

Manuscript title:

**Object drop in imperatives and the status of imperative subjects**

*Željko Bošković*

*University of Connecticut*

- 1 **Abstract:** The paper examines object drop in imperatives and argues that the null  
2 object in question undergoes movement to the left periphery. The paper also  
3 examines the position of overt imperative subjects, and argues that in some, but  
4 not all languages overt imperative subjects undergo movement to the left  
5 periphery, where the crosslinguistic variation in question correlates with the  
6 precise verbal form used in imperatives, the relevant difference being true  
7 imperatives vs other/bare forms used as imperatives (the latter leads to movement  
8 of overt imperative subjects to the left periphery).
- 10 **Keywords:** imperatives, null objects, *pro*-licensing, subject A'-movement

---

This file was last updated on September 16<sup>th</sup> 2024

11

# 1 Introduction

2 This article examines object drop in a particular type of imperatives, the starting  
3 point being such object drop in English imperatives (though the discussion will  
4 include a number of Slavic, Romance, and Germanic languages, as well as  
5 Hungarian). A major concern during the discussion will be what this object drop  
6 can tell us about the position of imperative subjects. While imperatives typically  
7 have a null subject, as in (1), the subject can be overtly realized, as in (2).

- 8  
9 (1) Buy yourself a nice present!  
10 (2) You buy yourself a nice present!

11  
12 Object drop in imperatives is illustrated by (3a). Previous literature has observed  
13 that object drop in imperatives is blocked when the imperative subject is overtly  
14 realized, as in (3b) (see Sadock 1974; Sigurðsson and Maling 2008; Bošković  
15 2011).<sup>1</sup>

- 16  
17 (3) a. Open carefully!  
18 b. \*You open carefully!  
19 c. cf. You open it carefully!

20  
21 I will use this paradigm to probe into the nature of the null element in question  
22 as well as the position of overt subjects in imperatives. I will argue that the null  
23 object undergoes movement to the left periphery for licensing reasons. This is on  
24 a par with what has been argued in the literature for other null elements (see e.g.  
25 Johnson 2001; Fujiwara 2022; Mizuno in press). Overt subjects in imperatives  
26 will also be argued to undergo movement. It will be observed that there is actually  
27 crosslinguistic variation regarding constructions like (3b), and a principled  
28 criterion that distinguishes contexts and languages where (3b) is allowed and  
29 where it is disallowed will be proposed. The precise verbal form used in  
30 imperatives will be argued to play a crucial role in this respect. Consequences of  
31 object drop in imperatives for analyzing argument drop in several other contexts,  
32 e.g. with verbs like *eat* and *donate*, will also be examined. Finally, the paper will  
33 also discuss inverted imperatives and imperatives where no overt verb is present.

## 34 2 Parasitic gaps

35 One argument for movement of null objects under investigation comes from  
36 parasitic gap licensing. It is well known that parasitic gaps are licensed only under  
37 overt A'-movement. Importantly, the null object in question licenses parasitic  
38 gaps, which indicates that it undergoes A'-movement.  
39

---

<sup>1</sup>The judgments are given for the transitive use of *open*. I will be ignoring its intransitive use, as in *We are opening on Monday*. It should be also noted that there is some speaker variation regarding the object drop cases discussed in the paper—this may not be surprising, since, as we will see below, objects can be dropped through different strategies, so the issue might be which strategy is employed.

1 (4) Open without closing afterward.

### 2 **3 The blocking effect of overt imperative subjects on object** 3 **drop**

4 Another argument for movement comes from the blocking effect of overt  
5 imperative subjects on object drop, illustrated by (3). What will be relevant to the  
6 account of (3) given below is object drop in Germanic V-2 languages, illustrated  
7 by (5)-(6), where dashes indicate the canonical object position.  
8

9 (5) A: Hvað finnst þér um nýja húsvörðinn?

10 what think you about new janitor.the

11 'What do you think about the new janitor?'

12 B: Veit é(g) ekki \_\_, hef é(g) ekki séð \_\_ enn.

13 know I not have I not seen yet

14 'I don't know (that), I have still not seen (him). (Icelandic)

15 (6) A: Vad tycker du om den nya vaktmästaren?

16 what think you about the new janitor.the

17 'What do you think about the new janitor?'

18 B: Vet ja(g) inte \_\_, har ja(g) fortfarande inte sett \_\_.

19 know I not have I still not seen

20 (Swedish, Sigurðsson and Maling 2008)  
21

22 Sigurðsson and Maling (2008) argue that such null objects are possible only with  
23 an empty SpecCP, as stated in (7) and illustrated by (8)-(9), where the presence  
24 of an element in SpecCP (9), but not in C (8), blocks object drop.  
25

26 (7) The Empty Left Edge Condition (ELEC): The left edge of a clause (i.e.  
27 SpecCP) containing a silent referential argument must be phonetically  
28 empty.

29 (8) a. (Det) känner ja(g) inte \_\_. Swedish

30 b. (Það) þekki é(g) ekki \_\_. Icelandic

31 (that) recognize I not

32 (9) a. \*Nu känner ja(g) inte \_\_. Swedish

33 b. \*Núna þekki é(g) ekki \_\_. Icelandic

34 now recognize I not  
35

36 Adopting a split CP, Sigurðsson and Maling argue that there are context-linking  
37 elements Topic, Logophoric Agent/Speaker ( $\Lambda A$ ) and Logophoric patient/hearer  
38 ( $\Lambda P$ ) above CP (i.e. above the projection where the initial element in V-2 clauses  
39 is located); null objects must enter into a licensing relation with them, which is  
40 blocked by something in SpecCP.

