

A Morphological Approach to the Lack of Negative Imperatives in Spanish

Adolfo Ausín

Michigan State University

1. Goals

Spanish, as well as some other languages, do not allow verb forms that are exclusively used in the imperative to be negated, as illustrated in (1) from RAE/ AALE (2009: §42.3t). In other languages it is possible to negate imperatives as illustrated in (2) and (3) from Zeijlstra (2005).

- (1) a. Entra tú
Come.IMP.2^{sg} you
'Come in' (2nd sg.)
b. *No entra tú
Not come.IMP.2sg you
'Don't come in' (2nd sg.)
c. No entres tú
Not come.SUBJ.2^{sg} you
'Don't come in' (2nd sg.)
- (2) a. Slaap! Dutch
Sleep!
'Sleep'
b. Slaap niet!
Sleep NEG!
'Don't sleep!'
- (3) a. Pracuj! Polish
Work.2SG.IMP
'Work!'
b. Nie pracuj! (TNI)
NEG work.2SG.IMP
'Don't work!'

In fact in some varieties of Spanish, 2nd person plural imperatives can be negated. RAE/ AALE (2009: §42.3t) notes that examples like (4) are occasionally documented, considers them a hypercorrection (a topic to which we will return later in the paper) and recommends their avoidance.

- (4) No hablad
Not talk.IMP.2pl
'Don't talk' (2nd plural)

This paper has two goals. On one hand, we will determine to what extent negated 2nd person plural imperative forms are available in Spanish. We will look into several sources and we will conclude that at least in some varieties of Spanish it is possible to have negative imperatives. On the other hand, we will make a proposal that can account for these facts, that at least for some speakers forms like (4) are acceptable. There have been several proposals in the literature to explain the lack of negative imperatives in Spanish, but as far as we can tell, none of them can satisfactorily explain the singular / plural contrast illustrated in (1b) vs. (4). The proposal that we will develop in this paper exploits the morphophonological differences between singular and plural imperative forms.

This paper is organized as follows. In section 2 we will briefly describe the relevant parts of the Spanish verbal paradigm, and present evidence that shows that negated 2nd person plural imperatives are available. In section 3, we will review some of the previous proposals that have been developed to account for the lack of negative imperatives. In section 4 we will present our own proposal, and in Section 5 we offer some concluding remarks.

2. The data

Let's start by looking at the paradigm of imperative forms in most Spanish dialects. The table in (5) illustrates the paradigm for the verb “hablar” (‘to speak’). It shows the forms for the affirmative imperative, the negative imperative and the present subjunctive.

(5) Imperative paradigm (and present subjunctive) for most dialects¹

	Affirmative imperative	Negative imperative	Present subjunctive
2nd singular	habla	no hables	hables
3 rd singular	hable	no hable	hable
1 st plural	hablemos	no hablemos	hablemos
2 nd plural	hablen	no hablen	hablen
3 rd plural			

The two relevant facts that this table reveals are the following. First, the only form that is exclusive to the imperative is the 2nd person singular “habla”; the rest are identical to the present subjunctive. Following the standard practice in the literature (Rivero (1994) among others), I will refer to this form as “true imperative”. Second, this true imperative form cannot be negated. We cannot say (6a); instead, we have to say (6b), using the present subjunctive form.

- (6) a. *No habla
 Not talk.IMP.2sg
 ‘Don’t talk’ (2nd singular)
- b. No hables
 Not talk.SUBJ.2sg
 ‘Don’t talk’ (2nd singular)

As illustrated in the table that appears in (7), the facts are slightly different in Castilian Spanish where there is a dedicated 2nd person plural form, different from the 3rd person plural: the “vosotros” form.

¹ Here and throughout the paper ‘3rd person’ is intended to mean ‘formal 2nd person.’

(7) Imperative paradigm (and present subjunctive) for Castilian Spanish

	Affirmative imperative	Negative imperative	Present subjunctive
2nd singular	habla	no hables	hables
3 rd singular	hable	no hable	hable
1 st plural	hablemos	no hablemos	hablemos
2nd plural ('vosotros')	hablad	no habléis	habléis
3 rd plural	hablen	no hablen	hablen

As with the 2nd person singular, the 2nd person plural (“vosotros”) form is a true imperative that cannot be negated (at least according to most descriptions). Thus, we must say (8b) instead of (8a).

