JOURNAL *of* **SLAVIC** LINGUISTICS

VOLUME 33 · FASL ISSUE · PROCEEDINGS OF FASL 32

# Object drop in imperatives and the status of imperative subjects

ŽELJKO BOŠKOVIĆ
*University of Connecticut, Storrs*

**ABSTRACT**

The paper examines object drop in imperatives and argues that the null object in question undergoes movement to the left periphery. The paper also examines the position of overt imperative subjects, and argues that in some, but not all languages overt imperative subjects undergo movement to the left periphery, where the crosslinguistic variation in question correlates with the precise verbal form used in imperatives, the relevant difference being true imperatives vs other/bare forms used as imperatives (the latter leads to movement of overt imperative subjects to the left periphery).

**KEYWORDS** imperatives · null objects · pro-licensing · subject A'-movement

## 1 INTRODUCTION

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

(1) Buy yourself a nice present!

(2) You buy yourself a nice present!

Object drop in imperatives is illustrated by (3-a). Previous literature has observed that object drop in imperatives is blocked when the imperative subject is overtly realized, as in (3-b) (see Sadock 1974, Sigurðsson & Maling 2008, Bošković 2011).[1]

(3) a. Open carefully!
b. *You open carefully!
c. cf. You open it carefully!

I will use this paradigm to probe into the nature of the null element in question as well as the position of overt subjects in imperatives. I will argue that the null object undergoes movement to the left periphery for licensing reasons. This is on a par with what has been argued in the literature for other null elements (see e.g. Johnson 2001, Fujiwara 2022, Mizuno 2025)[2]. Overt subjects in imperatives will also be argued to undergo movement. It will be observed that there is actually crosslinguistic variation regarding constructions like (3-b), and a principled criterion that distinguishes contexts and languages where

[1] 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.

[2] Also relevant is Den Dikken's (1992) null operator movement analysis of certain Dutch imperatives, which was brought to my attention after this paper was originally written.

(3-b) is allowed and where it is disallowed will be proposed. The precise verbal form used in imperatives will be argued to play a crucial role in this respect. Consequences of object drop in imperatives for analyzing argument drop in several other contexts, e.g. with verbs like *eat* and *donate*, will also be examined. Finally, the paper will also discuss inverted imperatives and imperatives where no overt verb is present.

## 2 PARASITIC GAPS

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

(4) Open without closing afterward.

## 3 THE BLOCKING EFFECT OF OVERT IMPERATIVE SUBJECTS ON OBJECT DROP

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

(5) A: Hvað finnst þér um nýja húsvörðinn? (Icelandic)
what think you about new janitor.the
'What do you think about the new janitor?'
B: Veit é(g) ekki __, hef é(g) ekki séð __ enn.
know I not have I not seen yet
'I don't know (that), I have still not seen (him).'

(6) A: Vad tycker du om den nya vaktmästaren? (Swedish)
what think you about the new janitor.the
'What do you think about the new janitor?'
B: Vet ja(g) inte __, har ja(g) fortfarande inte sett __.
know I not have I still not seen
'I don't know (that), I have still not seen (him).'(Sigurðsson & Maling 2008)

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

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

(8) a. (Det) känner ja(g) inte __. (Swedish)
b. (Það) þekki é(g) ekki __. (Icelandic)
(that) recognize I not
'I don't recognize (that)'

(9) a. *Nu känner ja(g) inte __. (Swedish)
b. *Núna þekki é(g) ekki __. (Icelandic)
now recognize I not
Intended: 'Now I don't recognize (that)'

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

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

(10) [ Top/AA/AP [$_{CP}$ **SPEC** ... [$_{IP}$ ... Ø ...

If SpecCP must always be filled in V-2 clauses, the requirement can be satisfied by the null object in (5)–(6) (cf. Huang 1984)), which would be moving through SpecCP on its way to the context-linking projections.

Alternatively, the movement of null objects takes place to SpecCP (i.e. this is where the licensing is done); this is why SpecCP cannot be filled by anything else. I will leave the choice between these two possibilities open here.