41 Bošković (2011) argues that the licensing is actually accomplished via  
42 movement of null objects to the Specs of these projections. Since this must be  
43 A'-movement it is blocked by an intervening SpecCP in (9), as shown in (10).



1 Another argument for movement is provided by islands. The dropped object is  
2 embedded within an island below, a Complex NP in (15) and a wh-island in (17).  
3 The islandhood effect indicates that the object is moving out of these islands.  
4

- 5 (15) Print the instruction to open it carefully.  
6 (16) ?\*Print the instruction to open carefully.  
7 (17) Ask how you can open it with a knife.  
8 (18) \*Ask how you can open with a knife.  
9

10 There is also a Coordinate Structure Constraint (CSC) effect. The effect is found  
11 in (19), where the null object itself is a conjunct (namely, the first conjunct), but  
12 not in (20), where it originates within the conjunct. I interpret this as indicating  
13 that when imperatives are coordinated, there is no movement out of an imperative  
14 conjunct itself (the movement can take place to the edge of the imperative in (20)  
15 without moving outside of the coordination, hence the CSC is not violated).  
16

- 17 (19) \*Keep and other medications out of the reach of children.  
18 (20) a. Hold can six inches from underarm and push down to spray.  
19 (Sadock 1974)  
20 b. Put key in lock and rotate.

## 21 **5 P-stranding**

22 Another argument for movement of null objects in imperatives concerns  
23 preposition (P-)stranding. Consider (21). What is dropped in (21) is an object of  
24 a preposition, stranding the preposition. As far as I know, null objects with  
25 prepositions as in (21) are possible only if the language allows P-stranding under  
26 movement (a number of languages that allow imperative object drop but not P-  
27 stranding are discussed below—none of them allow examples like (21)). This  
28 may then provide another argument for the movement of the null object.<sup>2</sup>  
29

- 30 (21) Dispose of carefully. (Sadock 1974)

## 31 **6 Slavic and what really matters for the blocking effect of** 32 **overt subjects**

33 Turning now to Slavic, we will see in this section that Slavic languages enable us  
34 to pinpoint more precisely what is going on regarding the intervention effect  
35 discussed in section 3.

36 First, the blocking effect of overt imperative subjects on object drop is not  
37 found in Serbo-Croatian (SC).  
38

- 39 (22) { Otvori / Pažljivo otvori }  
40 open / carefully open

---

<sup>2</sup>It should, however, be noted that such constructions are not very productive in English either (see Sadock 1974), which may have to do with the recoverability of what is dropped.

1 (23) Ti { otvori / pažljivo otvori }  
2 you open / carefully open

3 (24) ?\*You wash leeks and you chop and place in boiling water.<sup>3</sup>

4 (25) Ti operi prasu, a ti izreži i stavi u vruću vodu.  
5 you wash leeks and you cut and place in hot water  
6

7 While SC differs from English regarding the blocking effect of overt subjects on  
8 object drop, there are still islandhood effects with such object drop in SC, as  
9 shown by (26)-(27), which indicates that it is not the case that the null object in  
10 SC simply does not move.  
11

12 (26) ?\*Udji u kuću kad Ivan bude otvorio.  
13 enter in house when Ivan be opened  
14 Intended: 'Enter the house when Ivan opens [the door].'

15 (27) ??Odštampaj instrukcije kako da otvoriš.  
16 print instructions how that opens  
17 Intended: 'Print the instructions on how to open [it].'  
18

19 Regarding the English/SC contrast, it is in principle possible that there is a  
20 difference in the nature of the null object, or that the subject Case matters (the  
21 subject is vocative in SC). I will argue that this is not what matters. Rather, what  
22 matters is a difference in the verbal form. SC has a dedicated imperative verbal  
23 form, which is not the case with English.

24 That this is what is relevant here is confirmed by Russian (all Russian data  
25 below are due to Ksenia Zanon). Russian imperatives pattern with SC imperatives  
26 in the relevant respect: there is no blocking effect of an overt imperative subject  
27 on object drop.  
28

29 (28) a. Otkryvaj oštorožno!  
30 open.IMP carefully

31 b. Ty otkryvaj oštorožno!  
32 you open.IMP carefully  
33

34 However, Russian can also use infinitives (with dative subjects) as imperatives.  
35 In infinitival imperatives, the blocking effect in question shows up: an overt  
36 subject blocks object drop (as noted by Ksenia Zanon, p.c., pronominal subjects  
37 in general are worse than quantified subjects in Russian infinitival imperatives).  
38

39 (29) a. Otkryvat' oštorožno!  
40 open.INF carefully

41 b. ?\*Vsem otkryvat' oštorožno!  
42 all.DAT open.INF carefully  
43

---

<sup>3</sup>The context for (24)-(25): two people cooking, each 'you' a different person. Note that (24) is fine if the overt subjects are dropped.