- (8) a. (*)No hablad
Not talk.IMP.2pl
'Don't talk' (2nd plural)
- b. No habléis
Not talk.SUBJ.2pl
'Don't talk' (2nd plural)

However, as already mentioned, forms like (4) / (8a) are documented. In what follows I will present some evidence of the availability of these forms.² First, RAE / AALE (2009: §42.3t) quotes examples like the following from several literary sources:

- (9) a. Atended al tiempo y no quered perder el rocín y las manzanas (Estébanez Calderón, *Escenas*)
b. No habed miedo de no tener sitio (Palacio, *Ahorcado*)
c. La cruz. No llorad ninguna (Lorca, *Cante*)³
d. Venga, no tened mala idea (García Hortelano, *Mary Tribune*)

Silva-Villar (1998) also mentions examples from different sources and eras:

- (10) a. Entrad, pues, agora muy quedo e non fablad nada (XIV, López de Ayala, *Rimado*)
b. ¡Estaos al raso conmigo! ¡Aún no tocadle! (C. Rodríguez, *Ante la pared de adobe*)
c. ¡No olvidad las elecciones! (1936 political banner)
d. Haced el favor, no buscad más excusas. Poneros el pijama y a la cama (Vigara Tauste 1992: 192-3)

The internet provides a great window into the actual use of the Spanish language. A Google search of a sequence like “no haced caso” (‘Don't pay attention’) returns hundreds of examples, some of which appear in (11), with the original spelling and typography respected.

- (11) a. No haced caso al nick estefi152.
b. NO HACED CASO AL “GOBIERNO” NI A LOS “CIENTIFICOS” NI A LOS “SACERDOTES”
c. Excelente, no haced caso a criticos perfeccionistas
d. No haced caso al mapa de Google mostrado, es totalmente incorrecto
e. NO HACED CASO DE LAS MALAS OPINIONES

² We will be assuming that (8a) and (8b) have the same interpretation. However, Silva-Villar (1996: §6.3.2) argues that in dialects where (8a) is accepted it does not have the same interpretation as (8b).

³ Seco (2011: 254) also discusses this example by Lorca but claims that the use of true imperatives with negation is not “normal”.

- f. NO HACED CASO, OS ESTAN TOMANDO EL PELO
- g. No haced caso de lo k pongo de OT, es para ver si me publican algo ñoña por la tele.
(Google search performed in April 2011)

Similar results are obtained with a search for the sequence “no tened miedo”.

- (12)a. Progres, no tened miedo
- b. No tened miedo a salir del Opus Dei
- c. No tened miedo de la energía atómica
- d. no tened miedo a la biopsia de médula
(Google search performed in January 2012)

Internet search results always need to be taken with a grain of salt since we know very little about their sources. However, the fact that it is easy to find hundreds of examples shows that plural negative imperatives are attested.

To conclude this brief survey about the availability of negative imperatives, let’s consider two items from Spanish newspapers. (13) is a headline from “La Vanguardia” where the true negative imperative appears not once, but twice.

- (13) No haced ruido, no haced ruido. (La Vanguardia, page 25, Sept. 22, 2005)
<http://hemeroteca.lavanguardia.com/preview/2005/09/22/pagina-25/41652823/pdf.html>

As usual, one of the best ways to document the use of a given form is to find complaints about such forms. The second news item clearly illustrates this tradition. The author of an opinion article in “El País” entitled “No pisad el césped” (‘Don’t step on the grass’, with a negated plural imperative) vividly complains about the speakers who use negated true imperatives such as “No pisad el césped.” He says:

- (14) “No pisad el césped” es cuando menos un acongojante servilismo gramatical, una fantasía inocente, sólo permisible a quienes no han tenido, por las razones que fuere, la ocasión de aprender a conjugar.
http://www.elpais.com/articulo/opinion/pisad/cesped/elpepiopi/19811017elpepiopi_4/Tes

The facts that we have seen so far in (9)-(14) could actually be described in two different ways:

- (15)a. At least in some varieties of Spanish, the “no hablad” pattern is acceptable.
- b. At least in some varieties of Spanish, 2nd person plural negative imperatives are acceptable.

The two statements in (15) are not completely equivalent because it is conceivable that the pattern “no hablad” is not a true imperative but a false one: an infinitive in disguise. In what follows, first I will describe how “no hablad” could be considered a false imperative, and later I will reject this possibility.

The possibility that the pattern “no hablad” is a false imperative is hinted at by RAE / AALE (2009: §42.3t) when they say that it is created by hypercorrection. Let’s see how “no hablad” could be created by hypercorrection. First, the 2nd person plural imperative is “incorrectly” replaced by the infinitive (see Garrido Medina (1999: §60.2.1.2)) as in (16a). Since there is no incompatibility between the infinitive and negation, these infinitive forms that are being used as imperatives can be negated as in (16b). Finally, speakers want to recover from the initial mistake of replacing the imperative “hablad” with the

infinitive “hablar” and reverse that change as in (16c), creating an allegedly anomalous sequence (“no hablad”), leading to the hypercorrection the “Nueva Gramática” talks about.⁴

- (16) a. “hablad” → “hablar”
 b. “hablar” → “no hablar”
 c. “no hablar” → “no hablad”

There is some anecdotal evidence of fluctuation between infinitives and 2nd person plural imperatives. Consider the following example:

- (17) Esta noche preferiría no escribir, preferiría no ser yo, no recordad ni sentir nada.
 Tonight I would prefer not to write, not to be me, not to remember nor feel anything
 (Luis Hernáez, *El destino, el barro y la coneja*, via <http://www.corpusdelespanol.org>)

In (17), the form “recordad” is being used as the head of an infinitival complement: it is embedded under “preferiría” and it is coordinated with other infinitival complements such as “ser yo” and “sentir nada”, both headed by infinitives. That is, based on the position it occupies in the sentence, “recordad” is playing the role of an infinitive, but morphologically it is an imperative since it ends in “-d”. Here, we can confidently say the form “recordad” is a false imperative. Even though it is dressed up morphologically as an imperative, it is actually an infinitive.

