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Imperative mood

The **imperative mood** is a grammatical mood that forms a command or request.

An example of a verb used in the imperative mood is the English sentence "Leave!" Such imperatives imply a second-person subject (*you*), but some other languages also have first- and third-person imperatives, with the meaning of "let's (do something)" or "let him/her/them (do something)" (the forms may alternatively be called cohortative and jussive).

Imperative mood can be denoted by the glossing abbreviation **IMP**. It is one of the irrealis moods.

Contents

Formation

Imperative mood is often expressed using special conjugated verb forms. Like other finite verb forms, imperatives often inflect for person and number. Second-person imperatives (used for ordering or requesting performance directly from the person being addressed) are most common, but some languages also have imperative forms for the first and third persons (alternatively called cohortative and jussive respectively).

In English, the imperative is formed using the bare infinitive form of the verb (see English verbs for more details). This is usually also the same as the second-person present indicative form, except in the case of the verb *to be*, where the imperative is *be* while the indicative is *are*. (The present subjunctive always has the same form as the imperative, although it is negated differently – the imperative is negated using *do not*, as in "Don't touch me!"; see do-support. Occasionally *do* is not used: *Dare not touch me!*) The imperative form is understood as being in the second person (the subject pronoun *you* is usually omitted, although it can be included for emphasis), with no explicit indication of singular or plural. First and third person imperatives are expressed periphrastically, using a construction with the imperative of the verb *let*:

- Let me (Let's) see! (Internal monologue equivalent to a first person singular imperative))
- Let us (Let's) go! (equivalent to a first person plural imperative)

- Let us be heard! (Royal we in an equivalent to a first person passive imperative; also constructions like "We are to be heard")
- Let him/her/it/them run! (equivalent to a third person imperative; constructions with *may* are also used)
- Let him/her/it/them be counted! (Eqivalent to a third person passive imperative)

Other languages such as Latin, French and German have a greater variety of inflected imperative forms, marked for person and number, their formation often depending on a verb's conjugation pattern. Examples can be found in the specific language sections below. In languages that make a T–V distinction (*tu* vs. *vous*, *du* vs. *Sie*, *você* vs. *tu*, *tu* vs. *usted*, etc.) the use of particular forms of the second person imperative may also be dependent on the degree of familiarity between the speaker and the addressee, as with other verb forms.

The second person singular imperative often consists of just the stem of the verb, without any ending – this is the case in the Slavic languages, for example.

Syntax and negation

Imperative sentences sometimes use different syntax than declarative or other types of clauses. There may also be differences of syntax between affirmative and negative imperative sentences. In some cases the imperative form of the verb is itself different when negated. A distinct negative imperative form is sometimes said to be in **prohibitive** or **vetative** mood (abbreviated ᴘʀᴏʜ).

Many languages, even not normally null-subject languages, omit the subject pronoun in imperative sentences, as usually occurs in English (see below). Details of the syntax of imperative sentences in certain other languages, and of differences between affirmative and negative imperatives, can be found in some of the other specific language sections below.

Usage

Imperatives are used principally for ordering, requesting or advising the listener to do (or not to do) something: "Put down the gun!"; "Pass me the sauce"; "Don't go too near the tiger." They are also often used for giving instructions as to how to perform a task ("Install the file, then restart your computer"). They can sometimes be seen on signs giving orders or warnings ("Stop"; "Give way"; "Do not enter").

The use of the imperative mood may be seen as impolite, inappropriate or even offensive in certain circumstances.[1] In polite speech, orders or requests are often phrased instead as questions or statements, rather than as imperatives:

- Could you come here for a moment? (more polite than "Come here!")
- It would be great if you made us a drink. (for "Make us a drink!")
- I have to ask you to stop. (for "Stop!")