- 1 c. ?Vsem odkryvat' pis'ma ostorozno!  
 2 all.DAT open letters carefully
- 3 (30) a. ?\*Vsem nemedlenno zakryt!  
 4 all.DAT at.once close.INF
- 5 b. ?Vsem nemedlenno zakryt' učebniki!  
 6 all.DAT at.once close.INF textbooks
- 7 c. \*{ Tebe / vam } nemedlenno zakryt!  
 8 you.SG/ you.PL at.once close.INF
- 9 d. ?\*/(???) { Tebe / vam } nemedlenno zakryt' učebniki!  
 10 you.SG/ you.PL at.once close.INF textbook

11  
 12 Note that there is an islandhood effect with object drop.  
 13

- 14 (31) \*Vojdi v dom, kogda Ivan otkroet.  
 15 enter in house when Ivan opens  
 16 Intended: 'Enter the house when Ivan opens it.'  
 17

18 Consider also Slovenian (the Slovenian data are due to Adrian Stegovec).  
 19 Slovenian also has regular imperatives and infinitives as imperatives. Dropped  
 20 objects with overt subjects are better with the former. (Pronominal subjects are  
 21 not allowed with the latter, only quantificational subjects. Recall that the blocking  
 22 effect in question is weaker with non-pronominal subjects in English as well, cf.  
 23 (12).)  
 24

- 25 (32) Odpri vrata!  
 26 open.IMP door

- 27 (33) Ti odpri (vrata)!  
 28 you open.IMP door

- 29 (34) a. ?Zdaj vsi odprite (vrata)!  
 30 now all open.IMP (door)

- 31 b. ??Zdaj vsi odpret!  
 32 now all open.INF  
 33

34 Notice that the object drop in Slovenian is also island-sensitive.  
 35

- 36 (35) a. ?\*Stopi v hišo ko bo Ivan odprl.  
 37 step.IMP in house when FUT.3SG Ivan open  
 38 Intended: 'Step into the house when Ivan will open.'

- 39 b. \*Stopi v hišo ko Ivan odpre.  
 40 step.IMP in house when Ivan opens  
 41 Intended: 'Step into the house when Ivan opens.'  
 42

43 A short side remark is now in order regarding imperatives without a verb,  
 44 illustrated by (36).  
 45

1 (36) Takoj domov!  
2 immediately home  
3 'Come home right now!'  
4

5 Adrian Stegovec (p.c.) observes that all these involve a direction, like 'home' or  
6 'to school', but not a regular object, so there are contextual limitations on what  
7 can be dropped (cf. (37) vs (38)). Some verbs (like *go*) are general enough to be  
8 possible to recover them from the directionality of the PP. The same holds if there  
9 is another way of expressing direction, as in (39)).  
10

11 (37) Takoj v šolo!  
12 immediately in school.ACC  
13 'Go to school right now'

14 (38) \*Takoj roke!  
15 immediately hands.ACC  
16 Intended: 'Wash your hands right now!'

17 (39) Takoj denar nazaj!  
18 immediately money.ACC back  
19 'Give back the money right now.'  
20

21 The phenomenon is also found in Russian, as in (40c).  
22

23 (40) a. Nemedlenno spat! (infinitive)  
24 immediately sleep.INF

25 b. Nemedlenno vstal (i vyšel )! (past tense)  
26 immediately got.up.M.PST (and left. M.PST)  
27 'Immediately get up and leave!'

28 c. Nemedlenno v krovat! (no verb)  
29 immediately to bed  
30

31 The point to be made here is that these no-verb-imperatives do not come from  
32 (underlying) infinitival imperatives since SC, which does not have infinitival  
33 imperatives, has them (overt subject is also possible, in vocative where this can  
34 be seen).<sup>4</sup>  
35

---

<sup>4</sup>One can imagine infinitival imperatives being possible in very limited single sentence instructions/warnings on labels. A rare, OKish case is given in (ia). An overt subject is still completely impossible here (ib), which is not the case with no-verb imperatives (cf. (42)). This also indicates that no-verb-imperatives do not come from (underlying) infinitival imperatives.

(i) a. Popiti tri puta na dan.  
to-drink three times on day  
'Take three times a day'

b. \*Svi popiti tri puta na dan!  
all to-drink three times on day



- 1 (41) Odmah u školu!  
 2 immediately in school.ACC  
 3 ‘Go to school right now!’
- 4 (42) Svi odmah u školu!  
 5 all immediately in school.ACC  
 6 ‘Everyone immediately to school!’  
 7

8 Taking stock of the main point of the discussion so far, taking SC, English,  
 9 Russian, and Slovenian into consideration, the blocking effect of overt subjects  
 10 on object drop does not show up with true imperative forms; it shows up in cases  
 11 where an infinitive or a bare verb is used as an imperative.

12 Also relevant is Icelandic. As noted above, Sigurðsson and Maling (2008)  
 13 note that Icelandic imperatives also show the blocking effect in question (see  
 14 section 7 for the data). While they gloss the relevant verbal form as imperative,  
 15 the form in question for 2sg is formed by dropping the -a ending from the  
 16 infinitival form of the verb, which yields a bare stem. The 2pl plural imperative  
 17 form is the same as the exhortative/indicative/subjunctive form. So the situation  
 18 here is similar to English.