Despite the previous remarks, we do not believe that the pattern “no hablad” should generally be considered a false imperative. It is likely that the acceptability of “no hablad” might have been favored by its similarities with the infinitive. However, we believe that there are at least two strong arguments to consider it a true imperative. First, if “hablad” could generally be considered an infinitive in disguise we should find many more instances of examples like (17), where an imperative is being used as an infinitive. However, the fact is that examples like (17) are fairly rare, compared to the abundance of negated 2nd person plural imperatives. Second, singular / plural contrasts in the availability of negated imperatives are cross-linguistically documented as illustrated in the following examples:

- (18) Italian (Zanuttini 1994)
 a. Telefona!
 'call!' (2nd sg.)
 b. *Non telefona!
 'don't call!' (2nd sg.)
 c. Telefonate!
 'call!' (2nd pl.)
 d. Non telefonate!
 'don't call!' (2nd pl.)
- (19) Modern Galician (Silva-Villar 1998)
 a. Non facedelle dano
 b. Non lle fagades dano
 ‘Don't hurt him/her’

The examples in (18) show that in Italian the singular imperative cannot be negated but the plural

⁴ Other authors who have analyzed the “no hablad” pattern as hypercorrection are Alarcos Llorach (1994: 151–2), Vigara Tauste (1992: 192–3), Llorente Maldonado de Guevara (1980: 21) and Silva-Villar (1996: 177–8).

can.⁵ The examples in (19) show that in Modern Galician, negative plural commands can be expressed either with a negated true imperative as in (19a) or with the subjunctive form as in (19b), which shows that in Galician there is also variation with respect to the acceptability of negated 2nd person plural imperatives.

To summarize, it seems clear to us that at least in some varieties of Spanish, 2nd person plural negative imperatives are acceptable. What needs to be accounted for is why there is such a clear contrast between the availability of negated imperatives in the singular and the plural. That is, why there is such a clear contrast in the acceptability of the examples in (20).

- (20) a. *No habla tú
 Not talk.IMP.2sg you.sg
 ‘Don’t talk’ (2nd singular)
- b. (?)No hablad vosotros
 Not talk.IMP.2pl you.pl
 ‘Don’t talk’ (2nd plural)

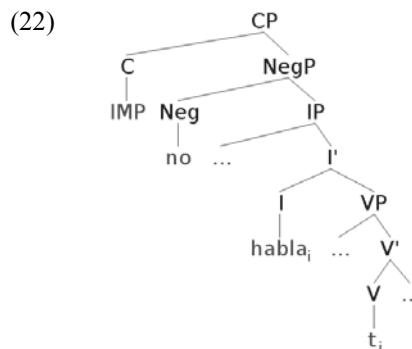
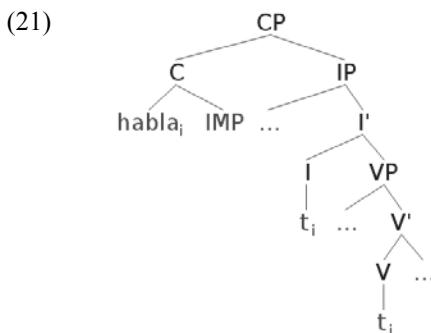
It is important to keep in mind that even though it is easy to find remarks regarding the acceptability of forms like (20b), some of which we have reviewed, there is never a discussion regarding the acceptability of examples like (20a). We take this to be a symptom of a clear singular / plural contrast in negated imperatives. The rest of this paper will be devoted to providing an account of such a contrast.

3. Previous proposals

As summarized in RAE / AALE (2009: §42.3v), there have been two types of approaches to explain the unavailability of negative imperatives: semantic and syntactic/morphological. (See for example Alarcos Llorach (1971), Zanuttini (1997), Rivero and Terzi (1995), Laka (1994), Han (2001), Miyoshi (2002), Zeijlstra (2005), Bošković (2008), among others.) Due to space constraints, we cannot review all of these proposals. We will instead go over the proposals we plan to use to build our own proposal.

3.1. The role of negation: Rivero and Terzi (1995)

One of the most popular accounts of the lack of negative imperatives is the one presented in Rivero and Terzi (1995). According to Rivero and Terzi, in a sentence with a true imperative, there is a strong V feature in C which causes the verb to raise overtly to C as in (21). This V-to-C movement is blocked by the presence of negation as in (22).



