

The imperative sentences with *let* in the English language: their distinctive features and counterparts in Albanian language

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Abstract

In this paper we aim at making a comparative study of the imperative sentences with *let* in the English language and their counterparts in Albanian. Studies on the imperative sentences interpretation have generally been carried out in the later periods of the linguistic studies. Initially, imperative sentences have been studied within the framework of linguistic concepts of the *morphological aspect* such as: the *moods* of the *verbs* and their *morphological expression*.

The utterance of imperative sentences is addressed to the listener or listeners and accordingly, it refers to the second person, a phenomenon which typifies the imperative sentences in several languages. However, the imperative shades of meaning can also be addressed to the first person singular or plural or even third person, through a particular subtype of the imperative paradigm built with the verb *let*. These verb forms (*let + me / him / her / us / them*) are defined in the English language as *combined* forms and entail some restrictions in the aspect of the *semantics* of sentences.

In the respective sentences in Albanian language they are expressed with a verb in the subjunctive mood preceded by the particle *Le*, which may also be removed without a change in meaning. The use of this particle before the main verb as a predicate in the subjunctive mood has almost weakened the relevant lexical meaning of this particle.

From the semantic point of view, the imperative sentences with *Let*, either in English or Albanian language are distinguished for their less imperative and directive shades of meaning (request, suggestion etc.) compared to the common imperative sentences which express orders, commands and instructions. The frequency of the use of imperative sentences with *Let* is greater compared to other structural types of imperative sentences, particularly in the spoken discourse.

Key Words: imperative sentences, *let*, characteristics, Albanian language, English language.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the everyday discourse the speakers of any language ask, state, inform, order, give instructions or even wish or curse sometimes. The sentences which denote *these utterances* are *classified* in the type of *imperative sentences*. The imperative sentences are part of a discourse where there are two actors operating: *the speaker* and *the listener* (the addressee, the receiver of the relevant utterance). For many linguists or students who are on the course of learning a certain foreign language, or anyone interested in a language, the term *imperative (urdhërore)* denotes an order addressed to a certain person, which is grammatically expressed by the personal pronoun *you (ti or ju* in Albanian), second person singular or plural. This addressing of the order towards a second person singular or plural is clearly seen in English language in the following sentences:

1. *Leave! Run away! (You!)*
(Largohu! Vrapo!) (Ti/ju!)

According to the aim of utterance in English language the sentences are divided into these main classes: affirmative sentences, interrogative, imperative and exclamation ones. This type of classification bears resemblance to many grammars and linguistic tendencies, from the traditional grammarians till the scholars of the contemporary times. In the modern grammars of English and Albanian language imperative sentences are defined as follows: “*sentences which have special grammatical features and*

which utter a command, order, a request towards another person...¹” or “sentences that express the will of the speaker in the form of a wish, request about the realization or not, of a certain action, state etc.,²”. On the other hand the definitions of different linguists in current studies describe the imperative sentence as the sentence whose meaning is connected with the fact that it is about to change the existent reality or is going to restore it³.

A special subtype of imperative sentences in English language is the group of sentences which express a proposal, involving the speaker and listener as well⁴. Quirk and Greenbaum state that the imperative sentences with the verb *let* in the Albanian language are formed with the absence of *let* and the subject in the objective case⁵. In English language there does not exist a first person imperative (*that proposes me and you should do something*) or third person (*for other persons, not the listener*). All these meanings can be conveyed in a structure built by the verb *let*⁶. We know that the meaning of imperative sentences is addressed to the listener or listeners and as a result the second person, a phenomenon which typifies imperative sentences in many languages. However, the meaning nuances in imperative sentences may also be addressed to the first person singular or plural or even third person through a special subtype of the imperative paradigm, which is constructed by the verb *let*. The main features which distinguish these subtypes from a pure imperative sentence is the possibility of using some noun phrases in the structure of sentences with *let* in the function of the subject, which in fact cannot be used in the pure imperative sentences.

Anyhow, there have been various approaches and contradictions about the status and nature of imperative sentences with *let*. This variety of approaches has occurred due to the same and frequent characteristics the verb *let* display just like other verbs in pure imperative sentences. Costa (1972), in his view, describes the imperative sentence with *let* as a pure imperative sentence and the verb *let* similar or rephrased by the verb *allow* (*lejoj*).

2. They *let* (allow) the children go home early.

(Ata i lejojnë fëmijët të kthehen herët në shtëpi.)