19 Consider also French: the relevant imperative paradigm from French is given  
 20 below.

- 21
- 22 (43) a. ?Ouvre!  
 23 open
- 24 b. \*Tu ouvre!  
 25 you open
- 26 c. (?)?Tu ouvre la porte!  
 27 you open the door
- 28 d. Ouvre la porte!  
 29 open the door  
 30

31 (43) indicates that French displays the overt imperative subject blocking effect.  
 32 (An overt imperative subject is somewhat degraded; however, (43b) is worse than  
 33 (43c).) What is relevant for us is that French imperative is syncretic with  
 34 indicative (there is a difference for -er verbs but it is only orthographic: *Chante!*  
 35 (You sing!) vs *Tu chantes* (You sing)).

36 In light of all this, I suggest that the relevant difference for the blocking effect  
 37 under consideration is true imperatives vs other/bare forms used as imperatives.  
 38

39 (44) The blocking effect of overt subjects on object drop arises in imperatives  
 40 with non-imperative-specific verbal forms, i.e. where a bare verb or a  
 41 different verbal form is used as an imperative.  
 42

43 To account for this, I suggest that only true imperatives have/license SpecIP. (The  
 44 intuition here is that non-imperative imperatives need to be somehow marked,  
 45 which is done through them not allowing “regular” subjects). Overt imperative  
 46 subjects cannot stay in SpecvP (see Potsdam 1998 and fn 5). In English (3b), the

1 overt imperative subject then must move to the left periphery, where, being  
2 located in an A'-position, it blocks A'-movement (see also Bošković 2024).<sup>5</sup> This  
3 is not the case in e.g. SC (22), where the imperative subject in SpecIP then does  
4 not block A'-movement of the null object.

5 As noted briefly above, Sigurðsson and Maling (2008) report that object drop  
6 in Icelandic imperatives improves when a clitic is used instead of a full pronoun  
7 subject (see section 7 for the data). This makes sense, given that a clitic would  
8 undergo cliticization movement, and given that traces do not count as interveners  
9 (see Chomsky 1995, Bošković 2011; to illustrate the effect, Italian experiencers  
10 block subject movement (45a), but not when they undergo cliticization (46) or  
11 topicalization (45b)).  
12

13 (45) a. \*Gianni<sub>i</sub> sembra a Maria [t<sub>i</sub> essere stanco].

14 Gianni seems to Maria to be tired

15 b. A Maria<sub>j</sub>, Gianni<sub>i</sub> sembra t<sub>j</sub> [t<sub>i</sub> essere stanco].

16 to Maria Gianni seems to be tired

17 (46) Gianni<sub>i</sub> gli<sub>j</sub> sembra t<sub>j</sub> [t<sub>i</sub> essere stanco].

18 Gianni her seems to be tired

19 'Gianni seems to her to be tired.'

20

(Italian)

21 To summarize the discussion in this section, we have seen that languages (and  
22 particular constructions within the same language) differ regarding the blocking  
23 effect of overt subjects on imperative object drop. I suggested that the relevant  
24 difference for the blocking effect in question is true imperatives vs other/bare  
25 forms used as imperatives. The preliminary generalization regarding the blocking  
26 effect in question was given in (44). The generalization was motivated by  
27 English, Icelandic, SC, Russian, Slovenian, and French (additional motivation is  
28 provided below with Spanish and Italian). The reader should, however, take the  
29 above discussion as a preliminary investigation of the validity of the potential  
30 typological generalization in (44).

## 31 7 Inverted imperatives

32 I will now briefly consider inverted infinitives. They involve true inversion, as  
33 indicated by the fact that negation takes wide scope in (47) ((47) is fine on the  
34 "everyone should expect..." reading, not on the "nobody should expect..."

---

<sup>5</sup>Potsdam 1998 places the overt imperative subject in English in SpecIP. His arguments, however, only show that the subject cannot be lower than that—they are compatible with a movement-to-the-left-periphery treatment. Thus, the data in (i)-(ii) simply show that the imperative subject is not lower than SpecIP—they do not tell us anything about whether the subject is in SpecIP or higher.

(i) There's plenty of room.

\*Simply everyone move to his right a little!

(ii) a. Don't you *simply* stand there!

b. \*Don't *simply* you stand there!

c. \*Don't stand there *simply*!

(Potsdam 1998)

1 reading. Potsdam (1998) in fact claims that negation in inverted imperatives  
2 always takes the widest scope, just as in other constructions involving inversion).

3  
4 (47) Don't everyone expect a raise.  
5

6 Turning now to object drop, there is a blocking effect of overt subjects on object  
7 drop in inverted imperatives as well, which seems to be surprising, given that the  
8 negation here is in C.  
9

- 10 (48) a. \*Don't you open forcefully.  
11 b. Don't you open it forcefully.  
12 c. \*Don't anyone open forcefully.  
13 d. Don't anyone open it forcefully.  
14

15 What is relevant here is the discussion of inversion above the phrase hosting local  
16 subject A'-movement in Bošković (2024). Bošković (2024) argues that local  
17 subject A'-movement goes to a lower phrase than non-subject A'-movement of  
18 the same type. Thus, he argues that *who* in *who left* undergoes wh-movement, but  
19 its landing site is lower than the landing site of *what* in *what did Mary buy*.  
20 Bošković (2024) argues that focalized subjects in indicatives also undergo this  
21 lower A'-movement (see Bošković 2024 for a more detailed discussion of the  
22 nature of the position/movement in question, which I am simplifying here).  
23 Consider (49).  
24

- 25 (49) a. Only his girlfriend does John give any flowers.  
26 b. \*John gives only his girlfriend any flowers.  
27 c. Only Mary showed any respect for the visitors. (Branigan 1992:84)  
28

