

In Lithuanian, the 2SG imperative can be used “to express surprise” (Ulvydas, ed. 1971, 61).

This is illustrated in (1) (my own example):

(1) Lithuanian

<i>Nu</i>	<i>ir</i>	<i>pasitaiky-k</i>	<i>tu</i>	<i>man,</i>	<i>kad</i>	<i>būtent</i>
PCL	PCL	happen-IMP.2SG	you(SG).NOM	me.DAT	that	precisely
<i>šit-q</i>	<i>ryt-q</i>	<i>mano</i>	<i>mylim-a</i>	<i>ses-ė</i>		
this-ACC.SG	morning-ACC.SG	my	beloved-NOM.SG.F	sister-NOM.SG		
<i>atsirado</i>	<i>su</i>	<i>siuntinuk-u</i>	<i>visoki-ų</i>	<i>gėrybi-ų</i>		
turn.up.PST.3	with	parcel-INS.SG	various-GEN.PL	goodies-GEN.PL		
<i>iš</i>	<i>nam-ų.</i> ¹					
from	home-GEN.PL					

‘Now imagine my beloved sister turning up precisely this morning with a parcel full of goodies from home.’

This mirative imperative is part of a construction consisting of

– the 2SG imperative, followed by

– the NOM.SG pronoun *tu* ‘you’ (even with verbs that do not licence an animate subject that could be addressed), followed by

– the ethic dative *man* ‘me’ (i.e. a dative not licenced by the verb and expressing the speaker’s interest in, or affectedness by, the situation described by the verb, as in French *regardez-moi ça*, German *Dass du mir nicht zu spät kommst* etc.).²

This use of the imperative is reminiscent of similar uses in Russian:

(2) Russian

<i>I</i>	<i>slučis’</i>	<i>emu</i>	<i>odnaždy</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>usmireni-i</i>
and	happen.IMP.2SG	him.DAT	one.day	at	punitive.action-LOC.SG
<i>v</i>	<i>odn-om</i>	<i>pomeščič’-em</i>	<i>imeni-i</i>	<i>byt’, i</i>	
in	one-LOC.SG.M	landowner.ADJ-LOC.SG.M	estate-LOC.SG	be.INF and	
<i>uznaj</i>	<i>on</i>	<i>ot</i>	<i>gospodin-a</i>	<i>pomeščik-a,</i>	
learn.IMP.2SG	he.NOM	from	Mr.-GEN.SG	landowner-GEN.SG	

[*čto glavnyj naustitel’ vsej smuty est’ mestnyj svjaščennik.*]

‘Imagine him being present one day at a punitive action at some country gentleman’s estate, and learning from the gentleman [that the main instigator of the unrest was the local priest].’ (NKRJa, from Saltykov-Ščedrin)

This Russian imperative is said to describe “unexpected action” (Xrakovskij & Volodin 1986, 245). Whereas no special study seems to have been devoted to the Lithuanian mirative, much has been written on Russian imperatives as illustrated in (2), and they have been taken to shed light on certain semantic aspects of imperatives.

¹ <http://pieniuzudejimas.blogspot.com/2009/09/puikus-rudeninis-savaitgalis.html> (accessed March 2017)

² According to the Academy Grammar (Ulvydas, ed., 1971) the 3SG.M pronoun *jam* can also be used instead of *man*, but this does not seem to be characteristic of the modern standard language.

The Russian imperative in (2) has never been described as mirative. Instead, one finds such terms as

- Narrative imperative (Mazon 1914, after him Fortuin 2000)
- Descriptive imperative (Ebeling 1956)
- Dramatic imperative (Isačenko 1960)
- Historical imperative (Aikhenvald 2010)

In this talk I will raise the following questions:

– are mirative and narrative (descriptive, dramatic...) imperatives instances of the same gram type, or are they different?

– where do mirative (narrative, descriptive...) imperatives come from?