Politeness strategies (for instance, indirect speech acts) can seem more appropriate in order not to threaten a conversational partner in their needs of self-determination and territory: the partner's *negative face* should not appear threatened.[2] As well as the replacement of imperatives with other sentence types as discussed above, there also often exist methods of phrasing an imperative in a more polite manner, such as the addition of a word like *please* or a phrase like *if you could*.

Imperatives are also used for speech acts whose function is essentially not to make an order or request, but to give an invitation, give permission, express a wish, make an apology, etc.:

- Come to the party tomorrow! (invitation)
- Eat the apple if you want. (permission)
- Have a nice trip! (wish)
- Pardon me. (apology)
- Visit Estonia! (advertisement)

When written, imperative sentences are often, but not always, terminated with an exclamation mark.

First person plural imperatives (cohortatives) are used mainly for suggesting an action to be performed together by the speaker and the addressee (and possibly other people): "Let's go to Barbados this year"; "Let us pray". Third person imperatives (jussives) are used to suggest or order that a third party or parties be permitted or made to do something: "Let them eat cake"; "Let him be executed".

There is an additional imperative form that is used for general prohibitions, consisting of the word "no" followed by the gerund form. The best known examples are "No Smoking" and "No Parking". This form does not have a positive form; that is, "Parking" by itself has no meaning unless used as a noun when it tells that parking is permitted.

Imperatives in particular languages

For more details on imperatives in the languages listed below, and in languages that are not listed, see the articles on the grammar of the specific languages.

English

English usually omits the subject pronoun in imperative sentences:

- You work hard. (indicative)
- Work hard! (imperative; subject pronoun *you* omitted)

However, it is possible to include the *you* in imperative sentences for emphasis.

English imperatives are negated using *don't* (as in "Don't work!") This is a case of *do*-support as found in indicative clauses; however in the imperative it applies even in the case of the verb *be* (which does not use *do*-support in the indicative):

- You **are not** late. (indicative)
- **Don't be** late! (imperative)

It is also possible to use *do*-support in affirmative imperatives, for emphasis or (sometimes) politeness: "Do be quiet!"; "Do help yourself!".

The subject *you* may be included for emphasis in negated imperatives as well, following *don't*: "Don't you dare do that again!"

Latin

Latin regular imperatives include *amā* (2nd pers. singular) and *amāte* (2nd pers. plural), from the infinitive *amāre* ("to love"); similarly *monē* and *monēte* from *monēre* ("to advise/warn"); *audī* and *audīte* from *audīre* ("to hear"), etc. The negative imperative is formed with the infinitive of the verb, preceded by the imperative of *nōlle* ("to not want"): *nōlī stāre* ("don't stand", 2nd pers. singular) and *nōlīte stāre* (2nd pers. plural); compare the positive imperative *stā* ("stand", 2nd pers. singular) and *stāte* (2nd pers. plural).

For third-person imperatives, the subjunctive mood is used instead.

Latin also has a future imperative form. The corresponding forms are *amātō* (singular) and *amātōte* (plural), *monētō* and *monētōte*, *audītō* and *audītōte*. Unlike the present imperative, the future imperative also has special forms for the third person (*amantō, monentō, audiuntō*). See Latin conjugation.

Germanic languages

Dutch

A peculiar feature of Dutch is that it can form an imperative mood in the past tense. Its use is fairly common:[3]

- *Had gebeld!* ("You should have called!")
- *Was gekomen!* ("You should have come!")

German

German verbs have a singular and a plural imperative. The singular imperative is equivalent to the bare stem or the bare stem + *-e*. (In most verbs, both ways are correct.) The plural imperative is the same as the second-person plural of the present tense.

- *sing!* or: *singe!* — said to one person: "sing!"
- *singt!* — said to a group of persons: "sing!"

In order to emphasize their addressee, German imperatives can be followed by the nominative personal pronouns *du* ("thou; you [sg.]") or *ihr* ("you [pl.]"), respectively. For example: *Geh weg! – Geh du doch weg!* ("Go away!" – "Why, you go away!").

