

DIFFICULT IMPERATIVES IN TURKISH*

ÖMER DEMİROK¹

DESPINA OIKONOMOU²

Massachusetts Institute of Technology¹, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin²

1 Introduction

Imperative forms cross-linguistically have been associated with *a directive speech act*. That is, they typically carry functions such as command, request, advise, and permission. The imperative form in Turkish, besides its canonical directive use, also has a non-directive use. To illustrate, the imperative form in (1) is licensed in a context that clearly does *not* support a directive function. Rather, (1) expresses the *speaker's attitude that the event expressed by the imperative form is difficult to actualize*.

- (1) Context: *Susan and Melis are in a library which many tourists are visiting. While Melis will watch a movie, Susan needs to study. Seeing the tourists making noise, Susan says to Melis:*

Bu gürültü-de çalış şimdi.

this noise-LOC study.IMP.2SG now

Lit: 'Study with this noise now'

↪ 'It is difficult to study with this noise.'

In reference to this difficulty inference, we label this construction Difficult Imperatives (DIs). In the following section, we discuss the properties of DIs that differentiate them from canonical imperatives (CIs) and show that DIs cannot be derived if the imperative form itself encodes a directive speech. Instead, we argue that DIs involve a mood projection that combines with a *tough*-operator (Section 3). Notably, this analysis has direct implications for canonical imperatives and raises important questions (Section 4).

2 Characterizing Difficult Imperatives

The DI reading of imperative forms is facilitated by a range of idiomatized expressions. These facilitating expressions do not seem to have a compositional contribution to the meaning. The examples in (2) that feature these idiomatized expressions (shown in brackets) are equivalent to (1)

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and are all licensed in the same context. They all convey that (the speaker thinks) *it's difficult to study with the noise (in the library)*.

- (2) a. [**Gel de**] bu gürültü-de çalış.
come.IMP ADD this noise-LOC study.IMP.2SG
- b. [**Hadi**] bu gürültü-de çalış [şimdi].
Come.on this noise-LOC study.IMP.2SG now
- c. Bu gürültü-de çalış [işin yok-sa].
this noise-LOC study.IMP.2SG work.2SG.POS not.exist-COND
- d. [**Gel de**] bu gürültü-de çalış [şimdi] [işin yok-sa].
come.IMP ADD this noise-LOC study.IMP.2SG now work.2SG.POS not.exist-COND

Modulo the difference in melody¹, the CI readings are also available for these strings. For example, the string in (2d) can express an actual command to the addressee ‘*If you don’t have anything to do, come and study with this noise now!*’. This is clearly different from the DI reading of (2d) which is non-directive and seems to be interpreted as an assertion like ‘*It is difficult (for me) to study with this noise.*’.

Where does this difficulty interpretation come from? One possibility is that the DI reading is a special *inference* of CIs. In particular, a directive imperative uttered so as to *challenge* the addressee also licenses this inference. This is exemplified in (3), which challenges the addressee to study. In addition to its directive character, it licenses a difficulty inference.

- (3) Bu gürültü-de çalış da gör-elim
this noise-LOC study.IMP.2SG ADD see-OPT.1PL
‘Lit: Study with this noise! let us see it!’
↷ *It is difficult to study with this noise.*

However, the utterances in (1)-(2) are about the speaker not the addressee (i.e. the speaker expresses that it is difficult for herself to study with the noise). This contrasts with the challenging imperative example in (3), which is about the addressee. In fact, most natural examples of DIs are about the speaker, contrasting with challenging CIs. Although a 2SG imperative form² can be self-directed, this does not automatically derive a DI-inference as shown by (4). The imperative preserves its prototypical directive function: Zeynep clearly invites herself to finish her homework.

- (4) Context: Zeynep is doing her homework. It is getting late, she says to herself:
Hadi Zeynep, bitir artık şu ödev-in-i!
come.on Zeynep finish.IMP.2SG already this homework-2SG.POS-ACC
‘Lit: Come on Zeynep, finish your homework already!’