THE RUSSIAN MIRATIVE/DRAMATIC/NARRATIVE/HISTORICAL IMPERATIVE

As reflected in the terms cited above, authors discussing Russian imperatives as in (2) tend to interpret the feature of “unexpected action” as evidence for its narrative function: such imperatives describe a dramatic turn in a narrative. This narrative character is, however, not recognized by all authors; it is not mentioned, e.g., in Xrakovskij & Volodin (1986), who describe oppositive (*protivitel'nye*) constructions as the typical context for the use of this type of imperative. Actually a contrast is not really required: the opening sentence provides background information allowing the listener to understand why the information contained in the following sentence is unexpected. An example quoted by Xrakovskij & Volodin:

- (3) Russian
- | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Nakuri-l-i</i> | <i>na</i> | <i>zasedani-i,</i> | <i>a</i> | <i>ja</i> | <i>da</i> | <i>i</i> |
| smoke.up-PST-PL | at | meeting-LOC.SG | and | I.NOM | PCL | PCL |
| <i>voz'm-i</i> | <i>i</i> | <i>raskroj</i> | <i>potom</i> | <i>okn-o</i> | | <i>naprotiv</i> |
| take-IMP.2SG and | open.IMP.2SG | | afterwards | window-ACC.SG | | opposite |
| <i>mo-ego</i> | <i>stol-a...</i> | | | | | |
| my-GEN.SG.M | table.GEN.SG | | | | | |
- ‘They smoked up the room during the meeting and I took it into my head to open the window opposite my table.’ (from E. Evtušenko; said by a person explaining how he caught a cold)

Such a minimal context is often required in Lithuanian as well, so that the situation is perhaps not essentially different from what it is in Russian:

- (4) Lithuanian
- [*Aš pati tikrai lėkčiau į kokias sunkumų kilnojimo varžybas ir ne tik,*]
- | | | | | | |
|-------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|------------|
| <i>bet</i> | <i>pasitaiky-k</i> | <i>tu</i> | <i>man</i> | <i>taip,</i> | <i>kad</i> |
| but | happen-IMP.2SG | you(SG).NOM | me.DAT | so | that |
| <i>tą</i> | <i>savaitgal-į</i> | <i>kel-siu</i> | <i>sparn-ą</i> | <i>į užsienį.</i> ³ | |
| that.ACC.SG | weekend-ACC.SG | raise-FUT.1SG | wing-ACC.SG | abroad | |
- ‘[I would gladly rush to take part in a weightlifting competition and not only that], but luck will have it that I’m going abroad that weekend.’

The Russian narrative imperative differs from the Lithuanian mirative imperative in

3 <https://mobile.facebook.com/BeatosVirtuve/>

– lexical distribution: in its variety closest to the Russian narrative imperative, the Lithuanian mirative imperative is derived from happenstance verbs, whereas there are no such restrictions in Russian;

– person: the Russian narrative imperative has an overt 3rd-person (less frequently 1st-person) subject, whereas the Lithuanian mirative imperative can have no subject apart from the 2nd-person pronoun *tu* (if it is indeed a subject).

I will argue that these differences are a consequence of the different paths of development of the two imperatives.

ORIGIN OF THE RUSSIAN HISTORICAL IMPERATIVE

Several explanations have been proffered for the Russian historical imperative:

(1) a historical accident: according to Stender-Petersen (1930) the historical imperative could go back to an Old Russian aorist, as for some verbs (Leskien's 4th class) the 2/3SG imperative and the 2/3SG aorist phonetically coincided. For other explanations in a similar vein cf. Gronas 2006 (the Common Slavonic imperative goes back to an IE optative, and optatives with past tense functions are attested in several IE branches).

(2) the historical imperative is a genuine imperative. Further explanations differ:

(2a) the historical imperative originated in a specific context: Isačenko (1960) suggests ellipsis in internal monologue: *a on [podumal]: vernis'* 'and suddenly he thought: "Go back!" → *a on vernis'* 'suddenly he went back.IMP.2SG'.

(2b) the historical uses of the imperative reflect a certain aspect of the general meaning of the imperative. Jakobson (1932) describes the imperative as "Modus der willkürhaften Handlung". Citing a 19th-century Russian grammar by Nekrasov, he formulates the general meaning (*Gesamtbedeutung*) of this category as follows: "es gibt [...] keinen wirklichen Zusammenhang zwischen der Handlung und der handelnden Person. Die sprechende Person verfügt sozusagen in diesem Fall über die Handlung". This is echoed in Aikhenvald (2010, 249): "In sentences involving dramatic imperative, the speaker is 'in charge' of the action".

Even if we reject Stender-Petersen's explanation, the Russian narrative imperative can probably not be accounted for without recourse to diachrony. In modern Russian grammar the narrative imperative, which, according to Xrakovskij & Volodin (1986, 245) always has an overt subject, usually 3rd person, rarely 1st person but never 2nd person, is described as a 'transposition' of the 2nd person sg. imperative (Švedova, ed., 1970, 579). Historically, however, we cannot ignore the fact that what is now the 2SG imperative was originally a common form for 2SG and 3SG (2SG and 3SG optative having phonetically coalesced already in Common Slavonic). There are still residual uses of this form in 3rd person function, viz.