German has T/V distinction, which means that the pronouns *du* and *ihr* are used chiefly towards persons with whom one is privately acquainted, which holds true for the corresponding imperatives. (For details see German grammar.) Otherwise, the social-distance pronoun *Sie* ("you") is used for both singular and plural. Since there exists no actual imperative corresponding to *Sie*, the form is paraphrased with the third-person plural of the present subjunctive followed by the pronoun:

- *singen Sie!* — said to one or more persons: "sing!"
- *seien Sie still!* — said to one or more persons: "be quiet!"

German can theoretically form past imperatives and passive imperatives, simply by using the imperative form of the respective <u>auxiliary verbs</u>: *habe gesungen!* ("[you shall] have sung!"), *werde geliebt!* ("[you shall] be loved!"), *sei geliebt worden!* ("[you shall] have been loved!"). None of such forms is really current, however.

Like English, German features many constructions that express commands, wishes, etc. They are thus <u>semantically</u> related to imperatives without being imperatives grammatically:

- *lasst uns singen!* ("let's sing!")
- *mögest du singen!* ("may you sing!")
- *du sollst singen!* ("you shall sing!")

Romance languages

French

Examples of regular imperatives in French are *mange* (2nd pers. singular), *mangez* (2nd pers. plural) and *mangeons* (1st person plural, "let's eat"), from *manger* ("to eat") – these are similar or identical to the corresponding present indicative forms, although there are some irregular imperatives that resemble the present subjunctives, such as *sois*, *soyez* and *soyons*, from *être* ("to be"). A third person imperative can be formed using a subjunctive clause with the conjunction *que*, as in *qu'ils mangent de la brioche* ("<u>let them eat cake</u>").

French uses different word order for affirmative and negative imperative sentences:

- *Donne-le-leur.* ("Give it to them.")
- *Ne le leur donne pas.* ("Don't give it to them.")

The negative imperative (prohibitive) has the same word order as the indicative. See <u>French personal pronouns § Clitic order</u> for detail. Like in English, imperative sentences often end with an exclamation mark, e.g. to emphasize an order.

In French there is a very distinctive imperative which is the imperative mood of <u>preterite tense</u> also called (past imperative or imperative of <u>future perfect</u>), expresses a given order with previous future value which must be executed or fulfilled in a <u>future</u> not immediate, as if it were an action to come, but earlier in relation to another that will also happen in the future. However, this type of imperative is peculiar to French which has only one purpose: to order that something be done before the date or time, therefore, this will always be accompanied by a <u>circumstantial complement</u> of time. However, this imperative is formed with the auxiliary verb of the *avoir* compound tenses and with the auxiliary verb *être* that is also used to form the tenses composed of the pronominal verbs and some of the intransitive verbs, this means that the structure of the verb imperative in its entirety is composed. Examples:

Imperative of preterite tense

Persons	First conjugation	Second conjugation	Third conjugation			
With the verb *avoir*						
2nd sing.	aie aimé	aie fini	aie ouvert	aie reçu	aie rendu	aie mis
1st plural	ayons aimé	ayons fini	ayons ouvert	ayons reçu	ayons rendu	ayons mis
2nd plural	ayez aimé	ayez fini	ayez ouvert	ayez reçu	ayez rendu	ayez mis
With the verb *être*						
2nd sing.	sois allé	sois parti	sois venu	sois mort	sois né	sois devenu
1st plural	soyons allés	soyons partis	soyons venus	soyons morts	soyons nés	soyons devenus
2nd plural	soyez allés	soyez partis	soyez venus	soyez morts	soyez nés	soyez devenus

- ***Soyez levés*** *demain avant huit heures.* (**Get up** tomorrow before eight o'clock.) [With the verb *être*]

- **Ayez *fini*** *le travail avant qu'il (ne) fasse nuit.* (**Finish** the work before it gets dark.) [With the verb *avoir* and optional <u>expletive</u> *ne*]

- ***Aie écrit*** *le livre demain.* (**Write** the book tomorrow.) [With the verb *avoir*]

- ***Soyez partis*** *à midi.* (**Leave** at noon.) [With the verb *être*]

- ***Ayons fini*** *les devoirs à 6 h.* (**Let us complete** homework at 6 o'clock.) [With the verb *avoir*]

In <u>English</u> there is no equivalent grammatical structure to form this tense of the imperative mood; it is translated in imperative mood of present with previous value.

