Title	Belfast English Imperatives and Ergativity
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Citation	OUPEL(Osaka University Papers in English Linguistics). 2005, 10, p. 63-73
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://doi.org/10.18910/70797
rights	
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BELFAST ENGLISH IMPERATIVES AND ERGATIVITY[*]

1 INTRODUCTION

Based on the data in Henry (1995), I will argue that Belfast English imperatives exhibit the nature of an ergative system. Consider (1), for example.

(1) a.　Go you there.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(Henry 1995: 52)
　　　b.　*Read you that book.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(ibid.)

Standard English does not allow an imperative subject to occur after the verb *go* as in (1a) while Belfast English permits the subject to be situated after the verb. When it comes to the verb *read* in (1b), neither Standard nor Belfast English can use the imperative subject as in (1a). Henry (1995) analyzes this type of Belfast English imperative in terms of Principles and Parameters theory. I assume that the 'inverted' subject is originally located at the position in question. This paper will consider Belfast English imperatives from a typological perspective and demonstrate that the asymmetry in (1) reflects the nature of ergative language.

　　The organization of this paper is as follows. Section 2 provides data of Belfast English imperatives. Section 3 discusses aspects of ergative system. Section 4 then considers Belfast English imperatives in terms of ergativity. Section 5 states implications of the proposed analysis. The final section concludes this paper.

2 BELFAST ENGLISH IMPERATIVES

This section outlines the data of Belfast English imperatives relevant to this paper, on the basis of Henry (1995). Examples (2)-(12) below are cited from Henry (1995: 45-56). The most crucial is that Belfast English imperatives can 'invert' the imperative subject (i.e. *you*) while Standard English cannot.

(2) a.   You go away.
    b.   Go you away.

The overt subject imperative as in (2a) may be used in both Belfast and Standard English, but the form as in (2b) is limited to Belfast English. In what follows, I look at the characteristics of Belfast English imperatives such as (2b) and identify the verbs which are available for 'inversion.'

Not all the verbs in Belfast English can accompany imperative subjects.

(3) a.   Go you there.
    b.   *Read you that book.

While (3a) can put the subject after the verb, (3b) cannot allow the subject to appear at such a position. In short, (3a) and (3b) suggest that intransitive verbs can be used as (1a) and (2b), but transitive verbs cannot.

This does not mean that all the intransitive verbs permit 'inversion.' Verbs of motion are the only subset which allows the subject to be situated after the verb.

(4) a.   *Eat you up.
    b.   *Always laugh you at his jokes.

The verbs *eat* and *laugh* in (4a, b) are both intransitive, but they are not considered to be verbs of motion. Hence the subject cannot occur after the verb.

It should also be mentioned with this connection that further restrictions are imposed on the use of 'inverted' subjects in imperatives. Not all the verbs of motion permit 'inversion.' Consider one of the motion verbs *run* in (5a-f).

(5) a.   *Run you.
    b.   Run you away.
    c.   Run you home.
    d.   Run you into the garden.
    e.   *Run you in the garden.
    f.   *Run you every day if you want to keep fit.

Only in (5b-d) the subject can appear after *run*. Unlike (5a), the subject is followed by another expression such as *away*, *home* and *into the garden*. (5e, f) also co-occur with another phrase, but they are still ungrammatical. At this stage (5a-f) tell us that the imperative with the overt 'inverted' subject must co-occur with an expression that indicates destination like *away* and *home*.

More specifically, actions that have an endpoint or telic verbs are required for the imperative under discussion.

(6) a.   Leave you now.
    b.   *Run you now.
(7) a.   Arrive you before 6 o'clock.
    b.   *Run you before 6 o'clock.

The verbs *leave* and *arrive* in (6a) and (7a) are considered telic verbs and such verbs can allow 'inversion' even though they lack an expression that indicates destination as in (5b-d). On the other hand, the verb *run* itself has no telicity and (6b) and (7b), in which the verb is used on its own, are ungrammatical. Thus, the nature of telicity is inherent in some verbs like *leave* and *arrive*, but not in others. An additional phrase, however, renders the verb without telicity telic, as shown in (5) and (8).

    (8) a.   Walk you out of the door.
        b.   Walk into the garden.
        c.   Walk you away.
        d.   Walk you home.
        e. *Walk you.
        f. *Walk you in the garden.
        g. *Walk you every day if you want to keep fit.

The imperatives without an element which makes the verb phrase telic do not permit the subject to be located after the verb, such as (5a, e, f) and (8e-f).

The above observation leads Henry (1994) to state that the verb phrases in 'inverted' imperatives are classified as unaccusative verbs. Let us consider (9).

    (9) a.   Out of the door ran a mouse.
        b. *In the house ran a mouse.
        c.   Into the garden walked two men.
        d. *In the garden walked two men.

