

On the Syntactic Change of Imperatives in the History of English

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1. Introduction

In the history of generative grammar, there has not been much attention paid to English imperatives: they were regarded as idiosyncratic constructions, with special phrase structure rules and transformations postulated for describing their syntactic properties in early stages of generative grammar. On the other hand, Davies (1986), the first comprehensive work on English imperatives, demonstrates that there are many regularities in English imperatives and that interesting generalizations can be made which hold for imperatives and other constructions. Furthermore, stemming from the pioneering work by Davies, there have been a number of syntactic studies that deal with English imperatives on a par with declaratives and/or interrogatives (see Potsdam (1998) and Rupp (2003) among others). However, little research has been done on the historical aspects of English imperatives in the study of generative grammar. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to clarify the historical change of English imperatives within the framework of the minimalist program advocated by Chomsky (1995), presenting their syntactic structures in Old English (OE), Middle English (ME), and Modern English (ModE)¹. In this paper, I will mainly concentrate on English imperatives with overt subjects. Most of the historical data come from *The York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose* (Taylor et.

al. (2003); henceforth, YCOE), *The Second Edition of the Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English* (Kroch and Taylor (2000); henceforth, PPCME2), and *The Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English* (Kroch and Santorini (2005); henceforth, PCEME).

The organization of this paper is as follows: Section 2 gives an overview of basic facts of imperatives in early English. Section 3 introduces background assumptions on the syntactic structure of imperatives in PE and the historical development of sentential negation in English. Section 4 provides the syntactic structures of imperatives in OE, ME and ModE, accounting for their development in the history of English. Section 5 is the conclusion of this paper.

2. Basic Facts of Imperatives in the History of English

This section observes basic facts of imperatives in early English. As is well-known, early stages of English had relatively rich verbal morphology. The historical change of verbal inflectional endings of English imperatives is shown in the following table:

Table 1. Verbal Inflection in Imperatives from OE to PE

	OE	ME			ModE	PE
		South	Middle	North		
Singular	-∅	-∅	-∅	-∅	-∅	-∅
Plural	-aþ	-eth	-eth	-es, -∅	-∅	-∅

(adapted from Ukaji (2000: 209–217))

As shown in Table 1, the singular form does not have a distinctive inflectional ending throughout, while the plural form had an overt inflectional ending identical with that of the indicative present plural form in OE and ME.

After 1700, on the other hand, the non-inverted order became more common and the inverted order is seen with only a few phrases like “*Mind you!*” in PE (Visser (1969: 16)). Therefore, the word order change of affirmative imperatives in the history of English is summarized as follows:

- (4) a. V S (OE-EModE)
 b. S V (LModE-)

2.2. Negative Imperatives

This section examines negative imperatives in early English, beginning with those without periphrastic *do*. The following table shows the rate of the non-inverted (S-V) and inverted (V-S) orders in negative imperatives without *do* in the texts of YCOE, PPCME2, and PPCEME:

Table 3. The Frequency of the S-V and V-S Orders in Negative Imperatives

	OE	ME	EModE
S-V order	17(4.7%)	5(3.1%)	0(0%)
V-S order	343(95.3%)	154(96.9%)	11(100%)
Total	360(100%)	159(100%)	11(100%)

This table shows that negative imperatives in OE, ME and EModE also had the inverted order canonically, so I will concentrate on the inverted order here. The examples of negative imperatives in OE, ME and EModE are given in (5), (6) and (7), respectively:

- (5) Ne ondræd þu ðe nan ðing for ðissere dæde.
 not dread thou who no thing for these dead
 (coaelhom, ÆHom_15: 36.2158)
- (6) a. Lord, ne dwelle þou noust.
 Lord NEG dwell thou not (CMEARLPS, 83.3645)

- b. Trowst þu not þat he sizzyde
 trust thou not that he say (CMAELR3, 42.475)
- (7) a. Moureouer feare ye not the people of the londe.
 moreover fear you not the people of the land
 (TYNDOLD-E1-H, XIV, 1N.614)
- b. What God hath cleansed, that call not thou
 what god have cleansed that call not thou
 common.
 common (AUTHNEW-E2-P2, X, 1A.503)

In OE, as shown in (5), negative imperatives were formed by putting *ne* before the verb. In ME, apart from the “*ne V S*” type as in (5), there were two types of negative imperatives: those with two negators *ne* and *not* as in (6a) and those with only *not* as in (6b). The “*ne V S not*” type in (6a) was already found in OE in a minority of cases, while the “*V S not*” type in (6b) became common after 1400. Both of the types in (5) and (6a) became obsolete around 1400 with the loss of *ne*. In EModE, there were also two types of negative imperatives: those in which *not* follows the subject as in (7a) and those in which *not* precedes the subject as in (7b). The type “*V S not*” like (7a) was already found in LME as shown in (6b), while the “*V not S*” type in (7b) was only found in EModE. Both of the types in (7a, b) were lost during EModE and replaced by negative imperatives with periphrastic *do*.

