Focus movement in English imperative clauses*

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Dajung Kim. 2019. Focus movement in English imperative clauses. *Language and Linguistics* 84, 1-16. Inverted English imperative clauses such as *Don’t you leave!* share the same word order and scope facts with interrogative clauses. Based on this observation, Potsdam (2007) argues that the T-to-C movement optionally takes place in English imperative clauses. However, if this is so, why does this “optionality” exist? Regarding this question, we propose that imperative clauses can undergo focus movement when there is a focalized constituent, which results in inverted imperative clauses. In imperative clauses, *n’t* as an affix and its affirmative counterpart Ø can be focalized if they have an interpretable [Focus] feature.

Keywords: affix, focus-movement, inverted imperative clauses, optionality, scope ambiguity, T-to-C movement, word order variation

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1. Introduction

Inverted English imperative clauses such as *Don't you leave!* have attracted so much attention that they have been studied lively. Potsdam (1998) observes that *subject do(n’t) sequences as well as do(n’t) subject* strings convey imperatives. In this regard, he developed his account of English imperative clauses.

(1) a. Do everyone give it a try!
   b. Everybody do give it a try!
(2) a. Don’t you touch this!
   b. You don’t touch this!

Potsdam proposes that the word order in each of (1a) and (2a) is driven by T-to-C movement of *do* and *don’t* in (1b) and (2b),¹ each of which is taken to be an emphatic and a negative auxiliary, respectively.² Potsdam’s hypothesis capitalizes on the word order similarity between inverted imperative clauses (*do(n’t) Subject* structure) and interrogative clauses, and assumes that imperative clauses do not require an exceptional structure in English.

In this paper, partly adopting Potsdam’s (2007) suggestion, I argue that imperative clauses can undergo Focus-movement: that

¹ This analysis was originally proposed by Chomsky (1975) and is still retained in that it allows integrating imperative clauses into other tensed clauses without exception.
² Rupp (2003) gives each of interpretations to (1) as follows:

   (i) a. Do everyone give it a try! (Not only some of you!)
   b. Everyone do give it a try! (Don’t be shy!)

While it cannot be exactly determined what causes the meaning difference—whether emphatic *do* or imperative T, both sentences are obviously judged to be grammatical (cf. Davies 1986, Moon 2001, Potsdam 1998, Rupp 2003).