The unaccusative verb phrases *run out of the door* and *walk into the garden* can have the inverted structure like (9a, c), illustrating one of the characteristics of unaccusative verbs. On the contrary, the verb phrases that are not considered unaccusative such as *run in the house* and *walk in the garden* disallow 'inversion,' as can be seen from (9b, d). Of importance here is that exactly the same situation can be observed in 'inverted' imperatives.

    (10) a.   Run you out of the door.
        b. *Run you in the house.
        c.   Walk you into the garden.
        d. *Walk you in the garden.

The phrases *run out of the door* and *walk into the garden* are used in 'inverted' imperatives while the phrases *run in the house* and *walk in the garden* are not. It follows that the verb phrase in an 'inverted' imperative has the nature of unaccusativity.

In summary, the overt 'inverted' subject in Belfast English imperatives can occur after the verbs or verb phrases of motion which have the nature of telicity. Before moving on to the next section, I should add that the other dialect seems to behave differently from the above facts. All the verbs accept 'inversion,' as in (11).

(11) a.   Read you that book.
     b.   Do you your best.

The verbs *read* and *do* are typical transitive verbs, but they allow the subject to occur after the verb. Henry (1995) separates this type of dialect from the data I have seen above. This paper still assumes that this dialect also has the same nature and thus does not draw a strict line between the two, because negative imperatives exhibit the same behavior as the data above with respect to 'inversion.'

(12) a.   Don't run you away.
     b. *Don't hit you your sister.

The verb phrase *run away* in (12a) exemplifies the verb of motion with the nature of telicity but the transitive verb *hit* in (12b) does not. Only the former can permit the subject to be 'inverted' in imperatives, which corresponds with the facts outlined above. In this sense, it is safe to say that the generalization made at the beginning of this paragraph is still valid about Belfast English imperatives. To consider them in terms of ergativity, let me next review aspects of the ergative system.

3   ASPECTS OF THE ERGATIVE SYSTEM

3.1 Grammatical Roles

To consider Belfast English imperatives from a typological viewpoint, this section discusses grammatical roles in Palmer (1994), i.e. A (=Agent), P (=Patient) and S (=Single argument). A and P are needed to distinguish transitive sentences from intransitive sentences, since transitive sentences require both A and P. There are three types of grammatical marking to identify grammatical roles in English (Palmer 1994: 7). The first marking is word order. A precedes the verb and P follows the verb in a declarative sentence.

(13) a.   The boy hit the man.
     b.   The man hit the boy.

In (13a) *the boy* is A; *the man* is A in (13b). The second marking concerns morphology.

(14) a.   I hit him.
     b.   He hit me.

(14a) and (14b) illustrate that A and P assume different forms in the case of pronouns:

I (A), *me* (P), etc. The third grammatical marking is in number agreement with the verb for A.

(15) a.   The boy hits the man.
     b.   The boys hit the man.

If A is singular, then the singular marker -*s* is added to the verb in the present tense. From the comparison between (15b) and (16), we can say that there is no number agreement for P.

(16)   The boys hit the men.

A and P are thus differentiated from each other in a transitive sentence and also distinguished from S, which obligatorily appears in an intransitive sentence.

   Notice here that although A and P are prototypically associated with the agent and the patient of an event, respectively, grammatical roles should be distinguished from notional roles. For example, A does not necessarily refer to the agent of an action. Consider the following examples (Palmer 1994: 9).

(17) a.   The girl saw the accident.
     b.   Most men fear death.
     c.   Death frightens most men.

In (17a-c), *the girl*, *most men* and *death* are all regarded as A in that they precede the transitive verb. They, however, have different notional roles. A in (17a) is perceiver, A in (17b) serves as experiencer and A in (17c) is regarded as causer. The roles which are relevant to the remaining part of this paper are not notional roles but grammatical roles.

3.2 Ergativity

There are a number of definitions of ergativity in the literature (e.g. Blake 1994, Dixon 1994, Comrie 1978 and so on). This paper, as a rule, follows Dixon's definition, i.e. "the subject of an intransitive clause is treated in the same way as the object of a transitive clause, and differently from transitive subject" (Dixon 1994: 1). In terms of the grammatical roles A, P and S discussed in 3.1, ergativity is defined as (18).

(18)   S and P are treated in the same way and differently from A.

Keeping this definition in mind, I will look at aspects of the ergative system: case marking, noun incorporation, the thematic role of a certain type of verb.