Next, let us turn to negative imperatives with periphrastic *do* which have been found since LME. Negative imperatives with periphrastic *do* only have the inverted order, as shown in (8):

- (8) Doo not you vndoo the boxe;
 do not you undo the box (HARLEYEDW-E2-P2, 15.143)

Ellegård (1953) provides a quantitative study of *do* forms in various constructions, which is summarized as follows:⁵

As we can see from Figure 1, the frequency of periphrastic *do* in negative imperatives was very low until the end of the sixteenth century, but then it

increased so rapidly that negative imperatives established the usage of *do* a little earlier than negative declaratives.

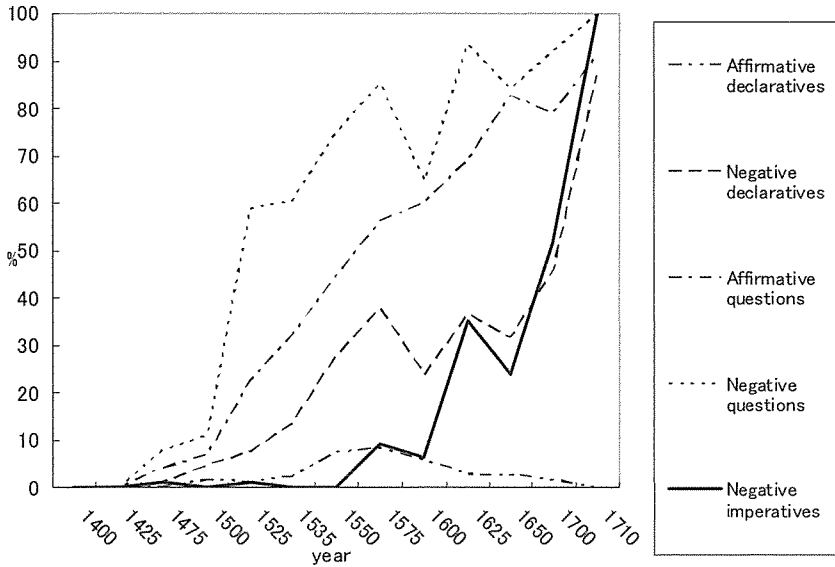


Figure 1. Percentage of *Do* Forms in Various Sentence Types
(cf. Ellegård (1953: 161))

Furthermore, negative imperatives with the contracted form *don't* as in (9) began to be attested around the end of the seventeenth century in the texts of PPCEME:

(9) but don't be afraid, Madam. (FARQUHAR-E3-H, 61.522)

According to Nakamura (1993, 1994), on the other hand, the first recorded occurrences of *don't* are attested in Osborne's *The Letters of Dorothy Osborne to William Temple* written in 1654, in which two of the three examples are found in negative imperatives. He also notes that the frequency of *don't* in negative imperatives increased rapidly after 1700.

To sum up, the word order change of negative imperatives in the

history of English is summarized as follows: ⁴

- (11) a. *ne* V S (OE-1400)
- b. *ne* V S *not* (EME-1400)
- c. V S *not* (LME-EModE)
- d. V *not* S (EModE)
- e. *do not* S V (LME-)
- f. *don't* S V (c. 1700-)

The following sections try to account for the historical development of English imperatives summarized in (4) and (11), presenting their syntactic structures in OE, ME, and ModE.

3. Background Assumptions

Before going into the discussion of (4) and (11), this section reviews one of the previous analyses of English imperatives which this paper rests on, and clarifies the syntactic status of sentential negation in the history of English.