29 The *only* licensor c-commands the NPI in both (49a) and (49b). The contrast then  
30 indicates that the licensing here is apparently not possible from an A-position.  
31 (49c) can then be captured if the focalized subject undergoes local A'-movement:  
32 The *only* DP in (49c) is then not in SpecIP, hence it can license the NPI, but it is  
33 also not in SpecCP. Consequently, it does not block inversion.  
34

35 (50) Did only Mary show any respect for the visitors?  
36

37 Another element that undergoes this type of subject focus-movement is *nobody*  
38 in (53). Consider the paradigm below. (51) indicates that an object can scope over  
39 a subject in SpecIP. The lack of inverse scope in (52) then indicates that *who* here  
40 does not stay in SpecIP. Interestingly, inverse scope is also not possible in (53).<sup>6</sup>  
41 Based on this, Bošković (2024) argues that *nobody* undergoes the same kind of  
42 focus-movement as the focalized subject in (49c)/(50) (on focus-movement of  
43 negative constituents, see Bošković 2007, 2009; note that inversion is also  
44 possible with *nobody*, as in *?Does nobody like John?*).  
45

- 46 (51) Someone likes everyone. inverse scope OK  
47 (52) Who likes everyone? inverse scope \*  
48 (53) Nobody likes everyone. inverse scope \*

---

<sup>6</sup>See e.g. Beghelli (1995), Sato (2003), Collins (2017).

1  
 2 The suggestion is then that the imperative subject movement discussed above  
 3 targets the same position. What is important for us is that an overt imperative  
 4 subject can undergo that kind of movement, hence be in an A'-position, even in  
 5 inverted infinitives: (48c) in fact patterns with (50) in the relevant respect: in both  
 6 cases, the subject undergoes short A'-movement, as indicated by the blocking  
 7 effect on object drop in (48c) and the relevant NPI-licensing in (50); still it is  
 8 lower than the inverted element in C (what is important for us is that (50) provides  
 9 independent evidence that the required subject A'-movement is possible below  
 10 C).

11 In fact, in Icelandic imperatives the verb quite generally precedes an overt  
 12 imperative subject that induces a blocking effect, i.e. Icelandic imperatives are  
 13 quite generally inverted.<sup>7</sup>

14  
 15 (54) a. Skerið (\*þið) \_\_\_ í litla bita.  
 16 cut.IMP.2PL (\*you.PL) in small pieces  
 17 'Cut in small pieces.'

18 b. cf. Skerið (þið) þau í litla bita.  
 19 cut.2PL (you.PL) them in small pieces  
 20 '(You) cut them in small pieces.' (Sigurðsson and Maling 2008)

21  
 22 Spanish and Italian, which have real imperatives, are also relevant here. They  
 23 disallow overt preverbal subjects in imperatives, but an overt subject is possible  
 24 postverbally. Importantly, it is also possible with object drop, as shown by  
 25 (55c)/(56c). (Recall that the verb form here is imperative specific. Note that, as  
 26 observed by Aarón Sanchez, p.c., the object drop in question is contextually more  
 27 restricted in Spanish, thus (55a) e.g. does not work for jars).<sup>8,9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup>Improvement with clitic subjects, noted in section 6, is illustrated below.

(i) ... þrjú egg ...  
 three eggs

a. \*Brjót þu \_\_\_ í skál og ...  
 break.IMP.2SG you.SG (them) into bowl and ...

b. ?Brjóttu \_\_\_ í skál og ... (Sigurðsson and Maling 2008)  
 break.IMP.2SG-CL2SG (them) into bowl and ...

<sup>8</sup>However, it may also be relevant here that subjects can stay in SpecvP in general in Spanish and Italian (though the issue is whether subjects can stay in situ in imperatives; it should, however, be noted that Miyoshi 2002 and Bošković 2004 argue that in languages with a ban on negative imperatives, like Spanish and Italian (see fn 9), in non-negative imperatives there is an affixal imperative head which needs to undergo PF merger with the verb under PF adjacency—an imperative subject in SpecIP is then pronounced in a lower position, postverbally (cf. (55c)/(56c)), not to block affix hopping. At any rate, no intervention effect is expected to be found in (55c) and (56c) given that we are dealing with imperative-specific forms.

<sup>9</sup>In both Spanish and Italian, imperatives cannot be negated—in that context a surrogate imperative, subjunctive in Spanish and infinitive in Italian, is used. However, an overt subject is not possible in surrogate imperatives regardless of object drop. (Spanish data

- 1  
 2 (55) a. ¡Abre!  
 3 open  
 4 b. \*¡Tú abre (la puerta)!  
 5 you open the door  
 6 c. ¡Abre tú!  
 7 open you (Spanish)  
 8 (56) a. Apri!  
 9 ‘Open!’  
 10 b. \*Tu apri (la porta)!  
 11 Intended: ‘You open (the door)!’  
 12 c. Apri tu! (Italian)

## 13 8 A test for null objects

14 The discussion above can be used as a diagnostic test for null objects (possibly  
 15 of a particular kind). In this section I will use imperative object drop to examine  
 16 cases where an argument optionally surfaces overtly (e.g. with *eat*, *donate*),  
 17 where it is not clear whether we are dealing with optionally transitive/ditransitive  
 18 usage, without a null element, or whether there is a null element.

