

## On overt subjects in English negative imperatives

E Jamieson, University of Edinburgh

**Background:** Subject licensing is one of the biggest topics in the literature on the syntax of English imperatives (e.g. Beukema & Coopmans 1989, Potsdam 1996, Rupp 2003, Zanuttini 2008). Beukema & Coopmans (1989) claimed only 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronominal *you*, or quantifier phrases (QPs) such as *everybody* could be imperative subjects. Potsdam (1996) extended this to include indefinites e.g. *somebody*; partitives e.g. *a few of you*; definites e.g. *the man with the list*; bare plurals e.g. *truck drivers*, and names e.g. *Jess*. Further work (e.g. Zanuttini 2008) has maintained this position with acknowledgment of some inter-speaker variation.

Though the focus in the literature has always been on positive imperatives, the works referenced have assumed that English negative imperatives share the same range of available subjects as positive imperatives. However, they have also claimed that negative imperative subject *positions* are variable, with subjects either occurring above or below *don't* (Davies 1981, Potsdam 1996, Rupp 2003).

1. Passengers with luggage<sub>i</sub> **don't** leave their<sub>i</sub> valuables unattended.
2. **Don't** the twins both be here for the picture! (both Potsdam 1996)
3. Everybody **don't** talk all at once!
4. **Don't** you tell her about the party!

High subjects (above *don't*) can be distinguished from vocatives by e.g. a lack of intonation boundary between the subject and the verb, and the ability to trigger 3<sup>rd</sup> person agreement (see Jensen 2003 for a full list).

So all possible imperative subjects can, supposedly, occur above (1,3) or below (2,4) *don't* in negative imperatives. This variable subject position is difficult to account for theoretically, requiring either optional subject-auxiliary inversion (Potsdam 1996) or some sort of flexible subject distribution (Rupp 2003). There has so far been no experimental work to establish whether this flexibility is truly motivated by the distribution.

**Data:** Using an acceptability judgment task where participants rated examples like those in (1-4) on a Likert scale from 1-5, I gathered data from 40 native English speakers in order to test two hypotheses:

- a) There is no high subject position in English negative imperatives; true subjects are always below *don't*.
- b) The only true subjects permitted in negative imperatives are 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronominals and QPs (e.g. Beukema & Coopmans' position)

Care was taken to ensure that the 'high' subjects did not meet Jensen's (2003) criteria for interpretation as vocatives (e.g. no intonation break, 2<sup>nd</sup> person binding).

**Results:** Regarding hypothesis (b), 'other' subjects were significantly dispreferred ( $p < .001$ ) in low position when compared to 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronoun and QP subjects, indicating that perhaps they are *not* available as true subjects. Regarding hypothesis (a), none of the possible subject types fared particularly well in high contexts, with mid-range ratings for all three types. For *you* and QPs, this score was significantly lower than the score for low position; for 'other' subjects, it was significantly higher.

	<i>YOU</i>	QP	'OTHER'
HIGH	3.56	3.03	3.44
LOW	4.74	4.28	2.54

Table 1: Mean scores for each subject type in high and low positions

It is also worth noting that when presented with examples where *you* or a QP was in high position, participants gave additional comments stating they would prefer to have the subject low (e.g. *don't you* rather than *you don't*). In all high subject cases, some also suggested there needed to be greater 'separation' between the 'subject' and *don't* – i.e. adding the vocative intonation break identified by Jensen (2003). I believe this accounts for the mid-range scores of the 'high' subjects – only minor adjustments had to be made to give these vocative interpretations.

Based on these results, I contend that only *you* and QPs are

possible English negative imperative subjects, and that optional 'high' subjects in negative imperatives are really vocatives.

**Analysis:** I posit an analysis for these results in which all English imperative subjects – as with declarative and interrogative subjects – are in SpecTP, as is argued by Potsdam (1996) on the basis of evidence from adverbial positioning. In negative imperatives, I argue that *don't* is base generated high (see Henry 1995, Weir 2013 for arguments to this effect), and the subject is not able to move above this. This accounts for the subject positioning results and does not require any optional movement.

Regarding the acceptability (or lack thereof) of 'other' subjects, I will discuss two potential analyses. Firstly, following Zanuttini (2008) 2<sup>nd</sup> person features can be assigned to any imperative subject through semantic binding and syntactic agreement from a high position (she posits JussiveP, which I follow below), permitting them to have the 'addressee' interpretation and 2<sup>nd</sup> person binding.

I posit that *don't* in C blocks the possibility of the functional head valuing the subject in SpecTP with 2<sup>nd</sup> person features. Therefore, the 'other' subjects are unable to take on the addressee subject role required in an imperative (Figure 2). *You* is acceptable as it already has 2<sup>nd</sup> person features, and is claimed to only check its existing features with the Jussive head (Zanuttini 2008). The acceptability of QPs is much harder to account for. There is a possible escape route by arguing for Quantifier Raising to CP (Fox 2000), with subsequent reconstruction at both PF and LF (Bobaljik 2002) to get both the right pronunciation below *don't* and the subject scoping under the negation (Potsdam 2013). However, this sort of double reconstruction has been criticised in the literature (e.g. Sobin 2004) as it is entirely covert movement and is thus theoretically undesirable.

The alternative analysis requires more broadly arguing that 3<sup>rd</sup> person subjects (e.g. 1-2) cannot be the subjects of imperatives. In Zanuttini's account, these 3<sup>rd</sup> person subjects have null determiners which are valued by the Jussive head with 2<sup>nd</sup> person features, allowing them to bind 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns while retaining 3<sup>rd</sup> person interpretations. To get the correct distribution here, this null determiner would have to not be available for valuation; valuation would still be possible for QPs, which are valued on the null NP corresponding to their domain restriction (Zanuttini 2008). Of course, following this alternative analysis would have consequences for the availability of subjects in positive imperatives. Testing whether this more restrictive alternative analysis is justified would require further experimental work on acceptability of various subjects in positive imperatives as claimed in the literature.

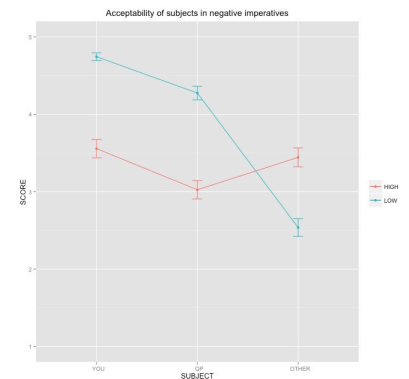


Figure 1: Availability of subjects in high/low position, means plotted

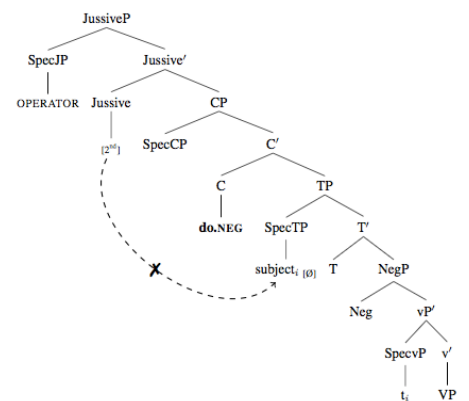


Figure 2: Negation blocks person assignment