3.1. Potsdam's (1998) Analysis of English Imperatives

As mentioned above, some syntactic studies have proposed to analyze English imperatives on a par with declaratives and/or interrogatives within the framework of generative grammar. Potsdam (1998), which is one of the greatest contributions to this field, argues that English imperatives have the same structure as finite clauses by pointing out the parallelism of word order between imperatives and finite clauses:

- (12) a. Don't everybody leave!
- b. Didn't everybody leave? (cf. Potsdam (1998: 323))
- (13) a. Everybody don't leave!
- b. Everybody didn't leave. (cf. *ibid.*)

Potsdam's claim is that the parallelism in (12) and (13) is a consequence of the identical structure and derivation that imperatives and finite clauses

share. He proposes the following structure for English imperatives:

(14) [_{CP} do(n't) [_{IP} subject [_I· do(n't) [_{SP} [_{VP}]]]]]! (cf. *ibid.*: 328)

In his analysis, [Spec, IP] is the canonical position for imperative subjects, and imperatives without overt subjects have null subject *pro* corresponding to the second person pronoun *you*. In the case of *do(n't)*-initial order like (12a), *do(n't)* in I moves up to C. On the other hand, in the case of subject-initial order like (13b), the I-to-C movement of *do(n't)* does not take place. Furthermore, within the framework of the minimalist program advocated by Chomsky (1995), he suggests that the I-to-C movement of *do(n't)* is motivated by the checking of a feature in C which he calls IMP (erative). Although he does not give its detailed characterization, the postulation of IMP in C is supported from the semantic interpretation of imperatives: they have the illocutionary force associated with commands and requests which is distinct from that of declaratives and interrogatives, and C, which is a locus of illocutionary force, should encode it as a feature specific to imperatives (see Han (2001)).

Although Potsdam (1998) appears to be successful in that he presents a unified analysis of imperatives and finite clauses, there remains at least one problem with English imperatives with periphrastic *do*: negative imperatives with non-contracted *do not* disallow the subject to intervene between *do* and *not*, unlike the corresponding negative questions, as seen from the contrast between (15) and (16):

(15) I know I've done wrong but I can't survive on my own.

a. ? Oh please, do not ALL of you desert me!

b. * Do somebody not desert me!

c. ? Oh please, SOMEbody do not desert me!

(Potsdam (1998: 372–373))

(16) a. You do not like dogs.

b. Do you not like dogs?

c. (?) Do not any of you with rural childhoods like dogs?

(cf. *ibid.*: 358)

In what follows, this paper adopts Potsdam's (1998) analysis for the most part with some modifications made from diachronic perspectives, arguing that the above problem can be solved by considering the history of *do* in English imperatives.

3.2. The Syntactic Status of Sentential Negation in the History of English

The syntactic status of sentential negation, especially *not*, should be taken into account since it has bearing on the historical change of English imperatives. The historical transition in sentential negation is shown in (17):

- (17) a. ic ne secge. (OE-1400)
 b. I ne seye not. (EME-1400)
 c. I say not. (LME-EModE)
 d I not say. (LME-EModE)
 e. I do not say. (LME-)
 f. I don't say. (c. 1660-) (cf. Jespersen (1917))

Note that there is a similar pattern of development in (11) and (17). I basically follow the lines of a number of generative studies on sentential negation in assuming that *not* has gone through the historical change summarized in Figure 2 (Roberts (1993), Ishikawa (1995), Frisch (1997), Kemenade (2000), Fischer et al. (2000), and Mizoguchi (2007) among others):

According to Figure 2, sentential negation was expressed by *ne* as a clitic in Neg in OE. Its negative force was gradually weakened, so *not* as an adverb came to be optionally inserted in [Spec, NegP] in EME. Then *ne* was lost around 1400; instead of *ne*, the head of NegP began to be occupied by *not* thereafter. It is generally assumed that periphrastic *do* was introduced as a result of the loss of rich verbal morphology, with *do* forms replacing *do*-less forms during EModE. Finally, *not* also began to be weakened, optionally appearing as a clitic in the form of *don't* around 1660.