⁵ Zanuttini (1994) does not take (18c) and (18d) to be instances of true imperatives. We believe that it can be argued that they are in fact true imperatives but we postpone that discussion for future research. What matters here is that there is a clear singular / plural contrast.

That is, the ungrammaticality of (22) is due to the fact that the imperative feature in C is not checked because the verb cannot reach C due to the presence of negation. Although we find this proposal appealing and our own proposal will also rely on the interference created by the presence of negation, we believe that there are empirical arguments against the idea that negation blocks movement in Spanish. These arguments are based on VS order in Spanish interrogative sentences and some instances of embedded V-to-C movement in Spanish discussed by Bosque and Gutiérrez-Rexach (2009).

As is well-known, in most Spanish dialects the verb must precede the subject in interrogative sentences. If we follow Torrego (1984) and assume that the subject-verb inversion (SVI) in interrogative sentences is accounted for by moving the verb to a position preceding the subject, then it is fairly easy to argue that negation does not block verb movement in Spanish, since the presence of negation does not prevent the verb from appearing before the subject. To make things clearer, consider the following examples:

- (23) a. *¿Qué tu hermano quiere?
 What your brother wants
 b. ¿Qué quiere tu hermano?
 What wants your brother
 ‘What does your brother want?’
- (24) a. *¿Qué tu hermano no quiere?
 What your brother not wants
 b. ¿Qué no quiere tu hermano?
 What no wants your brother
 ‘What doesn’t your brother want?’

A Torrego-style analysis would attribute the grammaticality contrast that is observed in (23) to the fact that the verb has failed to undergo V-to-C movement in (23a) but not in (23b). A similar contrast is observed in (24), which should be accounted for in the same way: (24a) is ungrammatical because the verb has failed to undergo V-to-C movement. Such movement takes place in (24b), despite the presence of negation, contrary to Rivero and Terzi’s expectations.

This argument against the blocking effect of negation based on (24) holds only if one assumes Torrego’s approach to SVI in Spanish interrogative sentences. If one follows the approach by Suñer (1994) and others that the VS order in (23) and (24) is accounted for by assuming, not that the V moves over the subject, but that the subject stays below the V (within VP), then the previous argument does not hold. A more solid empirical argument against the blocking effect of negation can be constructed by looking at a different instance of V-to-C movement, which is what we will do next.

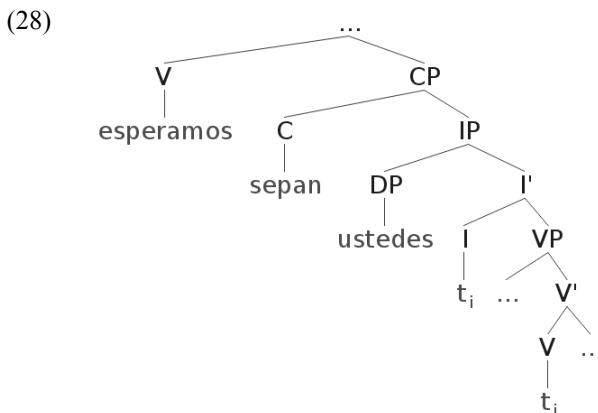
Bosque and Gutiérrez-Rexach (2009: 195–6) note that in embedded sentences, C may be missing in some varieties of Spanish:

- (25) a. Esperamos se encuentren a gusto entre nosotros
 Hope.PRES.1pl SE find.SUBJ.3pl comfortable among us
 ‘We hope you feel comfortable with us’
 b. Ruego acepte usted nuestras más sinceras disculpas
 Request.1sg accept.SUBJ.3sg you our most sincere apologies
 ‘Please accept our most sincere apologies’
 c. Le agradeceré me responda a la mayor brevedad
 you.IO thank.FUT.1sg me.DO reply.SUBJ.3sg to the biggest brevity
 ‘I would appreciate if you could reply to me as soon as possible’
 Bosque and Gutiérrez-Rexach (2009: 195)

Interestingly, they note that subjects and adverbs must be postverbal in this type of construction:

- (26) a. *Esperamos ustedes sepan comprender nuestra urgencia
 hope.1pl you.pl know.3pl to understand our urgency
 b. Esperamos sepan ustedes comprender nuestra urgencia
 hope.1pl know.SUBJ3pl you.pl to understand our urgency
 ‘We hope you understand our urgency’
- (27) a. *Les agradecemos en breve plazo nos respondan
 You.IO thank.1pl in brief time us.DO reply.SUBJ.3pl
 b. Les agradecemos nos respondan en breve plazo
 You.IO thank.1pl us.DO reply.SUBJ.3pl in brief time
 ‘We would appreciate if you could reply to us soon’
 Bosque and Gutiérrez-Rexach (2009: 195–6)

To account for these facts, Bosque and Gutiérrez Rexach propose that in these sentences the embedded verb undergoes movement to C. In this way it is explained why the normal embedded C (namely, “que”) is absent in this type of construction and why the verb needs to precede all the other elements in the embedded sentence. (28) represents the structure of (26b) according to Bosque and Gutiérrez Rexach, with irrelevant details omitted.