¹DIs and CIs exhibit different melodic properties. One clear difference is the boundary tone: CIs have a low boundary tone, like declaratives, whereas DIs end with a rise-fall boundary tone (H-L%). There are more differences, also related with the placement and the type of the Nuclear Pitch Accent but we leave their description to future work.

²It should be noted that Turkish has distinct first, second, and third person subjunctive/imperative forms. Notably, the DI examples in (1)-(2) feature 2SG imperative forms although they are about the speaker. On the flip side, 1SG subjunctives are odd in the same contexts. 3SG subjunctives seem to be compatible with a DI-reading. Although these person restrictions are interesting, we have to leave their proper description and explanation to future work.

On the contrary, there is a clear intuition that the examples in (1)-(2) are *not* directive under the DI reading. In other words, they neither invite the addressee to do anything nor are they self-invites (for the speaker) to do anything. In what follows, we argue that this intuition that DIs are not directive is on the right track, showing how DIs differ from CIs.

First, DIs tolerate a *yes/no*-response. However, challenging CIs, even though they might license a similar difficulty inference, do not license such a response. This is illustrated below.

- (5) a. John: Gel de bu gürültü-de çalış. *difficult imperative*
 come.IMP ADD this noise-LOC study.IMP.2SG
 b. Mary: Aynen/evet ya! (Mümkün görünmüyor.)
 Exactly/yes! (It doesn't seem to be possible.)
- (6) a. John: Bu gürültü-de çalış da gör-elim *challenging imperative*
 this noise-LOC study-IMP.2SG ADD see-OPT.1PL
 b. Mary: #Aynen/evet ya! (Mümkün görünmüyor)
 Exactly/yes! (It doesn't seem to be possible.)

Second, DIs can function as anchors to question tags, i.e. the speaker can ask for confirmation of the truthfulness of their statement, as illustrated in (7). This is not possible for directive imperatives, as shown in (8).

- (7) Context: *Mary is hosting a party and there are still many people in the house. She is trying to put her baby to sleep. Susan, one of the guests, sympathizes with Mary and says to her:*
- a. Susan: Bebeğ-i uyut şimdi için yok-sa, **di mi?**
 baby-ACC sleep.CAUS.IMP.2SG now work.2SG.POS not.exist.COND Q-TAG
 Lit: 'Put her to sleep now if you don't have anything to do, right?'
 ~→ *It's difficult to put the baby to sleep, right?*
- b. Mary: Yok ya, uyur şimdi. Hemen uyuyor.
 'No-no, she will sleep soon. She usually falls asleep right away.'
- (8) # Buraya otur, **di mi?**
 here sit.IMP2SG, Q-TAG
 '#Sit here, right?'

These two properties suggest that difficult imperatives function more like declarative than imperative speech acts.

Finally, DIs do not exhibit another core property of CIs. Even the so-called *weak imperatives* (e.g. permission, disinterested advice) have been shown to involve some commitment from the speaker that she is not against the actualization of the prejacent.³ DIs do not feature this restriction which goes hand in hand with their non-directive character. This is illustrated in (9), where the speaker does not express any desire/preference for the prejacent to be realized. On the contrary, as signalled by the underlined continuation, the speaker in fact holds the opposite wish.

³This is expressed in different ways in the literature. The way it is put here is closer to a weak version of the notion of *speaker endorsement* in Kaufmann (2012, 2016) but see also Condoravdi and Lauer (2012).

- (9) *Context: John is watching two politicians on the TV presenting ridiculous arguments. He gets disappointed and utters:*

Gel de güven böyle politikacılara. Umarım kimse bunlara oy vermez.
 come.IMP ADD trust.IMP.2SG such politicians I hope nobody will vote for these.

Lit: ‘Come and trust such politicians!’

Notably, the phenomenon of DIs does not seem to be an idiosyncratic property of imperative forms in Turkish. DIs are also found in other languages such as Greek, Bulgarian and Russian (Oikonomou 2016). The Greek examples in (10) seem to pattern with DIs in Turkish: both a particle like *ande* (Turkish *hadi*) ‘come on!’ and a particular intonation pattern is necessary for the DI reading. Interestingly, the DI reading in Greek surfaces not only with the imperative form but also with the subjunctive form.