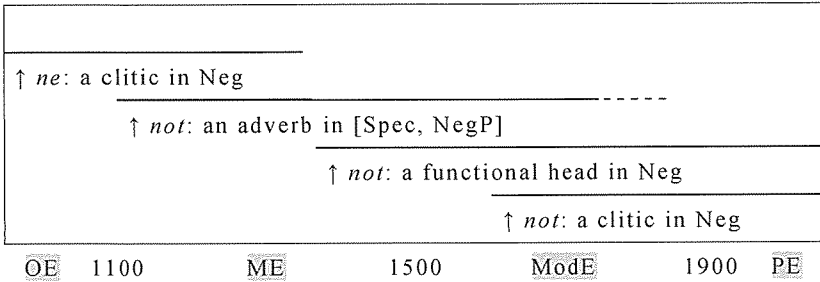


Figure 2. The Historical Change in the Syntactic Status of *Not*

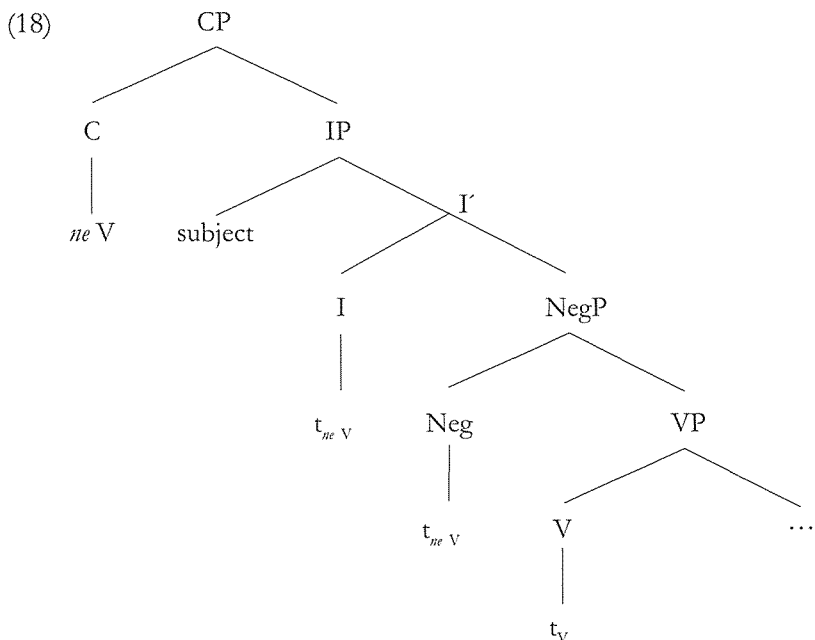
4. Analysis

With the assumptions above in mind, let us consider the word order variation of imperatives in the history of English as summarized in (4) and (11). For the sake of convenience, negative imperatives are discussed first.

4.1. Negative Imperatives

4.1.1. *ne*-V-S

The order '*ne*-V-S' in (11a) was frequently observed in OE, and was lost around 1400 with the loss of *ne*. Because imperatives in OE have the same word order as *yes-no* interrogatives, there is good reason to assume that verbs in interrogatives and imperatives occupy the head of CP (cf. Pintzuk (1999)). Furthermore, given that *ne* functions as a clitic sentential negator occupying the head of NegP (see Figure 2), negative imperatives with the order '*ne*-V-S' will have the following structure and derivation:

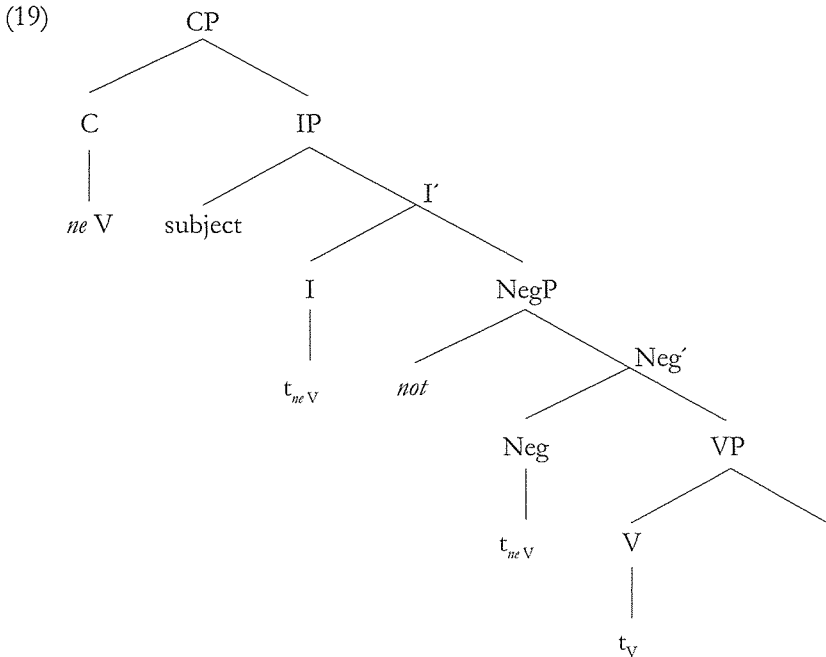


In (18), the verb generated in V moves up to I through Neg, where *ne* cliticizes onto the verb. As we saw in Table 1, imperative verbs have a distinctive inflectional ending in the plural form in OE and ME, so it would be plausible to assume that the inflectional features of imperatives are strong enough to trigger V-to-I movement along the lines of the original proposal by Pollock (1989) and its application to the diachrony of verb movement by Roberts (1993)⁵. Then, the verb moves further up to C from I, deriving the ‘*ne*-V-S’ order. As for the motivation of the I-to-C movement in imperatives, I follow Potsdam (1998) in assuming that it is triggered by IMP in C, which is related to their illocutionary force (see Section 3.1).