It should be noted that Sigurðsson and Maling argue that the effect in (7) is a PF processing effect. There are some obvious issues with this proposal (see Bošković 2011). First, it is strange to treat an intervention effect of the kind typically found in syntax as a PF phenomenon. Also, the effect has a semantic reflex (determining the reference of the null object); it is obviously quite tricky to capture that in a PF analysis. Furthermore, if we were dealing here with a processing effect we might expect speakers to be able to "recover" from it, which does not happen. In light of this, I will adopt the movement intervention analysis from Bošković (2011).

Turning to the blocking effect of overt imperative subjects on object drop (3-b), note that the overt subject is focalized, i.e. it is contrastively focused, in contrast to the null subject. The suggestion is then that, being focalized, the subject in (3-b)–(3-c) undergoes A'-movement to the left periphery, hence it blocks A'-movement of the null object (see here Bošković 2024; the reason for subject movement will be slightly revised below). The blocking effect then also provides an argument for movement (in particular, A'-movement) of the null object.

It is worth noting here that Icelandic imperatives also show the blocking effect in question. Sigurðsson & Maling (2008) report that object drop improves when a clitic is used instead of a full pronoun subject. That makes sense from the current perspective since a clitic subject cannot be focalized (the account will be slightly revised below).

Note also that the effect in question is found with non-pronominal subjects as well, though it is somewhat weaker in this case.

(11) Everyone open it carefully.

(12) ??Everyone open carefully.

With an embedded clause object drop, a higher clause overt imperative subject induces an intervention effect (albeit somewhat weaker), which indicates that the movement of the null object here goes into the imperative matrix clause—it does not stop in the embedded clause CP field.

(13) Make sure that they open carefully.

(14) ??You make sure that they open carefully.

## 4 ISLANDHOOD EFFECTS

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

(15) Print the instruction to open it carefully.

(16) ?*Print the instruction to open carefully.

(17) Ask how you can open it with a knife.

(18) *Ask how you can open with a knife.

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

(19) *Keep and other medications out of the reach of children.

(20) a. Hold can six inches from underarm and push down to spray. (Sadock 1974)

b. Put key in lock and rotate.

## 5 P-STRANDING

Another argument for movement of null objects in imperatives concerns preposition (P-)stranding. Consider (21). What is dropped in (21) is an object of a preposition, stranding the preposition. As far as I know, null objects with prepositions as in (21) are possible only if the language allows P-stranding under movement (a number of languages that allow imperative object drop but not P-stranding are discussed below—none of them allow examples like (21)). This may then provide another argument for the movement of the null object.[3]

(21) Dispose of carefully. (Sadock 1974)

## 6 SLAVIC AND WHAT REALLY MATTERS FOR THE BLOCKING EFFECT OF OVERT SUBJECTS

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

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

(22) { Otvori / Pažljivo otvori. }
open carefully open
'Open / Open carefully.'

(23) Ti { otvori / pažljivo otvori. }
you open carefully open
'You open / open carefully.'

(24) ?*You wash leeks and you chop and place in boiling water.[4]

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

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

[3] 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.

[4] The context for (24)–(25): two people cooking, each 'you' a different person. Note that (24) is fine if the overt subjects are dropped.

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

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

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

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

(28) a. Otkryvaj ostorožno!
open.IMP carefully
'Open carefully.'
b. Ty otkryvaj ostorožno!
you open.IMP carefully
'You open carefully.'

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

(29) a. Otkryvat' ostorožno!
open.INF carefully
'Open carefully.'
b. ?*Vsem otkryvat' ostorožno!
all.DAT open.INF carefully
'Everyone open carefully.'
c. ?Vsem otkryvat' pis'ma ostorožno!
all.DAT open letters carefully
'Everyone open the letters carefully.'

(30) a. ?*Vsem nemedlenno zakryt'!
all.DAT at.once close.INF
'Everyone close immediately.'
b. ?Vsem nemedlenno zakryt' učebniki!
all.DAT at.once close.INF textbooks
'Everyone close the textbooks immediately.'
c. *{ Tebe / vam } nemedlenno zakryt'!
you.SG you.PL at.once close.INF
Intended: 'You close immediately.'
d. ?*/(???) { Tebe / vam } nemedlenno zakryt' učebniki!
you.SG you.PL at.once close.INF textbook
'You close the textbooks immediately.'

Note that there is an islandhood effect with object drop.

