Past imperatives: counterfactuality and impoliteness

Vesela Simeonova (University of Graz)

Background. While we usually think of imperatives as future oriented, there is growing evidence that some languages also have **past imperatives (PI)** (Mastop, 2011), a construction that combines **counterfactual** ('CF') past tense marking with imperative meaning and bears a markedly negative attitude of **reprimanding** the addressee (called also 'reproachatives'). The PI construction is gaining interest since it relates morphologically and semantically to a constellation of expressions, while also differing from each: CF conditionals, optatives, past deontic modals, imperatives, exclamatives and expressives. Some analyze it as an insubordinated conditional (Biezma, 2013), while others as a true past imperative (Bosque, 1980; Vicente, 2013; Vallejo, 2017; Karawani & Quer, 2019), see van Olmen (2018) for a hybrid account.

In addition to the nature of the construction, its cross-linguistic distribution also needs explanation: why is it so rare (van Olmen, 2018) and what specific properties make it available in a given language? This is a puzzle for both imperative and conditional accounts of PI, since arguably most languages have linguistic means to express both constructions (or any of the phenomena listed above), but not PI.

New insights from Bulgarian. Most previous works focus on Spanish (Bosque, 1980; Vicente, 2013; Vallejo, 2017) and Dutch (Mastop, 2011, Schwager, 2011; van Olmen, 2018) but face the challenge of impoverished morphology since PI is expressed with infinitival perfect (e.g. *Haber venido!* – ~`Had you come!').

The present work contributes novel findings from Bulgarian (Balkan; South Slavic), a language that lacks infinitives and uninflected verb forms and can therefore inform the PI construction more transparently. Bulgarian has not been discussed in the context of PI; this talk attests that it has the construction, cf. (1).

(1) Da beše složil skrijnšot. Ne četem misli.

SUBJ AUX.2SG.PST put.PP screenshot not read.PRES.1PL thoughts

'~Had you included a screenshot. We can't read thoughts' (natural example)

Note: Since English does not have PI, this translation is an approximation only

I propose that PIs arise at the intersection of three ingredients: (i) non-canonical imperative morphology; (ii) strong counterfactual marking; (iii) conversational givenness. This also has cross-linguistic implications.

Non-canonical imperative. The Bulgarian PI is a true imperative, albeit non-canonical. Arguments: (i) it is not a declarative speech act: (1) does not have a truth-value and cannot be replied to with 'That's not true' (unlike a modal statement with *should have*). Also, it is unembeddable, cf. (2):

- (2) Kazaxa=mi {*da bjax složil / √če e trjabvalo da složa} skrijnšot. told.3pl=me SUBJ AUX.PST.1SG put.PP / that AUX.PRES.3SG should.PP SUBJ put screenshot 'They told me {*that I had included / √ that I should have included a screenshot}.'
- (ii) the morphology of PI in Bulgarian is directly related to that of non-canonical non-past imperatives: PI features the analytic subjunctive particle da, which (among many other uses) is used for **impolite** 2^{nd} person commands (3a) (cf. the standard imperative (3b)) and 3^{rd} person commands, which can range from polite to neutral (4a) to subjunctive (4b) to curses (not shown here).
 - (3) a. (ti) da mŭlčiš! b. Mŭlči!

 you SUBJ keep.quiet.PRES.2SG keep.quiet.2SG.IMPER
 'You keep quiet!' 'Keep quiet!'
 - (4) a. Da vleze sledvaštijat pacient. b. Da živee kralicata! SUBJ enter.PRES.3SG next patient SUBJ live.PRES.3SG queen '~Enter next patient' 'Long live the queen!'
- (iii) PI is directive (unlike exclamatives): the action was doable by the addressee (unlike optatives).

Strong counterfactuality ('CF'). While counterfactuality is usually regarded as cancellable (implicature), some languages have dedicated strong CF marking (Karawani, 2014). In Bulgarian the morphology used to convey strong CF, (5), is the same as in the PI construction, (1): the subjunctive da, also used in imperatives (see above) and the pluperfect, which conveys two layers of past (Ippolito, 2013) – one for the event and one for the modal evaluation, going back in time when the possibility was still open. In PI, this contributes to the meaning of impoliteness in that it emphasises that the now closed possibility (strong CF: you didn't include a screenshot) was still accessible to the addressee at a past time (you could have). If there was still an open possibility that the antecedent was true at the time of utterance, the speaker would not have sufficient grounds to reproach the addressee. Thus, strong CF is a necessary ingredient of PI.

(5) **Da/ako beše složil** skrijnšot, štjaxme da razberem kakŭv e problemŭt. SUBJ/IF AUX.PST.2SG put.PP screenshot FUT.PST.1PL SUBJ understand.1PL what is problem 'If you had put a screenshot (which you didn't), we would've understood what the problem was.'

At the same time, the Bg PI construction cannot be reduced to a CF conditional or an optative: while PI is obligatorily imperative and impolite, they are neither; PI is restricted to actions that were doable by the addressee (1), while optatives are not (e.g. 'if only he were tall'). In addition, the conditional can be formed with *ako* 'if' (5), while PI cannot, and optatives feature dedicated morphology not present in (1).

Givenness. I follow Biezma's (2011) idea that the impoliteness in PIs is also contributed by their givenness – in the conversation or as world knowledge (also van Olmen, 2018), producing a 'duh' effect: cf. the continuation with 'We can't read thoughts' in (1). This is supported by the fact that PIs are not felicitous out of the blue but are rather used as replies. For Biezma, givenness emerges from the inverted conditional structure of PI in Spanish. I suggest that it follows more generally from **strong CF being presupposed**, i.e. taken for granted in the common ground (e.g. that the addressee didn't include a screenshot).

Cross-linguistic outlook. Having proposed what the morphosemantic ingredients of the PI construction in Bulgarian are, I conclude with a conjecture on why PIs are (supposedly?) so rarely found typologically. If the proposal put forth here is on the right track, then PIs cross-linguistically are morphologically dependent on the availability of shared non-canonical imperative morphology and strong CF marking (like the subjunctive described here), and that is arguably rarer than the ingredients proposed by other approaches. Further preliminary support for this conjecture is that of the languages discussed by van Olmen (2018) as having PI, Arabic also has strong CF (Karawani, 2014); so does Spanish (Vallejo, 2017); and in Spanish, Estonian, Dutch, and Hungarian, the form used in PI also shares formal properties with imperatives (including non-canonical ones). It remains to be tested in other languages with PI.

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