4.1.2. *ne*-V-S-*not*

The order ‘*ne*-V-S-*not*’ in (11b) was frequently observed in ME and was lost around 1400 with the loss of *ne*. As shown in Figure 2, *ne* occupies the

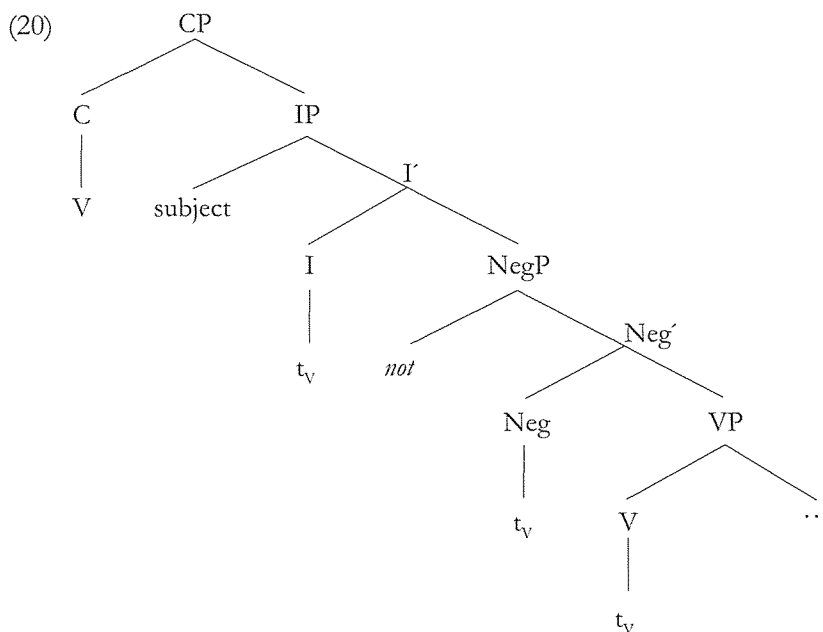
head of NegP, whereas *not* occupies [Spec, NegP], so the order ‘*ne*-V-S-*not*’ is derived as follows:



In (19), the verb moves up to Neg, where *ne* cliticizes onto the verb, and then moves up to C through I, ending up with the ‘*ne*-V-S-*not*’ order, with *not* occupying [Spec, NegP].

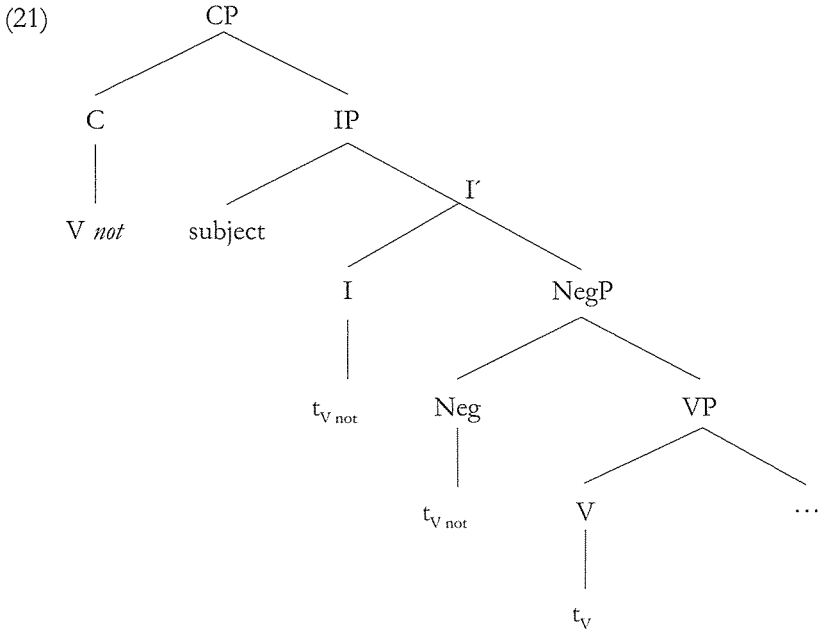
4.1.3. V-S-*not*

The order ‘V-S-*not*’ in (11c) was found in LME and EModE. Given that *ne* was lost around 1400, this order is derived as schematized in (20), where the verb moves up to C through Neg and I, with *not* occupying [Spec, NegP]:



4.1.4. *V-not-S*

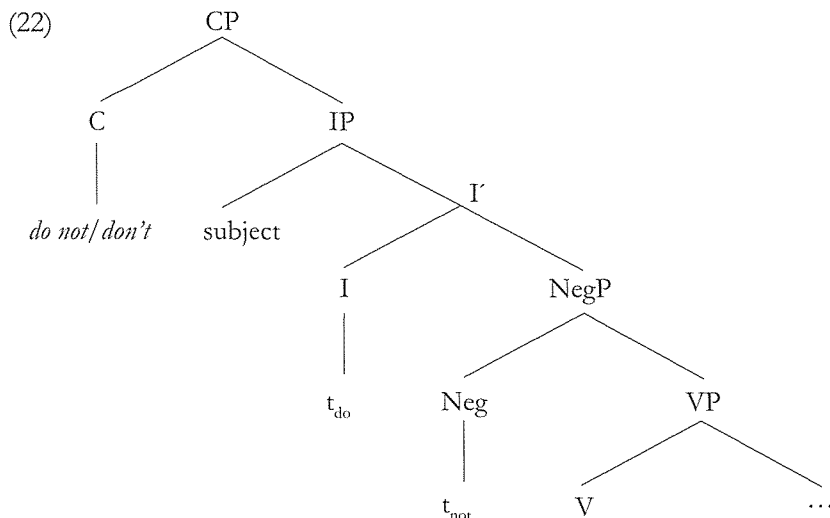
The order ‘*V-not-S*’ in (11d) was found in EModE. This is closely related to the dual status of *not*: as shown in Figure 2, after the loss of *ne* around 1400, *not* either continued to occupy [Spec, NegP] or came to be generated in Neg. Given the possibility that *not* occupies Neg, the ‘*V-not-S*’ order is derived as follows:



In (21), the verb moves up to C, but on its way it is combined with *not* to form a single head in Neg. Then, the complex head *V + not* moves up to C through I, and the ‘*V-not-S*’ order is derived. It is plausible to assume that the verb and *not* are combined into a single head in this order, because the verb is always adjacent to *not* in the relevant examples with this order found in the texts of PPCEME.

4.1.5. *do not*-S-V and *don't*-S-V

As mentioned above, by the beginning of ModE, imperative verbs, both singular and plural, came to have the same form as infinitives. Given the standard assumption that the loss of rich verbal morphology triggered the loss of *V-to-I* movement and the rise of *do*-support in the sixteenth century (Roberts (1993)), the order ‘*do not/don't*-S-V’ in (11e) is derived as follows:



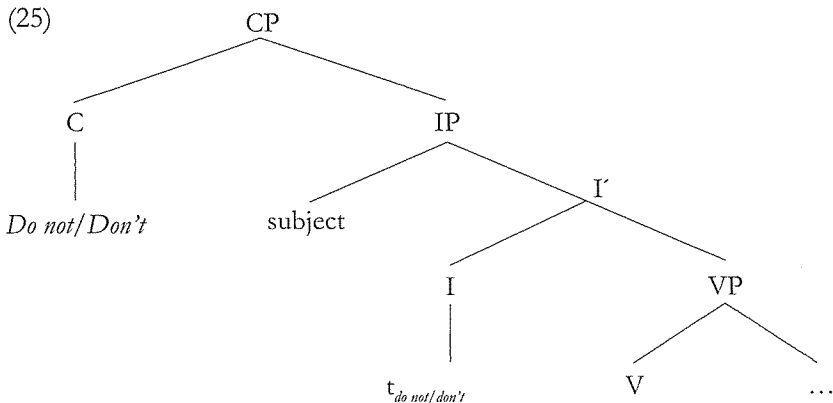
In (22), *not* as a clitic in Neg is combined with *do* inserted in I, and the complex head *do not/don't* moves up to C through I, deriving the ‘*do not/don't*-S-V’ order. This structure is consistent with Potsdam’s (1998) analysis introduced in Section 3.1, in which imperatives and interrogatives have the same syntactic structure. Note that even after the loss of V-to-I movement, I-to-C movement still takes place because it is triggered by IMP in C, which is a feature related to their illocutionary force that has not changed since OE, but not to their inflectional property.

