

Deontic readings of the imperative through the prism of force dynamic relations: Permissive and preventive utterances with the discourse marker *vaa(n)* in Finnish



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Abstract

This paper focuses on the interplay between the imperative form and the discourse marker *vaa(n)* in Finnish. The imperative semantics produces a temporally non-anchored representation of an event that is related to two subjective points of view, corresponding to intentional forces. Resulting from this deictically and modally open meaning structure, imperative constructions display a particular potential to host discourse markers, which orient the interpretation of the utterance. In the case of *vaa(n)*, the force dynamic relation entailed in the imperative enters into interaction with the semantics of the discourse marker. *Vaa(n)* is assumed to stem from an adverbial form with the meaning ‘firmly’, implying an agonist force’s resistance to an antagonist force. When used with the imperative form, *vaan* gives prominence to an underlying force dynamic relation that impacts the virtual validator of the process. In so doing and by highlighting the positive or negative value of the non-anchored event at the intersubjective level, *vaa(n)* contributes to construing the permissive or preventive meaning of the imperative utterance. This analysis of *vaa(n)* thus allows us to identify the semantic similarities between these two types of imperative constructions, both of which entail a twofold force relationship.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Objectives of the study

This paper addresses the question of what role discourse markers play in imperative clauses with regard to the mechanisms underlying the modal readings of directive utterances. The focus is on Finnish imperative constructions accompanied by the discourse marker *vaa(n)*, as illustrated in (1) and (2).

(1)

(K and M are eating a pastry.)

1	K:	<i>mie</i>	<i>taia</i>	<i>ottaa</i>	<i>vie</i>	<i>iha</i>
		1 _{SG}	may.probably.1 _{SG}	take. _{INF}	again	just
		‘I think I’ll just have (a little bit) more’				

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- 2 M: *ota ota vaa ota vaa*
 take.IMP.2SG take.IMP.2SG VAAN take.IMP.2SG VAAN
 'have [some] **have [some]** VAAN **have [some]** VAAN/go ahead'

(FCDA, Sg121a)

(2)

- 1 *Kuuntele! Äläkä menekään vielä, katso kakun perään.*
 listen.IMP.2SG PROH.2SG.CLT go.CLT yet look.IMP.2SG cake.GEN after
 'Listen! And don't go yet, look after the cake.'
- 2 *Minun on mentävä ulos.*
 1SG.GEN be.3SG go.PASS.PRS.PT out
 'I have to go out.'
- 3 *Älä vaan päästä sitä kakkua palamaan.*
 PROH.2SG VAAN let DET.PART cake.PART burn.INF.ILL
 'Don't VAAN let the cake burn./Be sure not to let the cake burn.'

(Joenpelto, 1980:44)

In example (1), *vaa(n)* occurs in a positive imperative utterance that constitutes the second-pair part of an adjacency pair and has a permissive meaning, whereas in (2), *vaa(n)* is part of a negative imperative utterance with a preventive meaning, that is, it is expressing a warning (see ISK, 2004:§ 1657, 1674).

Apparently similar markers can be found in imperative clauses in other languages, as displayed in the following examples from French (3–5), Swedish (6) and German (7):

(3)

- Mais non, mais non, vous ne me dérangez pas du tout.*
 CONN NEG CONN NEG 2PL NEG 1SG disturb.2PL NEG PREP.ART all
Entrez seulement.
 enter.2PL SEULEMENT
 'No, no, you're not disturbing me at all. Come in SEULEMENT.'

(A. Gide, *Les faux-monnayeurs*, 1925, cited in Grevisse and Goosse, 2007:§ 957 f)

(4)

- 1 *Dites ce que vous voulez dire. N'ayez pas peur.*
 say.IMP.2PL DEM REL 2PL want.2PL say NEG AUX.IMP.2PL NEG fear
 'Say what you want to say. Don't be afraid.'
- 2 *Parlez donc.*
 speak.IMP.2PL DONC
 'Speak **donc**.'

(J. D'Ormesson, *La douane de mer*, 1994, cited in Paillard and Vu Thi, 2012:170)

(5)

- *Quel âge? –Dix-neuf ans... Une curieuse fille, plutôt intéressante que jolie...*
 '–How old is she? –Nineteen... A strange girl, interesting-looking rather than pretty...'
N'allez surtout pas vous mettre des idées en tête...
 NEG go.IMP.2PL SURTOUT NEG REFL.2PL put.INF INDEF.PL idea.PL in mind
 'Don't **surtout** start getting ideas...'

(G. Simenon, *Les vacances de Maigret*, 1948, cited in TLFi, s. v. *surtout*)

(6)

- *Kan jag ta mer tårta?*
 may 1SG take.INF more cake
 '– Can I have some more cake?'
- *Absolut, ta bara.*
 absolutely take.IMP.2 BARA
 '– Of course, have [some] **BARA**/go ahead.'
- Alex tar ännu en stor bit (...).*
 Alex take once more a big slice
 'Alex takes another big slice (...).'

(Hamberg, 2010)

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