According to Costa, the effect of such examples is an encouragement of the speakers in second person singular or plural to allow the desired thing or event to happen. Also, another linguist Ukaji has a similar attitude, by proposing in these cases: *the speaker is begging the listener to allow a group of people, among those they are involved, in order to fulfill a certain task or action*⁷.

Other attitudes describe the verb *let* in imperative sentences either as a particle, or as a modal verb, even other verbs which differ from the meaning of the verb *allow* (*lejoj*) and which is used with an implied subject *you* or *we*. According to E. Davies, all the above approaches are not scientifically grounded, because they have avoided the comparison of the *let* structure and the imperative sentences in general, and as a consequence parallel proposals are given which don't exist between the two subtypes of imperative sentences (sentences with *let* and the pure imperative sentences). Davies proposes a categorization of sentences with *let* as imperative sentences, by defining them as belonging to a special type, having the function of complementary sentences to the pure imperative ones. The distinctive feature of these sentences appears in the use of a number of subjects which are not grammatically correct in the pure imperative sentences⁸.

¹ R. Huddleston, G. Pullum, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English language*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pg. 853-854.

² *Gramatika e gjuhës shqipe II*, Akademia e Shkencave, Tiranë, 2002, pg. 129.

³ The same, pg. 5.

⁴ D. Biber, S. Conrad, G. Leech, *Student Grammar of spoken and written English*, Longman, 2002, pg. 254.

⁵ R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, *A student's grammar of the English language*, London: Longman, 1990, pg. 242.

⁶ M. Swan, *Practical English Usage*, Oxford University Press, 2005, pg. 243.

⁷ Quoted from E. Davies, *The English imperative*, Croom Helm, 1986, pg. 229.

⁸ *The same*, f. 239-250.

The paradigm of the verb-predicate of imperative sentences in the English language includes verb forms in second person, singular or plural, as well as combined forms of first and third person, in singular or plural. The verb forms of first, second and third person, singular and plural are defined in English language as *dual forms* (*të kombinuara*). These dual forms of the different persons are found in the imperative sentences with the verb *let* (let + me / him / her / us / them) and undergo some restrictions with reference to the semantics of sentences, which, in this case, cannot express instruction, command etc., but can express only a request or suggestion⁹.

3. *Let us read* (you “ti, ju” and I “unë”).

(Le të lexojmë.) (ti / ju dhe unë: format e kombinuara të vetave)

In these sentences we observe the use of the verb *let*, followed by a pronoun in the function of the subject (*us*). Even when we refer to the third person, there is the same sentence structure.

4. *Let's go and find Lucy.*

(Le të shkojmë të gjejmë Lusin).

5. *Let him approach*, said Aslan.

(Lëre atë të afrohet, - tha Aslani.)

These uses are less commonly met and almost archaic in the discourse, by singling out *let me type*, which is addressed to the first person. The most common used form is the contracted form of the first person plural: *let us = let's*. We should emphasize that the verb *let*, followed by the personal pronoun (first or third person singular and plural) in the objective case, cannot be used with the personal pronoun of second person *you*. The imperative sentences with *let you* sound as ungrammatical sentences. The pronouns that follow *let* signify the agent, thus the person who is expected to comply with the order, the request or command.

6. **Let you have a look.*¹⁰

(Le t'i hedhësh një sy ti. Hidhi një sy ti. T'i hedhësh një sy.)

In the respective sentences in Albanian language we observe the use of the particle *le* before the verb-predicate in the subjunctive mood, verb in the subjunctive mood or verb in the imperative mood. The sentence 6 is correct from the grammatical aspect, as well as the semantic one. The respective ones in the Albanian language differ from that in English, which is an ungrammatical sentence.

As far as the semantic meaning is concerned, the imperative sentences with *let* are categorized as follows:

A. Sentences that denote an order, instruction or a request:

7. *Let her print this form.*

(Le ta printojë ajo këtë formular.)

B. Sentences that denote a proposal addressed to the pair speaker-listener. In these uses the verb *let* is followed by the personal pronoun *us*.

8. *Let's have a drink.*

(Le të pimë diçka. / Pimë diçka?)

C. Sentences that denote an offer on the part of the speaker in order to do something. In these uses it is followed by the personal pronoun *me* (*mua*).

9. *Let me drive you home.*

(Le t'ju çoj unë me makinë në shtëpi. Ju shoqëroj unë me makinë në shtëpi.)