However, the structure of imperatives in (22), which is identical with that of interrogatives, is not enough to deal with all cases of imperatives. As we saw in (15) and (16) repeated here as (23) and (24), respectively, negative imperatives do not always behave like negative interrogatives in PE:

- (23) a. ? Oh please, do not ALL of you desert me!
 b. * Do somebody not desert me!
 c. ? Oh please, SOMEbody do not desert me!
- (24) a. You do not like dogs.
 b. Do you not like dogs?

c. (?) Do not any of you with rural childhoods like dogs?

Given that *not* as a non-clitic head in Neg is available in interrogatives, as shown in (24b), if *not* remains in Neg in (22), it would be incorrectly predicted that the order ‘*do-S-not*’ is allowed with imperatives as well. To solve this problem, I argue that soon after the rise of *do*-support in English imperatives, they came to have the following structure without NegP, where *do not/don’t* is base-generated in I as a single head and moves up to C:



The difference between (23) and (24) can be accounted for in terms of the CP structure without NegP in (25). That is, because *do* and *not* in imperatives constitute a single head even in the non-contracted form, it is impossible to put an element between *do* and *not*.⁶

There are some arguments for taking *do not* in negative imperatives as a single head. First, as we saw in Section 2.2, the establishment of the contracted form *don't* in imperatives was completed in a short period of time in spite of the fact that the introduction of periphrastic *do* was later in imperatives than in other types of sentences. It may be inferred that the status of *do not* as a single head caused the establishment of *don't* in so short a time. Second, no data have been found where an element intervenes between *do* and *not* since the appearance of negative imperatives with periphrastic *do*. In fact, Ukaji (1978) states that negative imperatives in ModE required strict adjacency between *do* and *not*; moreover, the

survey based on PPCEME finds 65 examples of negative imperatives with periphrastic *do*, none of which violates this adjacency. Third, the present analysis has an advantage in accounting for the well-known, but intractable fact of negative imperatives that they require *do*-support even in the presence of auxiliaries:

- (26) a. * Please {haven't/have not/not have} left a mess in the kitchen
for us to clean when we get back!
b. {Don't/Do not} have left a mess in the kitchen for us to
clean when we get back!
- (27) a. * {Ben't/Be not/Not be} going too soon!
b. {Don't/Do not} be going too soon!
- (28) a. * {Ben't/Be not/Not be} examined by that quack!
b. {Don't/Do not} be examined by that quack!

((26–28) are from Potsdam (1998: 131–132))

Given that there is no NegP in negative imperatives, the only way to derive them is to insert *do not/don't* into I regardless of whether they involve lexical verbs or auxiliaries. This is completely different from the mechanism of *do*-support in negative declaratives/interrogatives that is triggered by the failure of Affix Hopping with lexical verbs (Roberts (1993)).

4.2. Affirmative Imperatives

Finally, let us turn to affirmative imperatives in the history of English, which show the word order change as shown in (4) repeated here as (29):

- (29) a. V S (OE-EModE)
b. S V (LModE-)

The change in (29) can be accounted for as a consequence of the loss of V-to-I movement that was triggered by the loss of rich verbal morphology in the sixteenth century. The structures of (29) are represented as follows, respectively:

- (30) a. [_{CP} V [_{IP} *subject* [_{I'} t_v [_{VP} t_v ...]]]]

b. [_{CP} ∅ [_{IP} *subject* [_{I'} ∅ [_{VP} V ...]]]]

In (30a), the V-to-I movement is triggered by the strong inflectional features in I while the I-to-C movement is triggered by IMP in C. In (30b), the weak inflectional features in I does not trigger V-to-I movement, but if imperatives still bear IMP after the loss of rich verbal morphology (see the discussion in Section 4.1.5), it would lead us to assume that there is an empty auxiliary in I, which moves up to C by virtue of IMP. This might be regarded as the empty counterpart of *do* in imperatives like (31); the relevant auxiliary can only be overtly realized if it has any semantic effects like emphasis, on a par with the overt realization of pronominal subjects in null subject languages (Haegeman and Guéron (1999)).