Spanish

In Spanish, imperatives for the familiar singular second person (*tú*) are usually identical to indicative forms for the singular third person. However, there are irregular verbs for which unique imperative forms for *tú* exist. *vos* (alternative to *tú*) usually takes the same forms as *tú* (usually with slightly different emphasis) but unique forms exist for it as well. *vosotros* (plural familiar second person) also takes unique forms for the imperative.

Infinitive	3rd pers. indicative	*tú* imperative	*vos* imperative	*usted* imperative	*vosotros / vosotras* imperative	*ustedes* imperative
comer	*come*	*come*	*comé**	*coma*	*comed**	*coman*
beber	*bebe*	*bebe*	*bebé**	*beba*	*bebed**	*beban*
tener	*tiene*	*ten**	*tené**	*tenga*	*tened**	*tengan*
decir	*dice*	*di**	*decí**	*diga*	*decid**	*digan*
* = unique verb that only exists for this imperative form						

If an imperative takes a pronoun as an object, it is appended to the verb; for example, *Dime* ("Tell me"). Pronouns can be stacked like they can in indicative clauses:

- Me lo dices. ("You tell me it" or "You tell it to me", can also mean "You tell me" as *lo* usually isn't translated)
- Dímelo. ("Tell me it", "Tell it to me", "Tell me")

Imperatives can be formed for *usted* (singular formal second person), *ustedes* (plural second person), and *nosotros* (plural first person) from the respective present subjunctive form. Negative imperatives for these pronouns (as well as *tú*, *vos*, and *vosotros*) are also formed this way, but are negated by *no* (e.g. *No cantes*, "Don't sing").

Portuguese

In Portuguese, affirmative imperatives for singular and plural second person (*tu / vós*) derive from their respective present indicative conjugations, after having their final *-s* dropped.[pt 1] On the other hand, their negative imperatives are formed by their respective subjunctive forms, as well as both affirmative and negative imperatives for treatment pronouns (*você(s)*) and plural first person (*nós*).

Infinitive	*tu* indicative	*vós* indicative	*affirmative tu* imperative	*affirmative vós* imperative	*negative tu* imperative	*negative vós* imperative	*você* imperative	*vocês* imperative	*nós* imperative
comer	*comes*	*comeis*	*come*	*comei*	*não comas*	*não comais*	*(não) coma*	*(não) comam*	*(não) comamos*
beber	*bebes*	*bebeis*	*bebe*	*bebei*	*não bebas*	*não bebais*	*(não) beba*	*(não) bebam*	*(não) bebamos*
ter	*tens*	*tendes*	*tem*	*tende*	*não tenhas*	*não tenhais*	*(não) tenha*	*(não) tenham*	*(não) tenhamos*
dizer	*dizes*	*dizeis*	*diz(e)*	*dizei*	*não digas*	*não digais*	*(não) diga*	*(não) digam*	*(não) digamos*

1. There are some exceptions to this rule; mainly for phonetical reasons and for *vós*, which hold *vós*'s archaic conjugation paradigm, -*des*.

If a verb takes a pronoun, it should be appended to the verb:

- *Diz(e)-me.* ("Tell me") Portugal/Brazil
- *Me diz.* ("Tell me") Brazil (spoken)
- *Diz(e)-mo.* ("Tell me it", "Tell it to me")

Other Indo-European languages

Greek

Ancient Greek has imperative forms for present, aorist, and perfect tenses for the active, middle, and passive voices. Within these tenses, forms exist for second and third persons, for singular, dual, and plural subjects. Subjunctive forms with μή are used for negative imperatives in the aorist.