19 Regarding *eat*, there is some speaker variation with *eat*; one of the patterns  
 20 displayed by my informants is given below.

- 21  
 22 (57) a. Eat!  
 23 b. You eat!  
 24 c. Eat without boiling!  
 25 d. \*You eat without boiling!  
 26

27 The pattern can be accounted for if these speakers have two options:

---

in this section are due to Cristina Cuervo and Aarón Sanchez, and Italian data are due to Giulio Ciferri Muramatsu and Pietro Cerrone).

- (i) a. ¡No abras!  
 ‘Don’t open.SBJV!’  
 b. \*¡Tú no abras (la puerta)!  
 Intended: ‘You don’t open.SBJV (the door)!’  
 c. \*¡No abras tú!  
 Intended: ‘You don’t open.SBJV!’ (Spanish)  
 (ii) a. Non aprire!  
 ‘Don’t open.INF’  
 b. \*Tu non aprire (la porta)!  
 Intended: ‘You don’t open.INF (the door)!’  
 c. \*Non aprire tu!  
 Intended: ‘You don’t open.INF!’ (Italian)

- 1  
2 (a) a different phenomenon  
3 (b) the usual moving null imperative object  
4

5 Example (57b) is then acceptable because of option (a) and (57c) because of  
6 option (b). Notice that (57d) forces option (b) because of parasitic gap licensing,  
7 which requires movement, hence an overt subject, which blocks the movement  
8 in question, is not possible.

9 Consider now *donate*, which can take a DP and PP object, both of which are,  
10 on the surface, optional. This is illustrated by the paradigm in (58).  
11

- 12 (58) a. Alex donated ten dollars to the fund.  
13 b. Alex donated to the fund.  
14 c. Alex donated ten dollars.  
15 d. He hasn't donated yet.  
16

17 Consider now the imperative paradigm in (59). The selective blocking effect of  
18 the overt imperative subject in (59) indicates that there is a null object in (59b)  
19 but not (59c). This means that the intransitive usage is not really intransitive—  
20 there is a null DP object on that usage, i.e. *donate* must have at least one internal  
21 argument.  
22

- 23 (59) a. Please donate!  
24 b. \*You donate!  
25 c. You donate to the fund!

## 26 9 Conclusion

27 To conclude, the null object under consideration undergoes movement to the left  
28 periphery. It exhibits the following properties, all of which are indications of such  
29 movement:  
30

- 31 • it licenses parasitic gaps  
32 • it is island sensitive  
33 • it correlates with the possibility of P-stranding  
34 • it is blocked by overt imperative subjects, which was interpreted as  
35 indicating that the movement in question is blocked by overt subjects that  
36 undergo local A'-movement  
37

38 I have argued that there is crosslinguistic variation regarding whether overt  
39 imperative subjects can stay in SpecIP—the relevant difference is true  
40 imperatives vs other/bare forms used as imperatives (though it is possible that  
41 further research will lead to a more specific restriction regarding the latter (see  
42 also the discussion of Hungarian in the appendix) or even show that what we are  
43 dealing with here is a tendency, as most typological generalizations are).

44 It should, however, be noted that it would be strange if the kind of null object  
45 under consideration here would be confined to imperatives. In fact, even in  
46 imperatives it is contextually restricted—it is typically found on labels, on signs,  
47 and in recipes, it just happens that imperatives are typically used in those

1 contexts. There are, however, languages where its distribution may be broader—  
 2 the null object that is allowed in Germanic V-2 languages and illustrated by (5)-  
 3 (6), which do not involve an imperative, may in fact be the same kind of a null  
 4 element (or very similar to it) as the one we have been concerned with in this  
 5 paper—recall that this object is subject to a similar intervention effect as the one  
 6 we have been concerned with in this work (see also section 8). The most  
 7 conspicuous property of the null object under consideration, movement, has also  
 8 been argued to be involved in the derivation of other types of null elements (see  
 9 especially Fujiwara 2022 and Mizuno in press regarding argument ellipsis in  
 10 Japanese; they also consider the possibility of a movement derivation applying to  
 11 radical *pro*-drop in Japanese—notice that radical *pro*-drop is also not agreement  
 12 licensed, like the null object under consideration, which may be relevant here—  
 13 i. e. it is possible that non-agreement-licensed *pro* is licensed through movement  
 14 of the kind discussed in this paper).<sup>10</sup> I will, however, leave the possibility of a  
 15 unification, or a more fine-grained typology of null elements from this  
 16 perspective, for future research.

17

### 18 **Appendix: Hungarian**

19

20 There is a potentially interfering factor, hinted at in the conclusion section, to  
 21 bear in mind when testing the analysis presented in this paper with respect to  
 22 other languages. Consider example (60) from Hungarian (all Hungarian data in  
 23 this section are due to András Bárány), where subjunctives are used as  
 24 imperatives. In Hungarian, transitive verbs indicate a third person definite object  
 25 by object agreement (object agreement with definite objects is obligatory; for  
 26 discussion of object agreement in Hungarian, see e.g. Bartos 1997, Kiss 2002,  
 27 Coppock and Wechsler 2012, Bárány 2015). A pronominal object is then  
 28 generally dropped. In (60), an overt subject and a null object can co-occur.  
 29 However, this is a different kind of a null object from the one discussed so far. It  
 30 is an agreement-licensed null object—in this respect it is more similar to subject  
 31 *pro*-drop in languages like SC or Spanish. The discussion in the text regarding  
 32 movement of null elements is not intended to apply to agreement-licensed *pro*.  
 33