(31) Do someone help him quickly! (Potsdam (1998: 7))

5. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to account for the development of imperatives in the history of English in terms of the change of verb movement and clause structure. First, taking Potsdam's (1998) analysis of imperatives in PE as a starting point, I proposed the clause structure of imperatives in OE and ME which is identical with that of interrogatives, based on the parallelism of word order between them. Next, it was demonstrated that there are two kinds of derivation of imperatives without periphrastic *do* in EModE: in the 'V-S-not' order *not* occupies [Spec, NegP], while in the 'V-not-S' order *not* in Neg is combined with V and moves up to C through I. Finally, it was shown that imperatives with periphrastic *do* have the clause structure without NegP, in which *don't/do not* base-generated in I moves up to C. This structure is different from the one proposed by Potsdam (1998) in that there is no NegP or ΣP, that is, *don't/do not* in imperatives is a single head directly inserted into I. The clause structure of imperatives proposed here was shown to shed light on previously unexplained problems with negative imperatives⁷.

NOTES

¹ Here are the historical periods of English standardly assumed: Old English (OE) (700–1100), Middle English (ME) (1100–1500) (Early Middle English (EME) (1100–1300), Late Middle English (LME) (1300–1500)), Modern English (ModE) (1500–1900) (Early Modern English (EModE) (1500–1700), Late Modern English (LModE) (1700–1900)), Present-day English (PE) (1900–).

² According to Millward (1971: 91), the non-inverted order was limited to poetry and determined stylistically or metrically. Imperative subjects in the non-inverted order are often taken to be vocatives, because some element(s) may intervene between them and imperative verbs (Ono and Nakao (1980: 410)).

³ The frequency of periphrastic *do* in affirmative imperatives is not included in Figure 1 because it is so low that it is only a fraction of one per cent even at its peak (Ellegård (1953: 174)).

⁴ There is another type of negative imperatives without periphrastic *do* in EModE: those in which *not* precedes the verb as shown in (i):

(i) Be firm, my hand, *not sbed* a drop

(1611 B. Johnson, *Catiline* (Everym.) I, i, p. 103/Visser (1969: 1543))

Negative imperatives of this type are excluded in this paper because they were extremely rare: in fact, the viability of their usage is dubious (see Visser (1969: 1540, 1543)).

⁵ Roberts (1999: 292) suggests the following one-way implication: if there is verbal agreement making of the relevant type, I is strong enough to trigger V-to-I movement. Therefore, the lack of a verbal inflectional ending in the singular form in imperatives in OE and ME does not pose a problem for the assumption that the inflectional features of imperatives are strong and trigger V-to-I movement in OE and ME, because the strength of I does not necessarily imply the presence of agreement marking. Furthermore, there is crosslinguistic evidence that imperatives show V-to-I movement in the absence of a distinct inflectional ending: in Dutch and German, for example, a verb stem is used for the singular form of imperative verbs as in OE and ME (see Rupp (2003)).

⁶ This does not mean that there is no NegP in imperatives in any circumstances. Consider the following negative imperative which includes two negators:

(i) a. Don't you not listen to me!

b. [_{CP} Don't [_{IP} you [_{I'} t_{Don't} [_{NegP} [_{Neg'} not [_{VP} listen to me]]]]]]]]

(cf. Zhang (1990: 81))

Given that *don't* in negative imperatives is base-generated in I, it is conceivable that the other negator *not* occurs in the head of NegP between IP and VP, as shown in (ib). What is important here is that *don't/do not* has different status in imperatives and interrogatives.

⁷ One of the remaining problems is how to derive the order in (23c) where the subject precedes *do not/don't*. Assuming that IMP in C always triggers I-to-C movement in negative imperatives, the subject must be in a higher position than C. See Matsumoto (2010) for the possibility that imperative subjects move to the CP domain, i.e. [Spec, Foc(us) P] (cf. Rizzi (1997)), based on the observation by Davies (1986) that imperative subjects are contrastively focused in examples like (23c).

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Synopsis

On the Syntactic Change of Imperatives in the History of English
Yosuke Matsumoto

This paper attempts to account for the development of imperatives in the history of English, paying attention to the loss of V-to-I movement and the change of the clause structure. First, I propose the clause structure of imperatives in OE and ME which is identical with that of interrogatives, on the basis of the word-order parallelism between them. Next, it is argued that there are two kinds of derivation of imperatives without periphrastic *do* in EModE: ‘V-S-*not*’ order in which *not* occupies [Spec, NegP], and ‘V-*not*-S’ in which *not* in Neg is combined with V and moves up to C through I. Finally, it is shown that imperatives with periphrastic *do* have the clause structures without NegP, in which *do not/don’t* base-generated in I moves up to C. This structure enables us to explain the strangeness of negative imperatives in PE.