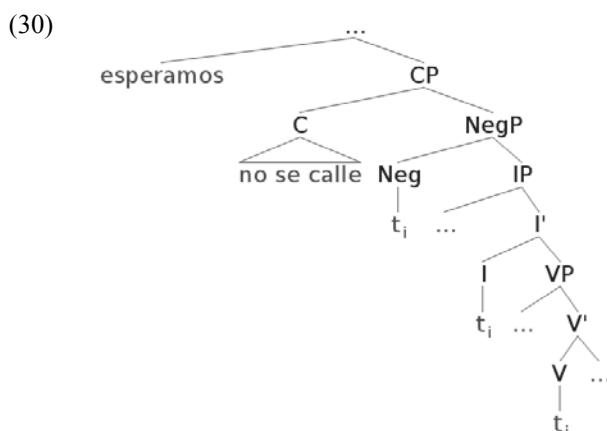
Since the grammatical sentences in (25)-(27) are more common in formal, administrative language, I will dub these constructions “formal embedded V-to-C” movement. We believe that formal embedded V-to-C movement represents a clearer example of verb movement to C than Subject Verb Inversion in interrogative sentences because in formal embedded V-to-C movement, not only does the verb need to appear in initial position but it also replaces the canonical embedded C. Now that we have a clear instance of V-to-C movement, we can ask the question of whether negation blocks it. That is, what happens when negation is added to the embedded sentences in (25)-(27)? To answer this question we performed a Google search for the sequences “esperamos no se” and “esperamos no le”.⁶ Some of the results that we obtained are below:

⁶ I included the clitic in the search string to make sure that I could find a variety of relevant examples. However, the clitic does not play a crucial role and examples can be found without clitics as in the following examples that an anonymous reviewer found through Google.

- (i) a. Esperamos no sepan disculpar
 b. los draw tienen ahora en sus manos un gran poder que esperamos no sepan usar aun

- (29)a. ¡Esperamos no se calle!
 hope.1pl no SE shut-up.SUBJ.3sg
 ‘We hope he does not shut up’
- b. Esperamos no se repitan nunca, ni de un lado ni del otro
- c. Vamos a llevar una campaña moderada; esperamos no se convierta en una guerra sucia
- d. Y esperamos no le moleste
- e. Esperamos no le de largas al asunto
 (Google search performed on April 2011)

What these examples indicate is that formal embedded V-to-C movement is compatible with negation in the embedded clause. We take these examples to show that negation does not block formal embedded V-to-C movement. We propose that V moves through Neg and the complex “neg V” moves to C. According to this, the relevant structure of an example like (29a) is the one that appears in (30), irrelevant details omitted.

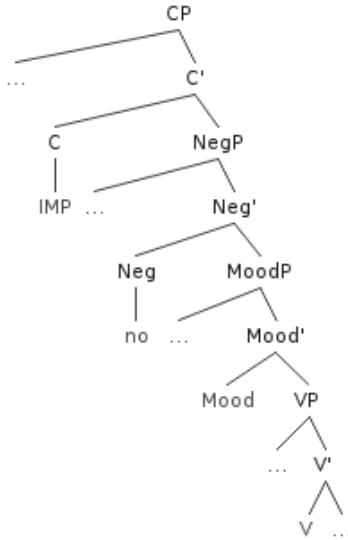


Contrary to Rivero and Terzi’s idea, we do not believe that negation blocks V-to-C movement. We assume that in Spanish “no” is a clitic that attaches to the verb, and when necessary, moves along with it. (See also Bosque and Gutiérrez-Rexach (2009: 634).) Thus, in (29a) / (30) “no” attaches to the verbal complex “se calle” and the newly created verbal complex “no se calle” moves to C.

3.2. Impoverished imperative morphology: Zanuttini (1997)

Another influential account of the lack of negative imperatives in certain languages is Zanuttini (1997). Zanuttini’s account relies on the impoverished morphology of imperatives. She proposes that in sentences with a preverbal negative marker (such as “no” in Spanish) there is a Mood head whose features must be checked by the verb. These features, however, cannot be checked by true imperatives, thus accounting for why true imperative cannot be negated. The basic structure of negative imperative sentences according to Zanuttini is as follows:

(31)



Let's see how Zanuttini's analysis is applied to the Spanish data. (32) contains examples of imperative sentences in the singular.