Present Active Imperative: 2nd sg. λεῖπε, 3rd sg. λειπ**έτω**, 2nd pl. λείπ**ετε**, 3rd pl. λειπ**όντων**.

Irish

Irish has imperative forms in all three persons and both numbers, although the first person singular is most commonly found in the negative (e.g. *ná cloisim sin arís* "let me not hear that again").

Sanskrit

In Sanskrit, लोट् लकार (*lōṭ lakār*) is used with the verb to form the imperative mood. To form the negative, न (na) is placed before the verb in the imperative mood.

Hindi and Bengali

New Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi and Bengali typically use the present indicative as imperatives. For the negative, Hindi uses the preposition *mat* (from Sanskrit *mā*) before the verb. Standard modern Bengali uses the negative postposition /nā/ after a future imperative formed using the *-iyo* fusional suffix (in addition, umlaut vowel changes in the verb root might take place).

Non-Indo-European languages

Finnish

In Finnish, there are two ways of forming a first-person plural imperative. A standard version exists, but it is typically replaced colloquially by the impersonal tense. For example, from *mennä* ("to go"), the imperative "let's go" can be expressed by *menkäämme* (standard form) or *mennään* (colloquial).

Forms also exist for second (sing. *mene*, plur. *menkää*) and third (sing. *menköön*, plur. *menkööt*) person. Only first person singular doesn't have an imperative.

Hebrew and Arabic

Generally, in Semitic languages, every word belongs to a word-family, and is, actually, a conjugation of word-family's three consonant roots. The various conjugations are made by adding vowels to the root consonants and by adding prefixes, in front or after the root consonant. For example, the conjugations of the root K.T.B (ك.ت.ب .כ.ת.ב), both in Hebrew and in Arabic, are words that have something to do with writing. Nouns like *a reporter* or *a letter* and verbs like *to write* or *to dictate* are conjugations of the root K.T.B. The verbs are further conjugated to bodies, times, and so on.

Both in classic Hebrew and in classic Arabic, there is a form for positive imperative. It exists for singular and plural, masculine and feminine second-person. The imperative conjugations look like shortages of the future ones. However, in modern Hebrew, the future tense is often used in its place in colloquial speech, and the proper imperative form is considered formal or of higher register.

The negative imperative in those languages is more complicated. In modern Hebrew, for instance, it contains a synonym of the word "no", that is used only in negative imperative (אַל), and is followed by the future tense.

The verb *to write* in singular, masculine	Future Indicative	Imperative / Prohibitive
Affirmative	tikhtov – תכתוב (*You will write*)	ktov – כתוב uktub -اُكْتُبْ (*Write!*)
Negative	lo tikhtov – לא תכתוב (*You will not write*)	al tikhtov – אל תכתוב (*Don't write!*)

(In Hebrew, some of the Bs sounds like V, and some like B)

The verb *to write* in singular, feminine	Future Indicative	Imperative / Prohibitive
Affirmative	tikhtevi – תכתבי (*You will write*)	כתבי – kitvi اكْتُبِي‎- uktubi (*Write!*)
Negative	lo tikhtevi – לא תכתבי (*You will not write*)	al tikhtevi – אל תכתבי لَا تَكْتُبِي‎- lā taktubī (*Don't write!*)

The verb *to dictate* in singular, masculine	Future Indicative	Imperative / Prohibitive
Affirmative	takhtiv – תכתיב (*You will dictate*)	hakhtev – הכתב (*Dictate!*)
Negative	lo takhtiv – לא תכתיב (*You will not dictate*)	al takhtiv – אל תכתיב (*Don't dictate!*)

Japanese

Japanese uses separate verb forms as shown below. For the verb *kaku* (*write*):

	Indicative	Imperative / Prohibitive
Affirmative	書く *kaku*	書け *kake*
Negative	書かない *kakanai*	書くな *kakuna*

See also the suffixes 〜なさい (*–nasai*) and 〜下さい/ください (*–kudasai*).