   The most obvious illustration of ergativity is case marking. Let us begin with case marking of three different languages: English, Japanese and Dyirbal in (19)-(21),

respectively.[1]

    (19) a.   He(S) runs.
        b.   He(A) reads the book(P).
    (20) a.   Kare-ga   hashiru.
            3.SG-NOM(S)   run
            'He runs.'
        b.   Kare-ga   hon-o   yomu.
            3.SG-NOM(A)   book-ACC(P)   read
            'He reads the book.'
    (21) a.   ŋuma   banaga-nʸu.   (Dixon 1994: 10)
            father.ABS(S)   return-NONFUT
            'Father(S) returned.'
        b.   yabu   ŋuma-ŋgu   bura-n   (ibid.)
            mother.ABS(P)   father-ERG(A)   see-NONFUT
            'Father saw mother.'

English and Japanese examples in (19) and (20) illustrate that S and A are both marked by NOM and that P is marked by ACC. In Dyirbal like (21), on the other hand, S and P are expressed by ABS and A by ERG.[2] The examples such as (19) and (20) in which S and A are treated alike and differently from P are traditionally referred to as accusative language; the language in which A is marked by different case from S and P is called ergative language. It follows that (21), unlike (19) and (20), exhibits the nature of ergativity.

    The concept of ergativity is sometimes extended to linguistic phenomena other than case marking system. In fact, some researchers like Comrie (1978) and Keenan (1987) discuss ergativity observed in accusative language like English. Noun incorporation is one of such examples. Comrie (1978: 389) points out that in English P and S can be incorporated into verbs more easily than A, although a typical example of noun incorporation involves direct objects (i.e. P) (see also Keenan 1987: 173-174). Consider (22), for example.

    (22) a.   fox-hunting   (Comrie 1978: 389)
        b.   bird-chirping   (ibid.)

(22a) and (22b) show that *fox* (P) and *bird* (S) are incorporated into the verbs *hunt* and *chirp*, respectively, thereby forming a compound noun. As stated in Comrie (1978), A is resistant to incorporation. Thus, S and P behave in the same way and differently from A with respect to noun incorporation. The phenomenon of this kind also exemplifies ergativity.

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[1] The abbreviations in this paper are as follows. ABS (Absolutive), ACC (Accusative), DIST (Distant from speaker and hearer), ERG (Ergative), IMP (Imperative), NOM (Nominative), NONFUT (Non future), PASS (Passive), SG (Singular), 2 (second person) and 3 (third person). For the sake of consistency, the glosses in the literature are regularized here.

[2] ABS is sometimes written as NOM in the literature. This issue is discussed in Goddard (1982) and Blake (1985) in more depth, but it is beyond the scope of this paper.

Finally, let us consider the following pair, in which both P and S show affectedness (for details see Comrie (1978) and Keenan (1987)).

(23) a.   John broke the window.   (Comrie 1978: 391)
     b.   The window broke.   (ibid.)

It is evident that the referent of P in (23a) is understood to be affected. Likewise, *the window* in (23b), i.e. S, is also an affected referent. Unlike P and S, A does not refer to the semantic role denoting affectedness. According to Keenan (1987: 175), "[m]ore typically subjects of transitive verbs are thematically Agents, Instruments, or Experiencers and somewhat less frequently Locatives, Temporals, and Possessors, but not Patients." With respect to the thematic role property, S and P can share affectedness but A cannot express such a thematic role, which implies the nature of the ergative system.

3.3 Summary

I have reviewed aspects of ergativity, in which S and P are dealt with in the same way and A is treated differently from S and P. To begin with, this is reflected in the case marking system. S and P have the same case marker and A has a special case marker, i.e. ergative case. Ergativity can also be found in noun incorporation. S and P are easier to be incorporated than A. Finally I discussed the thematic role property. S and P can express affectedness while A cannot. Thus, ergativity in a broad sense is reflected in various aspects of grammar. In what follows, I claim that ergativity sheds a new light on Belfast English imperatives, providing a systematic description of the data given in section 2.

4   ERGATIVITY IN BELFAST ENGLISH IMPERATIVES

Based on the ergative nature above, this section makes a generalization about the position of subjects in Belfast English imperatives.

(24)   In Belfast English imperatives, S and P can be situated at the internal argument (i.e. object) position.

The claim in (24) has a further implication that A cannot be located at the internal argument position; it should be situated at the external argument position. Of importance here is that (24) satisfies the definition of ergativity given in (18); S and P are treated in the same way, and differently from A, with respect to the position in an imperative. Belfast English imperatives can thus be reconsidered in the light of ergativity.

The crucial contrast to be explained is shown in (1a) and (1b), which are repeated as (25a) and (25b).

(25) a.   Go you there.
     b. *Read you that book.

The claim in (24) accurately describes the fact in Belfast English. That is, S (*you*) in (25a) can be situated at the internal argument position whereas A (*you*) in (25b) cannot be. Needless to say, P (*that book*) is supposed to appear after the verb *read*, i.e. the internal argument position. At this stage it can be concluded that S and P are treated in the same way with respect to the position within an imperative sentence, and differently from A.