- (32)a. Habla
Talk.IMP.2sg
'Talk' (2nd singular)
- b. *No habla
Not talk.IMP.2sg
'Don't talk' (2nd singular)
- c. No hables
Not talk.SUBJ.2sg
'Don't talk' (2nd singular)

In (32a) there is not negation, therefore Mood does not need to appear and, if it does, it does not have any features that the verb needs to check. In (32b) the appearance of "no" as the head of NegP forces the appearance of Mood, whose features cannot be checked because the true imperative "habla" is morphologically defective. In (32c) the presence of NegP headed by "no" requires the presence of Mood whose features can be successfully checked by the subjunctive "hables". Now let's consider the 2nd person plural imperative case. We have seen that there is some variation regarding 2nd plural imperatives. Some speakers reject forms like (33), but others accept them:

- (33)(*)No hablad
Not talk.IMP.2pl
'Don't talk' (2nd plural)

Zanuttini's analysis was designed to rule out examples like (33). For her, since "hablad" is a true imperative, it cannot check the features of the Mood head required by the negative marker. However, we have seen that there are some speakers who use forms like (33). As far as we can tell, it does not seem that Zanuttini's analysis can be modified easily so (33) can be ruled in. Since "hablad" is a true imperative, there is no way in which it could be compatible with negation under Zanuttini's analysis. For this reason, in the next section we will provide our alternative to Zanuttini's analysis. However, our

proposal will share with Zanuttini the assumption that the impoverished morphology of the imperative plays a crucial role in explaining why certain true imperative forms are incompatible with negation.

Before we proceed, let's review some of the evidence that shows that imperatives tend to be morphologically impoverished. In Spanish, as well as in other languages, imperatives are characterized by being minimally specified. Thus, in the 2nd person singular, the only morphological mark that imperatives have is the thematic vowel:

- (34) a. Habla
 'Talk'
 b. Bebe
 'Drink'
 c. Vive
 'Live'

In some extreme cases, even the thematic vowel is missing as in the following irregular imperatives:

- (35) a. hacer – haz 'make'
 b. poner – pon 'put'
 c. salir – sal 'leave'
 d. tener – ten 'have'
 e. venir – ven 'come'

The impoverished nature of imperative morphology is explicitly captured in the Imperative morphology ruled proposed by Harris (1998). The rule, given in (36), has the effect of removing the subjunctive inflection of those verbs that appear in C in imperative sentences, reinforcing the idea that imperatives somehow lack inflection, and effectively making the imperative forms defective within the verbal paradigm.

- (36) Imperative morphology
 [+subjnc] → Ø/ ____ [2pers]]_c

4. Our proposal

4.1. A morphological approach to the lack of negative imperatives

So far we have seen that 2nd person plural negative imperatives are possible in some varieties (Section 2), that sentential negation “no” is a clitic that attaches to the verb and moves with it (Section 3.1), and that imperatives are somehow morphologically defective (Section 3.2). Putting all of these together, we would like to propose that the reason true imperatives cannot be negated in Spanish is that the negative marker “no” can only attach to non-defective verbs. That is, “no”, being a marker for sentential negation, can only attach to an element that is a “real” verb, and imperatives, due to their impoverished morphology, do not count as a verb to which “no” can attach. The advantage of this proposal is that it leaves some room for speaker variation: different speakers might vary with respect to how defective they consider imperatives to be. Every speaker considers singular imperatives to be morphologically defective, whereas for some speakers the “-d” that we find at the end of plural imperatives changes the status of the plural imperative form. This final “-d” makes the plural imperative form non-defective and allows it to host the clitic “no” making 2nd person plural negative imperative possible.

Our proposal crucially relies on the imperative being a morphologically defective verb (which prevents it from hosting the negative marker “no” in the singular for all speakers and in the plural for

some speakers). We believe that this aspect of our account is supported by Maiden, Swearingen, and O’Neill (2009)’s work on imperatives in Romance. Maiden, Swearingen, and O’Neill (2009) show that the imperative forms are frequently an odd element within the verbal paradigm. Below are some of the patterns that they observed:

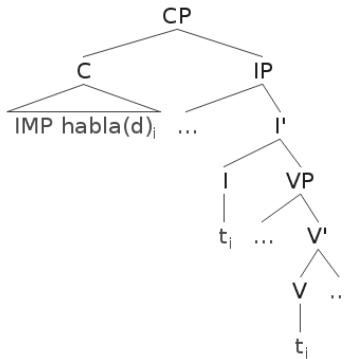
- (37) a. Some verbs are defective, by existing only in the imperative.
 b. Some become suppletive just in the imperative.
 c. Some imperatives have highly idiosyncratic inflectional endings.
 d. Imperatives often have ‘extraneous’ origins as interjections, or are borrowed from other languages.
 Maiden, Swearingen, and O’Neill (2009: 99)

The idiosyncrasy of the imperative provides some support to our proposal that the imperative lacks the relevant morphological requirements needed to host sentential negation. If it is a fact that imperatives are highly idiosyncratic from a morphophonological point of view, it is not unexpected that they behave differently from normal elements of the verbal paradigm with respect to whether they can host a clitic ‘no’ or not.