- (10) a. *Ande diavase \ na diavasis tora me tetjo thorivo.*
 Come.on study.IMP \ SUBJ study.2SG now with such noise
 ↗ ‘It’s difficult to study with this noise.’

More research is necessary to understand whether DIs exhibit cross-linguistic variation and when they can be attested in a language. However, we take the association of the DI reading with imperative forms in more than one language to be non-accidental and argue that a principled explanation for their correlation is in order. In the following section, we account for the unique properties of DIs by highlighting the role of the imperative mood.

3 Analysis: DIs as MoodPs + *tough*-OP

DIs seem to pattern more like declaratives in the sense that they can be judged true or false, they tolerate question tags and they do not express any deontic, bouletic or teleological modal flavor. Therefore, excluding the idea that a DI reading can be derived from an imperative with a directive function, we are left with two possibilities:

1. The imperative form is truly polysemous: a single form conveys two distinct readings (DIs vs. CIs)
2. The imperative form has a minimal meaning (i.e. does not involve any imperative operator Portner 2004, 2007) and the various meanings are derived by combining this minimal expression with different operators.

Following the analysis in Oikonomou (2016), we argue in favor of the second hypothesis. In particular, we propose that the imperative form is a mood-Phrase with a special imperative [+imp] mood feature. [+imp] restricts the interpretation of the mood-Phrase in certain ways.

In the spirit of Villalta (2008), we analyse [+imp]-feature as introducing a requirement that a modal operator with comparative semantics combines with the Mood_{imp}P. In CIs comparative semantics is contributed by a prioritizing ordering source (Kaufmann, 2012, Condoravdi and Lauer, 2012). In DIs the culprit is an operator conveying relative difficulty, with the meaning in (11) (cf. Keine and Poole 2016, Gluckman 2017).

- (11) $\llbracket \text{OP} \rrbracket^j = \lambda p_{\langle st \rangle}. \lambda s. \forall s', s'' \subseteq \text{DOX}_{\langle j, s \rangle}$ such that $p(s') = 1 \ \& \ p(s'') = 0 \ \& \ \text{MIN}(s')(s'')$,
 $\text{MAX}(\lambda d. \text{TOUGH}(d)(j)(s')) > \text{MAX}(\lambda d. \text{TOUGH}(d)(j)(s''))$
 where $\text{MIN}(s)(s') =_{\text{def}} s$ and s' are minimally different from each other

As can be seen in (11), the operator is interpreted relative to a *judge* (*j*) parameter (Lasersohn, 2005). The operator combines with a proposition *p* and returns the proposition that all situations consistent with the doxastic alternatives of the judge *j* and where *p* is true are more difficult to *j* than situations where *p* is false, granting that the compared situations are minimally different. [Simplifying, we represent the doxastic component as part of the denotation of the operator instead of treating it as a modal base *f* combining with the operator.]

The DI in (1) has the meaning that *all situations consistent with the speaker's beliefs in which the subject studies with this noise are more difficult than those in which she doesn't*. As one can see, this meaning is similar to the interpretation of a declarative clause involving a *tough*-operator, such as *difficult*.

This captures the intuition we described, namely that DIs behave more like declaratives expressing difficulty. However, it fails to account for a property of DIs that differentiates them from plain declaratives that involve an overt difficulty operator. In particular, DIs are only licensed if there is a situation in which it is debated whether *p* will happen or not. Consider the context in (12). Notice that while a plain declarative is licensed in the context, the DI example is infelicitous.

(12) Context: *Susan is making stuffed grape leaves. Mary enters the kitchen and asks her why she is not making pepper dolmas. Susan answers:*

a. #Gel de bu mevsim-de biber bul.
come.IMP ADD this season-LOC pepper find.2SG.IMP

Lit: 'Come and find peppers in this season.'

Difficult Imperative

b. Bu mevsim-de biber bul-mak zor.
this season-LOC pepper find-NMLZ difficult

'It is difficult to find peppers in this season.'