D. In the formal discourse the imperative sentence with *let* expresses a *desire* or *wish*¹¹.

10. *Let the best man or woman win.*

⁹ V. S. Xrakovskij, *Typology of imperative constructions*, Lincom Europa, 2001, pg. 361.

¹⁰ R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, J. Svartvik, *A comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, Longman, 1985, pg. 829-830.

¹¹ P. Collins, *The handbook of English Linguistics*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006, pg. 204.

(*Le të fitojë më i miri. / Të fitojë më i miri.*)

Not in all contexts the verb *let* in imperative sentences expresses an action which involves both parts speaker-listener, because in various contexts the speaker looks for a commitment or reaction on the part of the listener, who uses the imperative sentence with *let* to address to the listener in an indirect way by involving himself / herself in this context.

11. *Let's be more careful.*

(*Të tregojmë më shumë kujdes.*)

The message in the sentence 11 is more being addressed to the listener than both of them. The subtext of this sentence is:

12. *Be more careful!*

(*Ji më i kujdesshëm!*) or

13. *You should be more careful!*

(*Ti duhet të tregosh më shumë kujdes!*)

A special feature of imperative sentences with *let* in English language is that the listener in an act of communication, where he is proposed or offered something expressed by an imperative sentence with *let*; it is not necessarily expected to react or answer to the previous utterance. This means that the speaker proposes to fulfill something together and takes it for granted or accepted by the listener.

Ok. Let's try this. (Në rregull. Le ta provojmë.)

These sentences can be uttered at the end of the conversation and are treated as understandable utterances accepted by both sides. This feature is observed in the majority of uses of imperative sentences with *let*, but we should emphasize that in some contexts it is seen the expectation for a reaction on the side of the listener, either approval or refusal of the given utterance.

14. *Let's do this tomorrow. Ok. Good idea.*

(*Ta bëjmë nesër. Në rregull. Ide e mirë.*)

The frequency of the use of imperative sentences with *let* is *greater compared* to the pure imperative sentences. The *variety* of meanings of imperative sentences with *let* is clear in the explored uses in different discourses. Thus, imperative sentences with *let* are treated as a special case of the group of imperative sentences¹². In the spoken discourse these types of sentences have the greatest frequency of use.

On the structural point of view there are distinguished these types:

a. (Let + me / him / her / them +infinitive.)

(Le + first and third person pronouns: *mua, atë, ata* (me, him, her) + infinitive – verb in subjunctive mood.)

b. (Let + us + infinitive.)

(Le + first person pronoun, *ne / neve* (we-us) + infinitive – verb in subjunctive mood.)

In Albanian language the respective imperative sentences with *let* is an imperative sentence with verb-predicate in the subjunctive mood, preceded by the particle *let*, which may be removed. Let us analyze the examples 7, 8, 9, 10 [*(Le) ta printojë, të pimë, të të çoj unë, të fitojë*]. The particle *le* in Albanian language is used before the verbs in subjunctive mood to express an order or instruction in a more softened way. The verb particle *le* (contracted particle of imperative in the second person singular), when it is used in sentences as encouragement, permission or acceptance expressed by the speaker in the present or past tense of subjunctive mood, has almost completely weakened the respective lexical meaning, has lost the emphasis, syntactical function and the grammatical categories of the verb¹³.

¹² H. Takahashi, *A cognitive linguistic analysis of English imperative: with special reference to Japanese imperatives*, John Benjamins, 2012, pg. 25.

¹³ *Gramatika e gjuhës shqipe I, Morfologjia*, Akademia e Shkencave, Tiranë, 2002, pg. 415.

If we compare the sentences 11 and 12, we observe that sentence 11 expresses an order or instruction much more weakened than the meaning of the sentence 12, which is addressed to the speaker in a direct way.

15. *Le ta printojë ajo.* (Let her print it.)

16. *Ta printojë ajo.*

As a conclusion, the imperative sentences with *let* in English language have a variety of meanings and are distinguished from the pure imperative sentences, because they have an expressed subject with a personal pronoun in the objective case. Imperative sentences with *let* are more frequent compared to pure imperative sentences. In Albanian language imperative sentences with *let* are expressed with a verb-predicate in subjunctive mood proceeded by the particle *let*, which may even be removed. From the semantic aspect they are distinguished for the imperative nuances of meaning, which are softened compared to pure imperative sentences.

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