Let’s see how our proposal handles some of the examples that we have been considering throughout this paper. In the analysis of these examples, I will be assuming Rivero and Terzi’s proposal that the verb moves to C, although this aspect is not crucial to our analysis. First, consider positive imperatives:

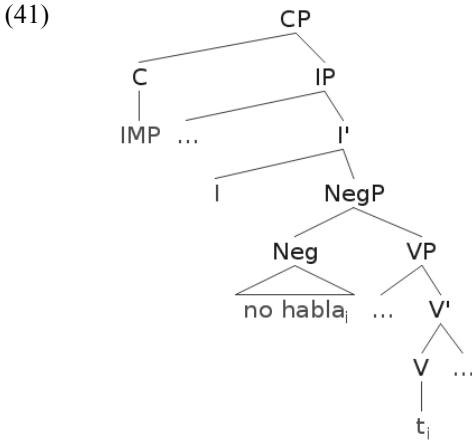
(38) Habla(d)

(39)



In (39) the verb moves all the way to C where it checks the imperative feature of C. Now consider the ungrammatical (40).

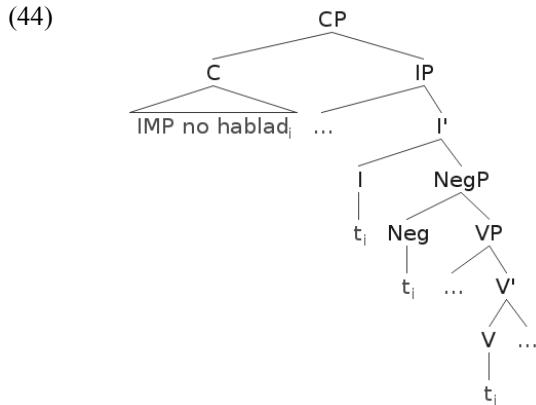
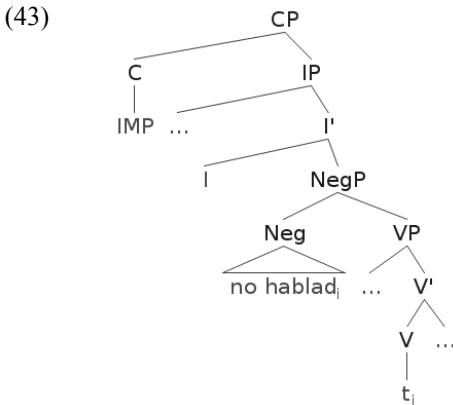
(40) *No habla



At some point in the derivation of (40) the clitic “no” is going to attach to the verb (see (41)), but at that point the sentence is going to be ruled out because we are assuming that the clitic “no” cannot attach to morphologically defective forms of the verb, such as the singular imperative. In our analysis, as well as in Rivero and Terzi’s, negation has a crucial role in accounting for the ungrammaticality of (40). For Rivero and Terzi, negation blocks verb movement to C, which we do not think is empirically accurate because of our discussion of (29). In our analysis negation plays a crucial role because of its selectional restrictions on what it can be attached to: it can only be attached to non-defective verbs.

Now let’s consider plural imperatives like (42). Remember that some speakers reject but others accept (42). The main advantage of the analysis that we are proposing is that it can accommodate such variation. At this point it is important to remember that even though the RAE / AALE (2009) recommends not to use forms like (42), it also points out that in order to properly account for the lack of negative imperatives in Spanish, we need to account for the fact that some speakers accept (42).

(42) #No hablad



For the speakers who reject (42), we propose that the sentential negation marker “no” cannot attach to “hablad” (see (43)), because for them “hablad” is a morphologically defective verb.⁷ For the speakers

⁷ We are assuming that “voseante” speakers of Spanish fall under this group since the imperative “vos” forms cannot be negated as illustrated in (i):

(i) (Vos) hablá / *No hablá

who accept (42), we propose that for them “hablad” is not morphologically defective (probably due to the “-d” ending) and therefore “no” can attach to “hablad”. The resulting verbal complex “no hablad” moves to C where it checks its imperative feature.

To summarize our proposal, we argue that the impossibility of having negative imperatives is due to the requirement that “no” attaches to a morphologically non-defective form of the verb. For all speakers, 2nd person singular imperative forms are morphologically defective which explains why they are always rejected. The status 2nd person plural imperative forms (“hablad”) is different. Some speakers consider them defective and therefore reject 2nd person plural negative imperatives (“*No hablad”). Others do not consider them defective and accept 2nd person plural negative imperatives (“No hablad”).⁸

Before presenting independent evidence for this proposal in the next section, let’s consider some potential counterexamples. Our proposal is based on the idea that the negative marker “no” is a clitic that needs to be hosted by a verb. However, “no” does not always need to be hosted, as illustrated by the following sentences:

- (45) a. Marta dijo que no
Marta said.3sg that not
‘Marta said no’
b. ¿Quieres venir? No
want.3sg come.INF not
‘Do you want to come? No’

