analysis.

3 Overt imperative subjects

Building on Rupp (1999), Jensen (2003) extended the description of the possible imperative subjects attested in English. Zanuttini et al. (2012) offered an analysis using a specialized functional head, called the ‘Jussive’ head. In Magionos (2019), I offered an account for the distribution of MG imperative subjects both in preverbal and postverbal position. More specifically, I showed that in MG overt 2nd person pronouns can be used for emphatic reasons or contrastively, as in (7), both in preverbal and postverbal position (small caps in the examples indicate focalization); this pattern is consistent with the pro-drop character of MG:

- (7) (Εσείς / ΕΣΕΙΣ) δουλέψτε (εσείς / ΕΣΕΙΣ)!
 you-pl / YOU-pl work-imp.pl you-pl / YOU-pl
 ‘(You / YOU) work (you / YOU)!’

QPs or DPs, on the other hand, which are 3rd person in terms of their grammatical features, qualify as imperative subjects compatible with a (sub)set of (the) addressees, as in (8) and (9):

- (8) (Οι πρώτοι / ΟΙ ΠΡΩΤΟΙ) δουλέψτε (οι πρώτοι / ΟΙ ΠΡΩΤΟΙ)!
 the.first-pl / THE FIRST-pl work-imp.pl the.first-pl / THE FIRST-pl
 ‘(The first ones / THE FIRST ONES) work (the first ones / THE FIRST ONES)!’

- (9) (Όλοι / ΟΛΟΙ) δουλέψτε (όλοι / ΟΛΟΙ)!
 all-pl / ALL-pl work-imp.pl all-pl / ALL-pl
 ‘(Everybody / EVERYBODY) work (everybody / EVERYBODY)!’

In MG, Vocative Phrases (VocPs), like (10), and overt preverbal imperative subjects, like (11), behave in a way similar to (aboutness) topics, since they target the entity or entities that the imperative concerns (see Stavrou 2014 and Hill 2014 for discussion on MG vocatives and Portner 2004 and Hill 2007, 2014 for discussion on the similarities and differences between topics, subjects and VocPs):

(10) (Πρωτοετείς) προχωρήστε (πρωτοετείς)
 first.year.students-voc proceed-imp.pl first.year.students-voc
 ‘(First-year students) move on (first-year students)!’

(11) (Οι πρωτοετείς) προχωρήστε (οι πρωτοετείς)
 the first.year.students-nom proceed-imp.pl the first.year.students-nom
 ‘(The first-year students) move on (the first-year students)!’

Both (10) and (11) can be uttered out of the blue, without imposing restrictions on alternative subsets the Addressees might include.

Consider next the example in (12) where the imperative subject is focalized. As such it can either be in a position lower than the imperative form, or fronted, in a left-peripheral position. In the latter case, it carries a distinct rising intonational contour:

(12) (ΟΙ ΠΡΩΤΟΕΤΕΙΣ) προχωρήστε (ΟΙ ΠΡΩΤΟΕΤΕΙΣ)!
 THE FIRST.YEAR.STUDENTS- proceed- THE FIRST.YEAR.STUDENTS-
 nom imp.pl nom
 ‘(THE FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS) move on (THE FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS)!’

Contrary to (10) and (11), the sentence in (12) is infelicitous in out-of-the-blue contexts. This is due to the fact that it is contrastive in nature and requires either a question, like (13), or a false proposition, like (14), that will introduce alternatives:

(13) Να προχωρήσουμε οι δευτεροετείς;
 subj proceed-1pl the second.year.students-nom
 ‘Should the second-year students move on?’

(14) Θα προχωρήσουμε οι δευτεροετείς.
 fut proceed-1pl the second.year.students-nom
 ‘The second-year students will move on!’

Having set the relevant theoretical and empirical background, in the following section I provide an analysis for imperative subjects and their interpretation on the syntax-information structure interface.

4 Analysis

In this section, I argue that imperatives might involve one or two information-structural lists. One information-structural list, namely the To-Do List or an equivalent list for imperatives, is activated when no overt subject is present. Two information-structural lists, the To-Do List and the QUD, are activated in cases where an alternative is generated amongst the Addressees (in non-focused overt subjects) or in cases where a contrastive interpretation takes place, replacing a given alternative with another one.

Based on Kratzer and Selkirk (to appear), I assume that contrastive focus (FoC) has a specific prosodic realization (a high tone, H*) contrary to information or newness focus. Note that prosody is just one of the possible ways to contrastively focus-mark a constituent, as in some cases fronting is also needed. At the same time, other languages may exploit other strategies.