(31) *Vojdi v dom, kogda Ivan otkroet.
enter in house when Ivan opens
Intended: 'Enter the house when Ivan opens it.'

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

(32) Odpri vrata!
open.IMP door
'Open the door.'

(33) Ti odpri (vrata)!
you open.IMP door
'You open the door.'

(34) a. ?Zdaj vsi odprite (vrata)!
now all open.IMP door
'Now everyone open the door.'
b. ??Zdaj vsi odpret!
now all open.INF
'Now everyone open.'

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

(35) a. ?*Stopi v hišo, ko bo Ivan odprl.
step.IMP in house when FUT.3SG Ivan open
Intended: 'Step into the house when Ivan opens.'
b. *Stopi v hišo, ko Ivan odpre.
step.IMP in house when Ivan opens
Intended: 'Step into the house when Ivan opens.'

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

(36) Takoj domov!
immediately home
'Come home right now!'

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

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

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

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

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

(40) a. Nemedlenno spat'! (infinitive)
immediately sleep.INF
'Go to sleep right now.'

b. Nemedlenno vstal (i vyšel)! (past tense)
immediately got.up.M.PST and left.M.PST
'Immediately get up and leave!'
c. Nemedlenno v krovat'! (no verb)
immediately to bed
'Go to bed right now.'

The point to be made here is that these no-verb-imperatives do not come from (underlying) infinitival imperatives since SC, which does not have infinitival imperatives, has them (overt subject is also possible, in vocative where this can be seen).[5]

(41) Odmah u školu!
immediately in school.ACC
'Go to school right now!'

(42) Svi odmah u školu!
all immediately in school.ACC
'Everyone immediately to school!'

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

Also relevant is Icelandic. As noted above, Sigurðsson & Maling (2008) note that Icelandic imperatives also show the blocking effect in question (see §7 for the data). While they gloss the relevant verbal form as imperative, the form in question for 2SG is formed by dropping the *-a* ending from the infinitival form of the verb, which yields a bare stem. The 2PL plural imperative form is the same as the exhortative/indicative/subjunctive form. So the situation here is similar to English.

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

(43) a. ?Ouvre!
open
'Open.'
b. *Tu ouvre!
you open
Intended: 'You open.'
c. (?)? Tu ouvre la porte!
you open the door
'You open the door.'
d. Ouvre la porte!
open the door
'Open the door.'

(43) indicates that French displays the overt imperative subject blocking effect. (An overt imperative subject is somewhat degraded; however, (43-b) is worse than (43-c).) What is

[5] 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
Intended 'Everyone take three times a day.'

relevant for us is that French imperative is syncretic with indicative (there is a difference for -er verbs but it is only orthographic: *Chante*! 'You sing!' vs *Tu chantes* 'You sing').

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

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

To account for this, I suggest that only true imperatives have/license SpecIP. (The intuition here is that non-imperative imperatives need to be somehow marked, which is done through them not allowing "regular" subjects). Overt imperative subjects cannot stay in SpecvP (see Potsdam 1998 and footnote 6). In English (3-b), the overt imperative subject then must move to the left periphery, where, being located in an A'-position, it blocks A'-movement (see also Bošković 2024).[6] This is not the case in e.g. SC (22), where the imperative subject in SpecIP then does not block A'-movement of the null object.

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

(45) a. *Gianni$_i$ sembra a Maria [t$_i$ essere stanco].
Gianni seems to Maria to be tired
Intended: 'Gianni seems to Maria to be tired.'
b. A Maria$_j$, Gianni$_i$ sembra t$_j$ [t$_i$ essere stanco].
to Maria Gianni seems to be tired
'To Maria, Gianni seems to be tired.'

(46) Gianni$_i$ gli$_j$ sembra t$_j$ [t$_i$ essere stanco]. (Italian)
Gianni her seems to be tired
'Gianni seems to her to be tired.'

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

[6] 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)

## 7 INVERTED IMPERATIVES

I will now briefly consider inverted imperatives. They involve true inversion, as indicated by the fact that negation takes wide scope in (47) ((47) is fine on the "not everyone should expect..." reading, not on the "nobody should expect…" reading. Potsdam (1998) in fact claims that negation in inverted imperatives always takes the widest scope, just as in other constructions involving inversion).

(47) Don't everyone expect a raise.

