

Atypical Imperatives in Focus: A Constructional Account of 'You do that'

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The centrality of the Imperative in communication, its semantic-pragmatic versatility, and its different syntactic configurations have unceasingly fueled scholarly interest in various linguistic paradigms (cf. Downes 1977; Bolinger 1977; Wilson and Sperber 1988; Han 1998, Stefanowitsch 2003, Takahashi 2004, 2011). Contributing to and extending this line of research through a Construction Grammar (CxG) approach, the present paper draws attention to *atypical*, i.e., *non-canonical*, *Imperatives* and their *Addressee-encoding* by means of overt pronominal Subjects. In particular, the paper focuses on 'you do that' (as in 1-2) and sketches out its constructional account as an instance of a considerably fixed sub-construction of the IMPERATIVE with fairly specific semantics-pragmatics and a distinctive syntactic configuration. It further argues that the construction pairs with a consistent *discourse-responsive* function that takes scope over a previous *Addressee-induced proposition* /p/.

(1) "- 'Nothing's come here, luv. I'll keep it for you if it does. - It'd be quite exciting to get somebody else's mail for once.' - She went back to her Daily Mirror. - 'Well... er... - 'I couldn't think of much else to say. - 'I'll call in tomorrow, just in case.' - ' **You do that**, Mac,' she said without looking up. 'Maybe we'll be less busy. Maybe you'll have a drink next time.'"

BNC: M. Ripley, *Angel series* (extract), W-fict-prose, Year of Publication 1991

(2) "These ladies and gentlemen are here by special invitation. Among them are some of the -- What is it, Lieutenant? - I didn't realize that you were in the middle of this. I'll wait till later. I don't wanna disturb you. - Uh-huh. **You do that**, and it's mate. Now, what were you saying, Lieutenant? - Oh, I don't want to, uh, throw your concentration, sir."

COCA: *Endangered* (subtitles), Film (genre: Action), Release Year: 1994

Geared in this direction, the paper integrates insights from research on *information structure* and *focus-related* phenomena (Lambrecht 1994) and illustrates how they relate to the *Imperative* and its *more or less prototypical sub-constructions* (Stefanowitsch 2003; Takahashi 2004, 2011) which – inter alia – have been shown to differ with respect to *force* (*degree* and *nature*), the (explicit) coding of a *Subject*, and the possible *benefit* arising from the fulfilment of the proposition /p/ involved. Against this background, 'you do that' will be argued to relate to *weak Imperatives* expressing *acquiescence* and *indifference* (von Fintel and Iatridou 2017), thus inheriting properties that account for its systematic encoding of *low Speaker-endorsement vis-à-vis* /p/. Therefore, the hypothesis entertained is that, unlike typical Imperatives, 'you do that' couches not the Speaker's desire(s) but his/her acceptance of the Addressee's wishes expressed through /p/. Interestingly, acceptance in this case will be shown to range from a form of *indifference* to *casual nonchalance* or even a *grudging*, 'passive-aggressive' one. In the context of all the above, the following emerge as research questions: a) How is 'you do that' different from its seeming 'formal twins' in the Indicative (e.g., "**You do that** when you're pissed..." (BNC)) or the Imperative featuring in an AND-CONDITIONAL IMPERATIVE (Culicover and Jackendoff 1997; Kaufmann 2012) as in "**You do that**, Father, **you do that** just once and there'll be one less for breakfast tomorrow morning." (COCA), b) What are its inherited and idiosyncratic properties that license its semantics and discourse-pragmatics? c) What are its discourse correlates and how do they relate to its scope and function? And d) how productive is its Imperative-based licensing template to be profitably related to other language patterns, such as the recently trending 'you do you'? To respond to the above, the paper adopts a usage-based methodological framework relying on empirical, corpus (BNC & COCA) evidence that is examined from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective. The corpus-based evidence collected is further correlated with the preliminary results of a small-scale written response survey targeting the levels of awareness that instructors of English as a second language (ESL) and material developers working in two international ESL publication houses have over the specific Imperative-based pattern, its semantics, and conventionalised discourse-pragmatics.

Key Words: non-canonical Imperative constructions, overt subjects, Addressee-encoding, acquiescence

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