In terms of semantics, a contrastively focalized constituent is understood in a Roothian alternative semantics (1985, 1992, 2016). In Rooth’s system, a focused expression takes two values: an ordinary value (O-value) and an alternative one (A-value). The O-value of an expression coincides with its ordinary meaning, whereas the A-value activates a set of alternatives to the expression. By contrastively focusing a given expression, we signify the presence and cancelation of other possible alternatives already available in the discourse. In Greek, as in other languages, contrastive focus is understood mostly in means of a specific prosodic contour and fronting needs not take place in all cases (see the discussion on the syntactic encoding of information structure in MG in Skopeteas 2016 and references therein). In terms of the information-structural lists, contrastive focus activates the QUD, as it creates alternative propositions with a given part in a way reminiscent of the wh-question formation.

More specifically, three different strategies or ways of issuing a command are recognized in MG imperatives with respect to their subjects. The unmarked case is the absence of an overt subject, where no alternative sets are recognized within the Addressees, and all the Addressees are expected to act according to the command issued by the Speaker. A non-contrastively focused subject targets a specific subset of the Addressees or quantifies over them, signaling the presence of alternative sets within the Addressees. A contrastively focused subject, cancels or substitutes an alternative set of Addressees already in the discourse and selects another alternative to bring the imperative about.

Let’s look at each case separately, as exemplified in (15) and (16). Given what we have said so far, we see that only the To-Do List or Plan Set is activated via the 2nd person specification on the true imperative verbal form. More precisely, the Speaker urges a single Addressee, as in (15), or the entirety of Addressees, as in (16), to add the preposition the imperative denotes to their future plans, or to commit themselves to a specific action:

(15) Σταμάτα αμέσως! 2sg: Single Addressee
 stop-imp.2sg immediately
 ‘Stop immediately!’

(16) Σταματήστε αμέσως! 2pl: Multiple Addressees
 stop-imp.2pl immediately
 ‘Stop immediately!’

Consider next imperatives with a non-focused 2nd person subject, irrespective of its position (preverbal or postverbal that is), as in (17) and (18). In this case, only the To-Do List or Plan Set is activated, and a similar result arises, unless there is a deictic element or gesture involved (see Schlenker 2020 on co-speech gestures and their semantic, pragmatic and information-structural contribution):

(17) (Εσύ) σταμάτα (εσύ) αμέσως (εσύ)!
 you-sg stop-imp.2sg you-sg immediately you-sg
 ‘(You) stop (you) immediately (you)!’

(18) (Εσείς) σταματήστε (εσείς) αμέσως (εσείς)!
 you-pl stop-imp.pl you-pl immediately you-pl
 ‘(You) stop (you) immediately (you)!’

As mentioned in the previous section, overt non-pronominal subjects seem to have an activating potential and they are alternative-generating. A subset of the Addressees is selected to bring the imperative about, as in (19), instead of all of them, yielding alternatives (one can be an Addressee in a given discourse, but (s)he needs not be a mechanic):

- (19) (Οι μηχανικοί) σταματήστε (οι μηχανικοί) αμέσως (οι μηχανικοί)!
 the mechanics stop-imp.pl the mechanics immediately the mechanics
 ‘(The mechanics) stop (the mechanics) immediately (the mechanics)!’

Descriptively, when using imperatives with overt non-pronominal subjects both the QUD and the To-Do List (or Plan Set) are activated. This involves a two-step process:

- a) The Addressees have to evaluate whether or not they belong to the subset used by the Speaker (so the QUD is activated, initiating alternatives), and if so
- b) The subset of selected Addressees adds the proposition/commitment that the imperative denotes to their To-Do List.

Consider next contrastively focused subjects (be they preverbal or postverbal). We see that these involve one additional step. A set already introduced in the discourse in as an alternative, like (20), is replaced by the Speaker using an alternative set prior to the aforementioned steps. Then, the Addressees under discussion act accordingly if they are members of the new alternative set that the Speaker has introduced, as in (21) or a superset of them needs to act according to the imperative, as in (22).

- (20) Να σταματήσουμε οι μηχανικοί;
 subj stop-1pl the mechanics
 ‘Should (we) the mechanics stop?’

- (21) ΟΙ ΗΛΕΚΤΡΟΛΟΓΟΙ σταματήστε! Τους άλλους σας θέλω εδώ!
 THE ELECTRICIANS stop-imp.pl the rest cl-pl want-1sg here
 ‘THE ELECTRICIANS stop! The rest of you, I want you here!’

- (22) Σταματήστε ΟΛΟΙ αμέσως!
 stop-imp.pl all immediately
 ‘EVERYBODY stop immediately!’

Having outlined the basic properties and interpretations, let us next consider the syntactic realization of these imperative subjects. For present purposes, I adopt an articulated CP analysis for imperatives (along the lines of Rizzi 1997, Haegeman 2004, Cormany 2013, and for MG Roussou 2000).