– fossilized expressions like *spasibo* 'thank you' < *spasi Bog* 'may God save [you]'

– imprecations, e.g.

(5) **Provalis'** *unter-officer-š-a*. (Gogol, *The Government Inspector*)
sink.through.IMP.2SG *non.commissioned.officer-F-NOM*
'The devil take the officer's widow.' (lit. 'may she sink through the ground')

In its central function, the 3rd person imperative was replaced with an analytic construction involving the hortative particle *pust'* (originally the imperative of *pustit'* 'let'):

- (6) **Pust'** *on* **pridet** *sjuda.*
 HORT he.NOM **come.FUT.3SG** hither
 'Let him come here.'

In the more peripheral functions the original 3rd person value of such imperatives survived and they were subsequently extended also to 1st person and to the plural⁴. These peripheral functions include:

– the hypothetic (conditional) function, as in

- (7) **Prid-i** **on,** *vse* *by* *uladilos'.*
come-IMP.2SG **he.NOM** everything.NOM IRR turn.out.well.PST.N
 'If he had come, everything would have turned out well.'

– the narrative use under discussion here.

There is thus a certain likelihood that the Russian narrative imperative is a 3rd person hortative.

OTHER NARRATIVE IMPERATIVES AND WHERE THEY COME FROM

The Russian narrative imperative has been compared with narrative imperatives in other languages, e.g., with the descriptive (narrative) imperative of spoken Palestinian Arabic (Henkins 1994, Fortuin 2000, 144). The following example is from Palva (1977):

- (8) spoken Palestinian Arabic
säkkar *ha-l-bāb.* **ṭəʔʔi** *ha-s-sandūʔ*
 close.PERF.3.SG.M DEF-door **open.IMP.2SG.F** DEF-chest
wanno **ṭālfi** *ha-l-ǧrāb*
 ? **pull.forth.IMP.2SG.F** DEF-socking
 'He closed the door. She opened the chest, pulled forth the stocking..
 (lit. open the chest, pull forth the stocking...)

This is clearly an imperative used in apostrophe, i.e., it is a rhetorical or narrative device, which justifies the use of the term 'narrative'. The narrative imperatives of many other languages can also be explained as apostrophic (cf. Spitzer 1918 on Romance).

- (9) Italian
Il naso, appena fatto, cominciò a crescere:
 the nose hardly made started to grow.INF
e cresci, cresci, cresci,
 and grow.IMP.2SG grow.IMP.2SG grow.IMP.2SG
 [diventò in pochi minuti un nasone che non finiva mai.]
 'No sooner had he made [the nose] than it began to grow. And it grew, and grew, and grew, until in a few minutes it had become an immense nose that seemed as if it would never end.' (Carlo Collodi)

Apostrophe may also involve other than imperatival clause types, e.g., affirmations (*To this you answered, O swineherd Eumaeus...*), so that it is not obvious an explanation should be sought in the meaning of the imperative as such. One could say, in the spirit of Jakobson's formulation, that "the speaker is in charge of the action": in order to make the action advance more rapidly, the narrator interferes in the narrated events by exhorting a character to act

⁴ This explanation does not apply to the so-called necessitive imperative (as in *ja rabotaj* 'I'm expected to work'), which I have described as an echoic (interpretive) 2SG imperative, cf. Holvoet & Konickaja (2011).

more energetically. But this happens at the level of style/narrative technique, not of grammar; of course, when such an apostrophic imperative is frequently used, it can eventually become a grammatical phenomenon. Apostrophic imperatives are obviously one of the sources for narrative imperatives.

Formally, apostrophic imperatives do not differ from ordinary imperatives: they are normally 2nd person, and normally have no overt subject. The Russian narrative imperative, which has an overt 3rd person (less frequently 1st person) subject, is therefore not likely to have originated as an apostrophic imperative. On the basis of what we know about the history of this form, we can trace it back to a 3rd person hortative. 3rd person hortatives referring to unexpected/surprising events are attested in at least one other language: Dutch.