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

(48) a. *Don't you open forcefully.
b. Don't you open it forcefully.
c. *Don't anyone open forcefully.
d. Don't anyone open it forcefully.

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

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

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

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

Another element that undergoes this type of subject focus-movement is *nobody* in (53). Consider the paradigm below. (51) indicates that an object can scope over a subject in SpecIP. The lack of inverse scope in (52) then indicates that *who* here does not stay in SpecIP. Interestingly, inverse scope is also not possible in (53).[7] Based on this, Bošković (2024) argues that *nobody* undergoes the same kind of focus-movement as the focalized subject in (49-c)/(50) (on focus-movement of negative constituents, see Bošković 2007, 2009; note that inversion is also possible with *nobody*, as in ?*Does nobody like John*?).

(51) Someone likes everyone. inverse scope OK

(52) Who likes everyone? inverse scope *

(53) Nobody likes everyone. inverse scope *

The suggestion is then that the imperative subject movement discussed above targets the same position. What is important for us is that an overt imperative subject can undergo that kind of movement, hence be in an A'-position, even in inverted infinitives. (48-c) in fact patterns with (50) in the relevant respect: in both cases, the subject undergoes

[7] See e.g. Beghelli (1995), Sato (2003), Collins (2017).

short A'-movement, as indicated by the blocking effect on object drop in (48-c) and the relevant NPI-licensing in (50); still it is lower than the inverted element in C (what is important for us is that (50) provides independent evidence that the required subject A'-movement is possible below C).

In fact, in Icelandic imperatives the verb quite generally precedes an overt imperative subject that induces a blocking effect, i.e. Icelandic imperatives are quite generally inverted.[8]

(54) a. Skerið (*þið) __ í litla bita.
cut.IMP.2PL (*you.PL) in small pieces
'Cut in small pieces.'
b. cf. Skerið (þið) þau í litla bita.
cut.2PL (you.PL) them in small pieces
'(You) cut them in small pieces.' (Sigurðsson & Maling 2008)

Spanish and Italian, which have real imperatives, are also relevant here. They disallow overt preverbal subjects in imperatives, but an overt subject is possible postverbally. Importantly, it is also possible with object drop, as shown by (55-c)/(56-c). (Recall that the verb form here is imperative specific. Note that, as observed by Aarón Sanchez, p.c., the object drop in question is contextually more restricted in Spanish, thus (55-a) e.g. does not work for jars).[9],[10]

[8]Improvement with clitic subjects, noted in §6, is illustrated below.

(i) … þrjú egg …
three eggs
1. *Brjót **þu** __ í skál og … (Sigurðsson & Maling 2008)
break.IMP.2SG you.SG (them) into bowl and …
2. ?Brjót**tu** __ í skál og …
break.IMP.2SG-CL2SG (them) into bowl and …

[9]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 footnote 10), 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. (55-c)/(56-c)), not to block affix hopping. At any rate, no intervention effect is expected to be found in (55-c) and (56-c) given that we are dealing with imperative-specific forms.

[10]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 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! (Spanish)
not open.SBJV
'Don't open!'
b. *¡Tú no abras (la puerta)!
You not open.SBJV (the door)
Intended: 'Don't you open (the door)!'
c. *¡No abras tú!
not open.SBJV you
Intended: 'Don't you open!'

(ii) a. Non aprire! (Italian)
not open.INF
'Don't open!'
b. *Tu non aprire (la porta)!
you not open.INF (the door)
Intended: 'Don't you open (the door)!
c. *Non aprire tu!
not open.INF you
Intended: 'Don't you open!'

(55) a. ¡Abre!
open
'Open!' (Spanish)
b. *¡Tú abre (la puerta)!
you open the door
Intended: 'You open the door!'
c. ¡Abre tú!
open you
'You open!'

(56) a. Apri!
open
'Open!' (Italian)
b. *Tu apri (la porta)!
you open the door
Intended: 'You open (the door)!'
c. Apri tu!
open you
'You open!'

## 8 A TEST FOR NULL OBJECTS

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

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

(57) a. Eat!
b. You eat!
c. Eat without boiling!
d. *You eat without boiling!