34 (60) (Te) (ezt) óvatosan nyisd ki!  
 35 you this carefully open.SBJV.2SG.SBJ>3.OBJ up

---

<sup>10</sup>As another potential case, SC is one of the languages where a yes-no question is typically answered with a verb (ia). John Bailyn (p.c.) observes that an overt subject is not possible in such cases ((ib) is unacceptable on the relevant usage, see also Gribanova 2017 regarding Russian), which can be accounted for if there is a null element that undergoes movement to the left periphery, with the overt subject pushed into the left periphery due to the raising of the verb in this construction (on the raising of the verb, see e.g. Gribanova 2017, Holmberg 2015, Martins 2007, Sato and Maeda 2021; the null element could be a *pro*-form or the remnant VP from which the verb moves, given that there have been proposals for movement of VPs to be elided, see e.g. Johnson 2001).

(i) Voli li Anu? a. Voli b. \*{ On/Jovan } voli.  
 love<sub>3sg</sub> Q Ana<sub>ACC</sub> love<sub>3sg</sub> he/Jovan loves<sub>3sg</sub>  
 ‘Does he love Ana? Yes.’

1 'Open (this) carefully!'  
2

3 Hungarian also has infinitival imperatives, which do not show object agreement  
4 (A. Bárány notes that they are often used on signs and often involve object drop).  
5

6 (61) Óvatosan kinyitni!  
7 carefully open up.INF  
8 'Open carefully!'  
9

10 Overt subjects are not possible with infinitival imperatives, hence the blocking  
11 effect under discussion in this paper cannot be tested with Hungarian infinitival  
12 imperatives.  
13

14 (62) \*Te (ezt) óvatosan kinyitni!  
15 you this carefully open up.INF  
16 'You open (this) carefully!'  
17

18 Returning to non-infinitival imperatives, when the subject is second person,  
19 object agreement only shows up with a third person object, not first. Interestingly,  
20 as noted by A. Bárány (p.c), without an overt indefinite object, a bare second  
21 person transitive imperative is interpreted as having a first person null object. So,  
22 example (63) with a non-object agreeing verb form (i.e. without object  
23 agreement) is interpreted as having a first person dropped object.  
24

25 (63) Nyissál ki!  
26 open.SBJV.2SG.SBJ up  
27 'Open me!'  
28

29 Furthermore, an overt subject allows a null object even with a first person null  
30 object (i.e. when the null object appears not to be agreement licensed); thus, both  
31 examples in (64) are acceptable.  
32

33 (64) a. Te nyissál ki!  
34 you open.SBJV.2SG.SBJ up  
35 'You open me!'  
36 b. Te nyisd ki!  
37 you open.SBJV.2SG.SBJ>3.OBJ up  
38 'You open it!'  
39

40 There are two possibilities to account for these data. One possibility is that there  
41 actually is agreement here, it just happens to be phonologically null—what  
42 matters is the opposition with third person agreement (note that second person  
43 interpretation is ruled out due to Condition B).<sup>11</sup> A piece of evidence for this  
44 analysis is that in infinitives, which do not mark object agreement, a first person  
45 object interpretation is not possible for null objects, the only possibility for the  
46 interpretation of the null object in (61) being third person. This can be taken to  
47 indicate that the possibility of agreement in the verbal paradigm is crucial for

---

<sup>11</sup>For an account where all personal pronouns in Hungarian trigger object agreement but object agreement is not always spelled-out, see Bárány (2015).



1 allowing the first person interpretation for the null object in (63), i.e. with non-  
2 infinitival imperatives, which in turn means that we are still dealing here with  
3 agreement licensing.

4 Alternatively, it is possible that if there are two verbal forms for imperatives  
5 (and not as a result of the ban on negative imperatives, noted in footnote 9), then  
6 the overt subject in the “standard” form (even if it is not an imperative-specific  
7 form, as in Hungarian) is located in SpecIP, i.e. as in SC, not as in English. In  
8 other words, the two forms in Hungarian would then be treated like the two forms  
9 in Russian. The generalization in (44) would then be restated as follows:<sup>12</sup>

10  
11 (66) The blocking effect of overt subjects on object drop arises in imperatives  
12 with non-imperative-specific verbal forms, i.e. where a bare verb or a  
13 different verbal form is used as an imperative, when there is a single  
14 imperative form; when there are two imperative forms, it arises with the  
15 imperative form with limited distribution.

16

17

## 18 **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

19

20 For helpful comments and suggestions, I thank anonymous reviewers and the  
21 participants of FASL 32 (Indiana University), Eastern Generative Grammar 2023  
22 (University of Novi Sad), and my 2023 University of Connecticut seminar,  
23 especially Adrian Stegovec, Ksenia Zanon, and András Bárány.

24

## 25 **CONTACT**

26

27 Željko Bošković <zeljko.boskovic@uconn.edu>

28

## 29 **ABBREVIATIONS**

30

31 ACC	accusative	M	masculine
32 CL	clitic	PL	plural
33 CSC	Coordinate Structure Constraint	SBJV	subjunctive
34 DAT	dative	SBJ	subject
35 FUT	future	OBJ	object
36 IMP	imperative	SC	Serbo-Croatian
37 INF	infinitive	SG	singular

## 38 **References**

39 Bárány, András. (2015) *Differential object marking in Hungarian and the*  
40 *morphosyntax of case and agreement*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of  
41 Cambridge.