THE DUTCH MIRATIVE HORTATIVE

In Dutch the 3rd person hortative is provided by the verb *laten* 'let', originally used in a permissive construction but now often behaving as a hortative auxiliary, agreeing with the subject of the verb to which the hortative marking is applied:

- (10) Dutch
Laten *zij* *maar met een oplossing* **kom-en.**
 let.PRS.3PL they.NOM PCL with a solution come-INF
 'Let them come up with a solution.'

The mirative use appears in:

- (11) *En laat er nu eens zo'n wondermiddel*
 and let.PRS.3.SG there PCL PCL such.a miracle.cure
op de markt gekomen zijn!
 on the market come.PP be.INF
 [*Althans, daar lijkt het op.*]⁵
 'Now imagine such a miracle cure suddenly appearing on the market. [At least that is what it looks like].'

As in Russian, this mirative use stands alongside a hypothetical use:

- (12) *Laat ABC een driehoek zijn met de hoek ABC groter*
 let a triangle be.INF with the angle greater
dan de hoek BCA.
 than the angle
 (common type of sentences in geometry books)

This suggests a common motivation for hypothetical and mirative use. Hypothetical use consists in the speaker appealing to the addressee to imagine a certain state of affairs so that one can go on to consider what would follow from it. This involves **subjectification**: in the case of a normal hortative, the addressee is asked to undertake something in order that a certain state of affairs might be realized; in the case of hypothetical use, this happens only in the mind of the addressee. In the case of mirative use the addressee is asked to make an imaginative effort enabling her/him to accept a piece of information that is otherwise hard to accept because it is unexpected. It is possible for this exhortation to an imaginative effort to be made explicitly, cf.

Hypothetic effect:

5 www.trendystyle.nl/.../creme-tegen-haargroei.html -

(13) *Imagine you are in a sinking boat and surrounded by sharks. How do you survive?*⁶

Mirative effect:

(14) *She had a very sheltered childhood. And then suddenly – imagine the most rebellious teenager suddenly being given a throne.*⁷

THE ORIGIN OF THE LITHUANIAN MIRATIVE IMPERATIVE

The origin of the Lithuanian mirative imperative is easy to reconstruct as all the successive stages in its development are extant. As imperatives normally require animate addressees, the construction with happenstance verbs illustrated in (1) must be secondary with regard to constructions with verbs licencing animate subjects:

(15) Lithuanian

<i>Ir</i>	<i>gim-k</i>	<i>tu</i>	<i>man</i>	<i>taip –</i>	<i>per</i>
and	be.born-IMP.2SG	you(SG).NOM	me.DAT	like.that	during
<i>pat-į</i>		<i>viduržiem-į!</i> ⁸			
very-ACC.SG.M		midwinter-ACC.SG			

‘How strange to be born like that in the middle of the winter!’

As an imperative normally presupposes agentivity, this construction must, in its turn, be secondary with regard to a variety with verbs involving control on the part of the subject:

(16) Lithuanian

<i>Nu</i>	<i>ir</i>	<i>sugalvo-k</i>	<i>tu</i>	<i>man</i>	<i>tok-į</i>
PCL	PCL	think.of-IMP.2SG	you(SG).NOM	me.DAT	such-ACC.SG.M
<i>pavojing-q</i>		<i>aparāt-q</i>		<i>pasigaminti.</i> ⁹	
dangerous-ACC.SG		device-ACC.SG		construct.INF	

‘What an idea to construct such a dangerous device.’

But this cannot be the ultimate source of the construction either, because there is no obvious explanation for the use of an imperative to describe astonishment at an incongruous course of action. Ultimately the mirative construction can be traced back to the rhetorical imperative, a device commonly used in many languages to express impossibility (cf. Donne’s *Go and catch a falling star!*):

(17) Lithuanian

<i>Aha,</i>	<i>ras-k</i>	<i>tu</i>	<i>man</i>	<i>vald-išk-q</i>
INTERJ	find-IMP.2SG	2SG.NOM	me.DAT	government-ADJ-ACC.SG

įstaig-q,
office-ACC.SG
[*kurioje nebūtų laiko pro langus paspoksot.*]
‘Ah, just try to find a government office [where one doesn’t have time enough to stare out of the windows].’ (DLKT, from André Eivaitė: *Kontora. Tarnybinis detektyvas.*)
(implied sense: there is no such government office)

6 <https://www.quora.com/Imagine-you-are-in-a-sinking-rowboat-surrounded-by-sharks-How-would-you-survive>

7 <http://www.npr.org/2016/11/27/503489407/julia-baird-paints-a-stronger-more-likable-victoria-the-queen>