The pattern can be accounted for if these speakers have two options:
(a) a different phenomenon
(b) the usual moving null imperative object
Example (57-b) is then acceptable because of option (a) and (57-c) because of option (b). Notice that (57-d) forces option (b) because of parasitic gap licensing, which requires movement; hence an overt subject, which blocks the movement in question, is not possible.

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

(58) a. Alex donated ten dollars to the fund.
b. Alex donated to the fund.
c. Alex donated ten dollars.
d. He hasn't donated yet.

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

(59) a. Please donate!
b. *You donate!
c. You donate to the fund!

## 9 CONCLUSION

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

- It licenses parasitic gaps
- It is island sensitive
- It correlates with the possibility of P-stranding
- It is blocked by overt imperative subjects, which was interpreted as indicating that the movement in question is blocked by overt subjects that undergo local A'-movement

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

It should, however, be noted that it would be strange if the kind of null object under consideration here would be confined to imperatives. In fact, even in imperatives it is contextually restricted—it is typically found on labels, on signs, and in recipes; it just happens that imperatives are typically used in those contexts. There are, however, languages where its distribution may be broader—the null object that is allowed in Germanic V-2 languages and illustrated by (5)–(6), which do not involve an imperative, may in fact be the same kind of a null element (or very similar to it) as the one we have been concerned with in this paper—recall that this object is subject to a similar intervention effect as the one we have been concerned with in this work (see also §8). The most conspicuous property of the null object under consideration, movement, has also been argued to be involved in the derivation of other types of null elements (see especially Fujiwara 2022 and Mizuno 2025 regarding argument ellipsis in Japanese. They also consider the possibility of a movement derivation applying to radical pro-drop in Japanese. Notice that radical pro-drop is also not agreement licensed, like the null object under consideration, which may be relevant here—i. e. it is possible that non-agreement-licensed pro is licensed through movement of the kind discussed in this paper).[11] I will, however, leave the possibility of a unification, or a more fine-grained typology of null elements from this perspective, for future research.

[11] 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 & 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.3SG Q Ana.ACC love.3SG he/Jovan loves.3SG
'Does he love Ana? Yes.'

## APPENDIX: HUNGARIAN

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

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

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

(61) Óvatosan kinyitni!
carefully open.up.INF
'Open carefully!'

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

(62) *Te (ezt) óvatosan kinyitni!
you this carefully open up.INF
Intended: 'You open (this) carefully!'

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

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

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

(64) a. Te nyissál ki!
you open.SBJV.2SG.SBJ up
'You open me!'
b. Te nyisd ki!
you open.SBJV.2SG.SBJ>3.OBJ up
'You open it!'

There are two possibilities to account for these data. One possibility is that there actually is agreement here, it just happens to be phonologically null—what matters is the opposition with third person agreement (note that second person interpretation is ruled out due

to Condition B).[12] A piece of evidence for this analysis is that in infinitives, which do not mark object agreement, a first person object interpretation is not possible for null objects, the only possibility for the interpretation of the null object in (61) being third person. This can be taken to indicate that the possibility of agreement in the verbal paradigm is crucial for allowing the first person interpretation for the null object in (63), i.e. with non-infinitival imperatives, which in turn means that we are still dealing here with agreement licensing.

Alternatively, it is possible that if there are two verbal forms for imperatives (and not as a result of the ban on negative imperatives, noted in footnote 10), then the overt subject in the "standard" form (even if it is not an imperative-specific form, as in Hungarian) is located in SpecIP, i.e. as in SC, not as in English. In other words, the two forms in Hungarian would then be treated like the two forms in Russian. The generalization in (44) would then be restated as follows:[13]

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

## ACKNOWLEGMENTS

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

## CONTACT

Željko Bošković — *zeljko.boskovic@uconn.edu*

## ABBREVIATIONS

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

## REFERENCES

Bárány, András. 2015. *Differential object marking in Hungarian and the morphosyntax of case and agreement*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge dissertation.

[12] For an account where all personal pronouns in Hungarian trigger object agreement but object agreement is not always spelled-out, see Bárány (2015).

[13] What may also crucially matter here is that the "standard" non-imperative specific imperative form in Hungarian, namely subjunctive, also otherwise allows overt subjects as productively as indicatives. Recall, however, that there is an alternative account of Hungarian which does not require the revision of (44) in (65), so it is not clear that the revision is needed at all.