Difficult Declarative

The contrast between (12b) and (12a) can be explained if we add to our system a presuppositional requirement that is already introduced by Kaufmann (2016) to account for the preformative character of imperatives. In particular, Kaufmann (2016) suggests that imperatives occur in a *practical context* such that the *Question Under Discussion* (QUD) corresponds to a *decision problem*⁴, defined as follows:⁵

(13) A *decision problem* for an agent α is a set of non-overlapping propositions where each cell represents a future course of events that is choosable for α . Kaufmann, 2016:22

Returning to the contrast between (12a)-(12b), we can now explain why the DI in (12b) is infelicitous: there is simply no *decision problem* as Susan has already decided what to cook. If we modify the context to involve a still open *decision problem* as in (14), (12a) is perfectly felicitous⁶.

⁴We think that the notion of *decision problem* better explains the restricted distribution of DIs than the notion of *Epistemic Uncertainty* introduced in previous works by Magdalena Kaufmann. Under the latter, it is not clear if (12a) can be accounted for. For the relation between *Epistemic Uncertainty* and *practical context* see Kaufmann, 2016:25.

⁵There are other components in defining a practical context related to decisive modality, which are not relevant for DIs. See Kaufmann 2016 for details.

⁶Notice that in Greek DIs are also licensed in (12). We think that this is because the 2nd person subject in DIs can get a generic interpretation which subsequently licenses DIs under hypothetical decision problems. As we said, the differences between the languages deserve more investigation than the space here allows us.

- (14) *Context: Susan and Mary discuss what they should cook for Sunday's dinner. They are in between stuffed peppers and stuffed cabbage dolma. Susan says:*
 OK_(12a), OK_(12b)

Under this view, DIs and CIs occur in the same environment but while CIs provide a (potential) solution to a decision problem, DIs comment on the difficulty involved in pursuing a certain alternative.

4 Concluding remarks

In this paper, we showed that imperative forms in Turkish can have a non-canonical interpretation that we labelled Difficult Imperatives. The availability of DIs (not only in Turkish but also in Greek, Russian, Bulgarian and probably other languages) posits a challenge to analyses which treat the imperative form as the spell-out of a distinct speech-act (e.g. Han 2000, Portner 2004). Instead, we have argued that the imperative form is the spell-out of a distinct verbal mood-phrase which shares common properties with the subjunctive mood (see a.o. Portner 1997, Stegovec 2016). In this sense, the proposal builds on the insight in Portner's (2004, 2007) minimal approach.⁷ On the other hand, our account is not strictly minimal in that a covert modal operator eventually combines with the mood phrase as a consequence of the requirement of the imperative mood.

Unlike approaches that take imperative forms to be the spell-out of a distinct speech act, our approach allows for the necessary flexibility to derive the differences between CIs and DIs. However, this flexibility can also lead to overgeneration/undergeneration problems.⁸ Hence, an important empirical question that arises from the current analysis is whether Mood_{imp}P can combine with more null or overt operators, as the current setup predicts. Any further inquiry to address this important question should involve identifying potential further semantic restrictions that the imperative mood imposes and characterizing restrictions associated with the syntactic embeddability of Mood_{imp}P.

Another potential worry against our analysis could be our non-compositional treatment of what we called facilitating expressions in DIs. We loosely took them to be PF-indicators of the operator responsible for DIs. It is very likely that future research will reveal them to be more compositional than we have assumed here.

To conclude, depending on what we define as 'imperative form' cross-linguistically, we might be able to detect more non-canonical interpretations of imperative forms which can contribute to our overall understanding of the imperative mood. So far, the only non-canonical meaning which has been discussed in detail for imperatives is Imperative and Declarative constructions (IaDs) (Han 2000, Kaufmann 2012, von Fintel and Iatridou 2017 a.o.). As it appears, the availability of DIs does not correlate with the availability of IaDs (e.g. Turkish lacks IaDs, Palestinian Arabic has IaDs but not DIs, Greek has both). We hope that this work is a step forward towards understanding how these constructions relate to canonical imperatives and to each other.

⁷See von Fintel and Iatridou (2017) for a similar insight for Imperative and Declarative constructions - IaDs.

⁸In particular, Villalta's (2008) theory, which we adopt in our analysis, is designed for the distribution of subjunctive mood in Spanish which can combine with many different predicates.

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