We would like to argue that in cases like these, “no” is not an instance of sentential negation but constituent negation as hinted at by the English translations. The “no” in (45) is translated as “no” but in all the other examples that we have considered in this paper “no” is translated as “not” or “n’t”. Thus, we would like to claim that the requirement that “no” is hosted by a non-defective verb only applies to sentential negation, making the examples in (45) irrelevant.⁹

‘Vos’ talk.IMP not talk.IMP
‘Talk’ / ‘Don’t talk’

- (ii) (Vos) tené / No tené
‘Vos’ have.IMP / not have.IMP
‘Have’ / ‘Don’t have’

⁸ Zanuttini (1997: 116) considers and rejects a proposal along these lines. Her rejection is partially based on the assumption that 2nd person plural imperative can never be negated in Spanish, which we have seen is not accurate.

⁹ Another type of potential evidence against our proposal is the incompatibility of true imperatives and preverbal negative quantifiers:

- (i) *No habla.
No talk.IMP.2sg
‘Don’t talk’

- (ii) *Nunca habla.
Never talk.IMP.2sg
‘Never talk’

- (iii) *De nada habla.
About nothing talk.IMP.2sg
‘Don’t talk about anything’

Our account of (i) is based on the incompatibility of clitic “no” and the imperative morphology. However, (ii) and (iii) are still ungrammatical even though there is no clitic “no”. In order to accommodate these examples it could be argued that the incompatibility exists not between the imperative and the clitic, but between the imperative and the abstract Neg head.

4.2. Further evidence

The proposal that we have outlined in the previous section accounts for the lack of negative 2nd person singular imperatives and for the variability of the acceptance of negative 2nd person plural imperatives. However, it does so in a slightly circular way since the only way to determine whether speakers consider 2nd person plural imperatives like “hablad” morphologically defective is to determine whether they accept “no hablad”. In this section, we will review some independent evidence supporting our account, effectively eliminating the circularity in our explanation.

First let’s consider Snyder and Bar-Shalom (1998), which investigates the early stages of children learning Russian, focusing on the optional infinitive stage when verbs may lack inflectional morphology. They discovered that optional infinitives were not compatible with negation. The following table summarizes some of their relevant findings:

(46)

	Positive	Negative
+ FIN	726	46
- FIN	100	0

When looking at regularly inflected verbs, they were able to find both positive (726) and negative (46) examples. However, when looking at optional infinitives, they were able to find only positive examples. The conclusion that they reached is that optional infinitives are not compatible with negation. To account for these facts they proposed that “Neg must be adjoined to a featurally specified T”, which is similar to our account of negative imperatives. We take the proposal by Snyder and Bar-Shalom, which covers different languages and different phenomena, as providing independent evidence for our proposal.

Further evidence for our proposal comes from Zeijlstra (2005), which examined the availability of negative imperatives across languages. He notes that in all languages where negative imperatives are impossible, negation is a head, but in some languages where negation is a head, negative imperatives are possible. To account for these facts he assumes the following sentence structure:

(47) [C° ... [Neg° ... [V_{imp} ...]]]

He then claims that

(48) “movement of V_{imp} to C° obeys the HMC. Consequently, if a negative marker is base-generated in Neg°, V_{imp} must attach to it, otherwise the derivation crashes. However, it depends on the phonological properties of a negative marker whether it allows this kind of cliticization. It could very well be that this negative marker cannot be attached to V_{imp}. In that case the language also bans T[ru_e]N[egative] I[imperative]s.” (Zeijlstra 2005: 431)

Thus, one of the ways that Zeijlstra tries to account for the availability of negative imperatives is by parameterizing whether the negative marker can attach to the imperative form of the verb or not. If a language has a negative marker that is a head and cannot attach to the imperative form of the verb, then negative imperatives are not available. If the negative head can attach to imperatives, then negative imperatives are available. Our account is similar to Zeijlstra’s in that we also rely on whether “no” can attach to the imperative or not. The cross-linguistic parametrization that Zeijlstra assumes exists across languages is what we assume exists between the singular and plural imperative forms in Spanish.

Finally, an anonymous reviewer pointed out that out of the two possible forms of the 1st person plural imperative forms of “ir” (‘to go’), namely, “vamos” and “vayamos,” only the regular “vayamos”

can be negated. We believe that this can be considered as further evidence for our proposal since it is the irregular (or defective) form the one that is incompatible with negation.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, in this paper we have presented an account of negative imperatives that leaves room for the acceptability of 2nd person plural negative imperatives (“no hablad”) in Spanish. In the discussions about negative imperatives in Spanish, it is normally assumed that true negative imperatives are never possible. However, we have reviewed evidence that they are available in the 2nd person plural. Under our account, sentential negation “no” is a clitic that needs to be hosted by a non-defective verb. Second person singular imperatives cannot host “no” but 2nd person plural imperatives can, at least for some speakers. Our account is supported by independent evidence from cross-linguistic considerations. We leave for future research whether our account could be applied to other languages such as Italian.

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