---

<sup>12</sup>Note, however, that Hungarian, which prompted the revision of (44) given in (66), is the only language discussed here which has two imperatives (independent of the ban on negative imperatives) with neither form being imperative-specific and that there is an alternative account of Hungarian which does not require the revision of (44) in (66).

- 1 Bartos, Huba (1997) “The nature of object agreement in Hungarian”. Alexis  
2 Dimitriadis, Laura Siegel, and Clarissa Surek-Clark, eds. *Proceedings of the*  
3 *21<sup>st</sup> annual Penn Linguistics Colloquium*. Philadelphia, PA: University of  
4 Pennsylvania, 19-34.
- 5 Beghelli Filippo. (1995) *The phrase structure of quantifier scope*. Ph.D.  
6 dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.
- 7 Bošković, Željko. (2004) “On the clitic switch in Greek imperatives”. Olga  
8 Mišeska Tomić, eds. *Balkan syntax and semantics*. Amsterdam: John  
9 Benjamins, 269-291.
- 10 Bošković, Željko. (2007) “On two types of negative constituents and negative  
11 concord”. Franc Marušič and Rok Žaucer, eds. *Studies in formal Slavic*  
12 *linguistics: Contributions from Formal Description of Slavic Languages 6.5*.  
13 Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 9-35.
- 14 Bošković, Željko. (2009) “Licensing negative constituents and negative  
15 concord”. Anisa Schardl, Martin Walkow, and Muhammad Abdurrahman, eds.  
16 *Proceedings of NELS 38*. Somerville, MA: GLSA, 125-139.
- 17 Bošković, Željko. (2011) “Rescue by PF deletion, traces as (non)interveners, and  
18 the *that*-trace effect”. *Linguistic inquiry* 42(1): 1-44.
- 19 Bošković, Željko, (2024) “On *wh* and subject positions, the EPP, and  
20 contextuality of syntax”. *The linguistic review*. 41(1): 7-58.
- 21 Branigan, Philip. (1992) *Subjects and complementizers*. Ph.D. dissertation,  
22 Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- 23 Chomsky, Noam. (1995) *The minimalist program*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- 24 Collins, Chris. (2017) “A scope freezing effect with negated quantifier phrases”.  
25 *Natural language semantics* 25: 315–27.
- 26 Coppock, Elizabeth and Stephen Wechsler. (2012) “The objective conjugation in  
27 Hungarian: Agreement without phi-features”. *Natural language and linguistic*  
28 *theory*. 30(3): 699-740.
- 29 Fujiwara, Yoshiki. (2022) *Movement approach to ellipsis*. Ph.D. dissertation,  
30 University of Connecticut, Storrs.
- 31 Gribanova, Vera. (2017) “Head movement and ellipsis in the expression of  
32 Russian polarity focus”. *Natural language and linguistic theory*. 35(4):  
33 1079-1121.
- 34 Holmberg, Anders. (2015) *The syntax of yes and no*. Oxford: Oxford University  
35 Press.
- 36 Johnson, Kyle. (2001) “What VP Ellipsis can do, and what it can’t, but not why”.  
37 Mark Baltin and Chris Collins, eds. *The handbook of contemporary syntactic*  
38 *theory*. London: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 439–79.
- 39 Kiss, Katalin. (2002) *The syntax of Hungarian*. Cambridge: Cambridge  
40 University Press.
- 41 Martins, Anna Maria. (2007) “Emphatic affirmation and polarity: contrasting  
42 European Portuguese with Brazilian Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan, and  
43 Galician”. Jenny Doetjes and Paz Gonzalez, eds. *Romance languages and*  
44 *linguistic theory 2004*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 197-223.
- 45 Miyoshi, Nobu. (2002) “Negative imperatives and PF merger”. Unpublished ms.,  
46 University of Connecticut.

- 1 Mizuno, Teruyuki. (In press). “Argument ellipsis as topic deletion”. *Natural*  
2 *language and linguistic theory*.
- 3 Potsdam, Eric. (1998) *Syntactic issues in the English imperative*. New York:  
4 Garland.
- 5 Sadock, Jerrold. (1974) “Read at your own risk: Syntactic and semantic horrors  
6 you can find in your medicine chest.” Michael W. La Galy, Robert A. Fox,  
7 Anthony Bruck, eds. *Papers from the 10th regional meeting of the Chicago*  
8 *Linguistic Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago, Chicago Linguistic  
9 Society, 599-607.
- 10 Sato, Eriko. (2003) “Minimality and scope rigidity in English”. *Journal of*  
11 *language and linguistics* 2(2): 283-322.
- 12 Sato, Yosuke and Masako Maeda. (2021) “Syntactic head movement in Japanese:  
13 Evidence from verb-echo answers and negative scope reversal”. *Linguistic*  
14 *inquiry*. 52(2): 359-76.
- 15 Sigurðsson, Halldór Armann and Joan Maling. (2008) “Argument drop and the  
16 Empty Left Edge Condition”. Christer Platzack, eds. *Working papers in*  
17 *Scandinavian syntax* 81. Lund: Centre for Languages and Literature, 1-17.