Korean

Korean has 6 levels of honorific, all of which have their own imperative endings. Auxiliary verbs 않다 *anta* and 말다 *malda* are used for negative indicative and prohibitive, respectively. For the verb *gada* ("go'"):

Level	Indicative Affirmative	Imperative	Indicative Negative	Prohibitive
(formal) Hasipsio-style	가십니다 *gasimnida*	가십시오 *gasipsio*	가지 않으십니다 *gaji aneusimnida*	가지 마십시오 *gaji masipsio*[vn 1]
Haeyo-style	가세요 *gaseyo*	가세요 *gaseyo*	가지 않으세요 *gaji aneuseyo*	가지 마세요 *gaji maseyo*[vn 1]
Hao-style	가시오 *gasio*	가시오 *gasio*	가지 않으시오 *gaji aneusio*	가지 마시오 *gaji masio*[vn 1]
Hage-style	가네 *gane*	가게 *gage*	가지 않네 *gaji anne*	가지 말게 *gaji malge*
Hae-style	가 *ga*	가 *ga*	가지 않아 *gaji ana*	가지 마 *gaji ma*[vn 2]
(informal) Haera-style	간다 *ganda*	가라 *gara*	가지 않는다 *gaji anneunda*	가지 마라 *gaji mara*[vn 2]

1. Verb and adjective stems that end in ㄹ *l*, including *mal-*, eliminate the last *l* before suffixes starting with *l* (not *r*), *n*, *o*, *p*, and *s*.
2. An imperative suffix *-a(ra)* contracts *mal-* to *ma-* exceptionally. The other verbs are not contracted by *-a(ra)*.

Mandarin

Standard Chinese uses different words of negation for the indicative and the prohibitive moods. For the verb 做 *zuò* (*do*):

	Indicative	Imperative / Prohibitive
Affirmative	做 zuò	做 zuò
Negative	不做 búzuo	别做 biézuò

Turkish

For the most common imperative form, the second person singular, Turkish uses the bare verb stem without the infinitive ending *-mek*/*-mak*. Other imperative forms use various suffixes. In the second person plural there are two forms: the formal imperative with the suffix *-in*/*-ın*/*-un*/*-ün*, and the public imperative used for notices and advice, which uses the suffix *-iniz*/*-ınız*/*-unuz*/*-ünüz*. All Turkish imperative suffixes change depending on the verb stem according to the rules of vowel harmony. For the verb *içmek* ("to drink", also "to smoke" a cigarette or similar):

The verb *içmek* ("to drink")	1st person singular	1st person plural	2nd person singular/informal	2nd person plural/formal	2nd person plural/public advice	3rd person singular	3rd person plural
Imperative form	*içeyim* ("let me drink")	*içelim* ("let us drink")	*iç* ("Drink!")	*için* ("Drink!")	*içiniz* ("Drink!", e.g. *Soğuk içiniz* "Drink cold" on soft drinks)	*içsin* ("let him/her drink")	*içsinler* ("let them drink")

Negative imperative forms are made in the same way, but using a negated verb as the base. For example, the second person singular imperative of *içmemek* ("not to drink") is *içme* ("Don't drink!"). Other Turkic languages construct imperative forms similarly to Turkish.

Footnotes

1. Wierzbicka, Anna, "Cross-Cultural Pragmatics", Mouton de Gruyter, 1991. ISBN 3-11-012538-2
2. Brown, P., and S. Levinson. "Universals in language use", in E. N. Goody (ed.), *Questions and Politeness* (Cambridge and London, 1978, Cambridge University Press: 56-310)
3. A.M. Duinhoven, 'Had gebeld! De irreële imperatief' (http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_tij003199501_01/_tij003199501_01_0031.php), in: Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde. Jaargang 111(1995)

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