The present analysis is consistent with the Unaccusative Hypothesis, according to which the subject of an unergative verb is generated as a subject in the same way as the subject of a transitive verb, whereas the subject of an unaccusative verb is generated originally as a direct object (e.g. Permutter 1978, Burzio 1986). Section 2 discussed lexical restrictions on overt subject imperatives in Belfast English, i.e., the verb or verb phrase in a given imperative must have the telic nature, unaccusativity (for details see examples 4-10). To the extent that the verbs or verb phrases, which permit 'inverted' subjects in Belfast English imperatives, are to be considered unaccusative, (24) fits well with the Unaccusative Hypothesis.

Finally, let me mention a consequence of the typological description of Belfast English imperatives in this paper. The claim in (24) further predicts where P can be positioned in the passive imperative sentence. Let us begin with the active sentence in (26), for example.

(26)   They elect you president before the end of the year.

In (26) *they* and *you* are regarded as A and P, respectively. If P occurs in the internal argument position, as claimed in (24), it is predicted that in the passive P appears at the internal argument position as well. This prediction is borne out. Consider the passive imperative form of (26).

(27) a.   Be elected you president before the end of the year.   (Henry 1995: 55)
     b. *Be you elected president before the end of the year.   (ibid.)

(27a) and (27b) indicate that P (*you*) can be situated after the verb *be elected*, i.e. at the internal argument position. Thus, the present analysis is applicable not only to the active imperative but also the passive imperative.

5   FURTHER ISSUES

5.1 Ergativity and Imperatives

Subjects are generally omitted in imperatives. It is evident that the deleted NPs (*you*) in (28a) and (28b) are S and A, respectively.

(28) a.   (You) come here!   (Comrie 1984: 94)
    b.   (You) hit the man!   (ibid.)

In Dyirbal, as pointed out in Comrie (1984) and Dixon (1994), S and A can be omitted in the same way, although Dyirbal belongs to ergative language.

(29) a.   (Nginda)   bani!   (ibid.)
          2.NOM   come here.IMP
          'Come here!'
    b.   (Nginda)   yara   balga!   (ibid.)
          2.NOM   man.ABS   hit.IMP
          'Hit the man!'

In the sense that S and A are deleted in the same way, this fact implies accusative nature. In other words, even if a given language is considered ergative language, it exhibits the accusative nature with respect to the imperative subject.

Such existing knowledge about imperatives can be deepened by consideration of the data and the description of Belfast English imperatives in the present paper. As already revealed, S and P in Belfast English imperatives can be located at the internal position while A should be located at the external position. This is the nature of ergative system. If I am on the right track, it follows that Belfast English, an accusative language, exhibits ergatitvity in imperatives.

5.2 Maori Imperatives

In this section I move on to Maori and demonstrate that the claim made above is valid to describe imperatives in this language as well. I have maintained that ergativity is observed in imperatives, in addition to well-known examples like case marking and noun incorporation. From ergativity, in which S is treated in the same way as P, it is theoretically predicted that P can become the subject of an imperative in the same way as S in a language. This prediction is borne out in Maori imperatives. Consider (30).

(30) a.   E   tuu   koe.   (Bauer 1993: 32)
          IMP   stand   2.SG
          'You stand!'
    b.   Patu-a   te   kurii   raa!   (ibid.)
          beat-PASS   the   dog   DIST
          'Beat that dog!'

(30a) exemplifies the imperative of an intransitive verb; (30b) illustrates the imperative of a transitive verb. It is well-known that Maori imperatives of transitive verbs require the passive form. (30b) is therefore in the passive form, in which P *te kurii* ('the dog') serves as a subject at the same subject position as S in (30a).

Ergativity, as repeatedly stated, means that S is treated in the same way as P and differently from A. This definition, together with the fact above, leads to the following generalization about Maori imperatives.

> (31)   In Maori imperatives, S and P can be situated at the external argument (i.e. subject) position.

(31) is the same as (24) except the position involved. Both of them claim that S and P behave alike, and differently from A, with respect to the imperative subject position. The two generalizations about imperatives in Belfast English and Maori strongly suggest that imperatives can be considered in terms of ergativity.

6   CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed a connection between imperatives and ergativity. In Belfast English, unlike Standard English, the subject occurs after a certain type of verb. The typological terms S, A and P enabled us to capture a generalization about Belfast English imperatives: S and P can be situated at the internal argument position. This generalization reflects the nature of the ergative system, which means that S and P are treated in the same way and differently from A. Imperatives can thus be regarded as one of the examples of ergativity, such as case marking, noun incorporation and so on. I referred to Maori imperatives as well, providing further evidence for a relation between ergativity and imperatives. In Maori imperatives S and P can be situated at the external argument position. This generalization is also consistent with the nature of the ergative system.

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