Bartos, Huba. 1997. The nature of object agreement in Hungarian. In Alexis Dimitriadis, Laura Siegel & Clarissa Surek-Clark (eds.), *Proceedings of the 21st annual Penn Linguistics Colloquium*, 19–34. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania.

Beghelli, Filippo. 1995. *The phrase structure of quantifier scope*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California, Los Angeles dissertation.

Bošković, Željko. 2004. On the clitic switch in Greek imperatives. In Olga Mišeska Tomić (ed.), *Balkan syntax and semantics*, 269–291. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Bošković, Željko. 2007. On two types of negative constituents and negative concord. In Franc Marušič & Rok Žaucer (eds.), *Studies in formal Slavic linguistics: Contributions from Formal Description of Slavic Languages 6.5*, 9–35. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Bošković, Željko. 2009. Licensing negative constituents and negative concord. In Anisa Schardl, Martin Walkow & Muhammad Abdurrahman (eds.), *Proceedings of NELS 38*, 125–139. Somerville, MA: GLSA.

Bošković, Željko. 2011. Rescue by PF deletion, traces as (non)interveners, and the that-trace effect. *Linguistic inquiry* 42(1). 1–44.

Bošković, Željko. 2024. On wh and subject positions, the EPP, and contextuality of syntax. *The linguistic review* 41(1). 7–58.

Branigan, Philip. 1992. *Subjects and complementizers*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology dissertation.

Chomsky, Noam. 1995. *The minimalist program*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Collins, Chris. 2017. A scope freezing effect with negated quantifier phrases. *Natural language semantics* 25. 315–27.

Coppock, Elizabeth & Stephen Wechsler. 2012. The objective conjugation in Hungarian: Agreement without phi-features. *Natural language and linguistic theory* 30(3). 699–740.

Den Dikken, Marcel. 1992. Empty operator movement in Dutch imperatives. *Language and cognition* 2(5). 51–64.

Fujiwara, Yoshiki. 2022. *Movement approach to ellipsis*. Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut, Storrs dissertation.

Gribanova, Vera. 2017. Head movement and ellipsis in the expression of Russian polarity focus. *Natural language and linguistic theory* 35(4). 1079–1121.

Holmberg, Anders. 2015. *The syntax of yes and no*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Huang, C.-T. James. 1984. On the distribution and reference of empty pronouns. *Linguistic inquiry* 15(4). 531–574.

Johnson, Kyle. 2001. What VP Ellipsis can do, and what it can't, but not why. In Mark Baltin & Chris Collins (eds.), *The handbook of contemporary syntactic theory*, 439–79. London: Blackwell Publishers.

Kiss, Katalin. 2002. *The syntax of Hungarian*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Martins, Anna Maria. 2007. Emphatic affirmation and polarity: contrasting European Portuguese with Brazilian Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan, and Galician. In Jenny Doetjes & Paz Gonzalez (eds.), *Romance languages and linguistic theory 2004*, 197–223. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Miyoshi, Nobu. 2002. Negative imperatives and PF merger. Unpublished ms., University of Connecticut.

Mizuno, Teruyuki. 2025. Argument ellipsis as topic deletion. *Natural language and linguistic theory* online first. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11049-024-09645-1.

Potsdam, Eric. 1998. *Syntactic issues in the English imperative*. New York: Garland.

Sadock, Jerrold. 1974. Read at your own risk: Syntactic and semantic horrors you can find in your medicine chest. In Michael W. La Galy, Robert A. Fox & Anthony Bruck (eds.), *Papers from the 10th regional meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*, 599–607. Chicago: University of Chicago, Chicago Linguistic Society.

Sato, Eriko. 2003. Minimality and scope rigidity in English. *Journal of language and linguistics* 2(2). 283–322.

Sato, Yosuke & Masako Maeda. 2021. Syntactic head movement in Japanese: Evidence from verb-echo answers and negative scope reversal. *Linguistic inquiry* 52(2). 359–76.

Sigurðsson, Halldór Armann & Joan Maling. 2008. Argument drop and the Empty Left Edge Condition. In Christer Platzack (ed.), *Working papers in Scandinavian syntax 81*, 1–17. Lund: Centre for Languages and Literature.