Based on their interpretation, I argue that preverbal subjects in imperatives internally merge in a Topic or Focus projection. If the imperative verb occupies a C position, the subject has to be in a higher Topic or Focus projection, as shown below.

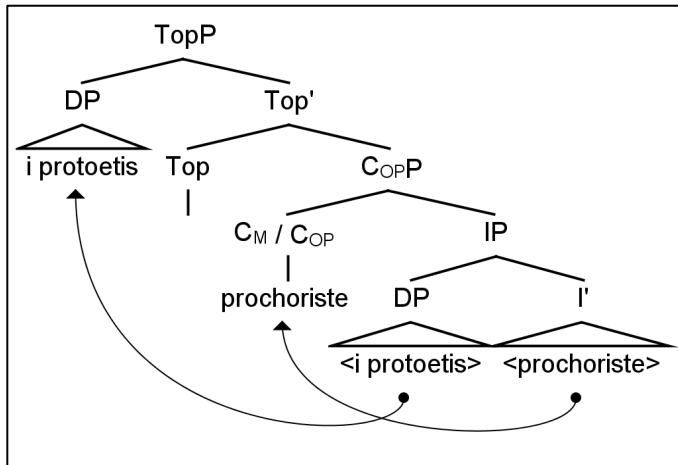


Figure 1. A topicalized imperative subject

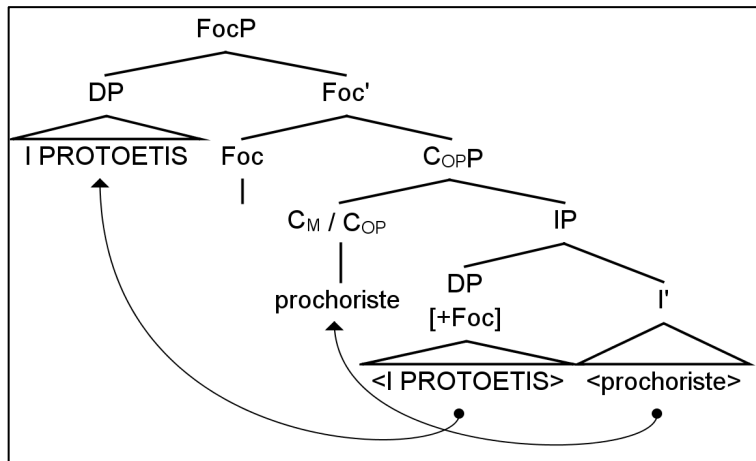


Figure 2. A (contrastively) topicalized imperative subject

Postverbal imperative subjects, on the other hand, remain in their external merge position. If they are prosodically marked for focus, their interpretation will be that of activating an alternative or alternating sets with respect to an already mentioned subject:

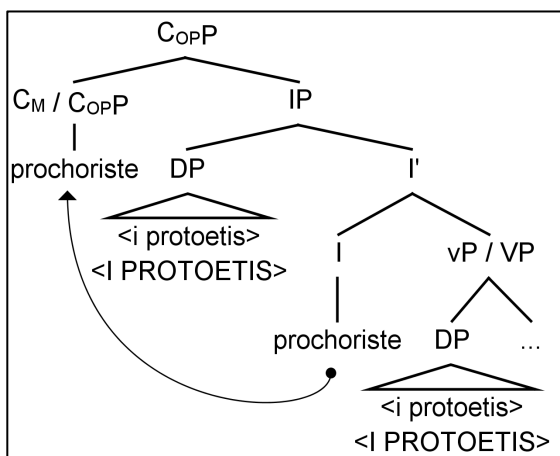


Figure 3. Postverbal imperative subjects

To summarize, there are different degrees of complexity issuing a command depending on the realization and the position of an imperative subject, as well as its prosodic properties. A null subject imperative activates the To-Do List. In cases involving an overt subject, the QUD needs to be activated to regulate a selection of the Addressees that will bring the imperative about (in non-contrastive environments) or as a way to alternate between sets including different Addressees or targeting different properties thereof (in contrastive environments).

5 Conclusions

In this paper I offered an account of overt imperative subjects, based on clause-typing and information structure. The reading of non-focused overt imperative subjects resembles that of A(boutness)-Topics, as the discourse participants are given information about those of them that need to act, whereas focused imperative subjects are mostly contrastive in nature and cannot be uttered in out-of-the-blue contexts. This difference between non-focused and focused imperative subjects also affects the way they are processed and interpreted, yielding a contrastive and alternative-cancelling reading in the latter, but not the former (see discussion on the interaction of contrast and exhaustivity in Kratzer and Selkirk to appear and references therein).

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