8 <http://www.vaikystes-sodas.lt/Austejos-blogas/I-am-Malala.-Arba-astuntasis-MS-gimtadienis.-/16988>

9 <http://www.andriusgrigaliunas.lt/2014/11/kontaktinis-suvirinimo-aparatas.html>

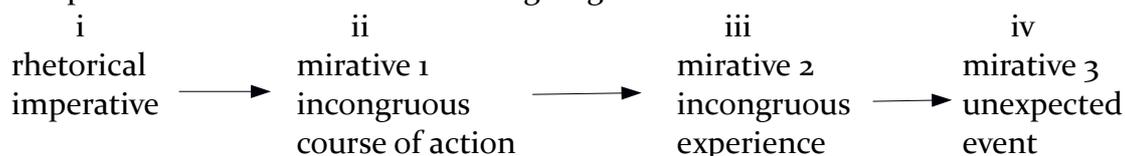
We can find cases of ambiguity between a rhetorical imperative and an ‘incongruous-course-of-action’ reading, cf.

- (17) Lithuanian
Nu bet išei-k tu man atostog-ų
 PCL PCL go.out-IMP.2SG 2SG.NOM me.DAT holiday-GEN.PL
per Jonin-es.¹⁰
 during Midsummer-ACC.PL
 (i) ‘Just try to take a holiday during the Midsummer days.’
 (ii) ‘What an idea to take a holiday during the Midsummer days.’

These two constructions are, however, formally not quite identical: the ethic dative is not obligatory with the rhetorical imperative. In this sense (17) could also appear as (18):

- (18) Lithuanian
Išei-k tu atostog-ų per
 go.out-IMP.2SG 2SG.NOM holiday-GEN.PL during
Jonin-es.
 Midsummer-ACC.PL
 ‘Just try to take a holiday during the Midsummer days.’

The development thus includes the following stages:



The fourth type is the one that comes closest to a historical/narrative imperative in the sense that it can be used in a narrative context as a device to move the action forward:

- (19) Lithuanian
Gyveno Plungėje du kaimyn-ai ir atsitik
 live.PST.3 PLN-LOC two.NOM.M neighbour-NOM.PL and happen.IMP.2SG
tu man taip, kad pas abudu kaimyn-us
 2SG.NOM me.DAT so that at both.ACC neighbour-ACC.PL
tą pači-ą dien-ą gimė sūn-ūs,
 that.ACC.SG same-ACC.SG.F day-ACC.SG be.born.PST.3 son-NOM.PL
 [ir dar, per pačias Petrines ir Povilines].¹¹
 ‘There lived two neighbours in Plungė and chance would have it that in both households sons were born on the same day and, what is more, on the very day of St. Peter and Paul.’

IN CONCLUSION

Explaining the use of imperatives to convey unexpected or surprising events by invoking some general meaning aspect of imperatives is clearly not satisfactory; such uses may have various sources, three of which have been identified here.

¹⁰ <https://www.tax.lt/temos/1320-atostoginiai/13>

¹¹ <http://lietuvsdiena.lrytas.lt/aktualijos/petra-lietuva-myli-o-povilo-ne-pilietybes-istatymo-vingrybes.htm>

Whether ‘mirative’ and ‘narratives’ imperatives represent one single category (gram-type) or several remains an open question. There are certainly differences between languages, and there may be a continuum going from purely mirative imperatives to narrative imperatives denoting unexpected events.

The fact that there are paths of development leading from different sources to some or other kind of mirative/narrative imperative seems to suggest that such imperatives are indeed a cross-linguistically identifiable minor gram-type. This would point to a certain archetype of unmotivated/unexpected/surprising events that tends to be expressed by imperatives. This could be viewed as a certain vindication of Jakobson’s notion of a “mode of arbitrary action”.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACC—accusative, ADJ—adjective, DAT—dative, DEF—definite, F—feminine, FUT—future, GEN—genitive, HORT—hortative, IMP—imperative, INF—infinitive, INS—instrumental, INTERJ—interjection, IRR—irrealis, LOC—locative, M—masculine, N—neuter, NOM—nominative, PCL—particle, PERF—perfect, PL—plural, PLN—place name, PP—past participle, PRS—present, PST—past, SG—singular

SOURCES

DLKT—Corpus of Modern Lithuanian, <http://tekstynas.vdu.lt/tekstynas>

NKRJa—Russian National Corpus, www.ruscorpora.ru

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