

# Implications of imperative questions in Turkish: What do imperatives denote?

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In this study, I analyze the interaction between imperative/optative and interrogative clauses in Turkish and offer a fresh perspective on the debate on the semantic denotation of imperatives by challenging the view that those two clause types are mutually exclusive. I also examine the overlap between imperative and optative paradigms in Turkish, highlighting the challenges in distinguishing between these moods and suggesting a pragmatic way to approach analyzing these paradigms.

I address the complex morphological and semantic overlap between imperatives and optatives in Turkish, where traditional analysis might be insufficient in establishing clear boundaries between the two paradigms. While the second-person forms show distinct morphological marking (verb root for imperative vs. -sIn for optative), the third-person forms share the same suffix (-sIn), creating syncretism. First-person forms, traditionally analyzed only as optatives, are shown to potentially function as imperatives in certain contexts. This ambiguity complicates the analysis of question forms with these suffixes, requiring careful consideration of semantic, pragmatic, and morphological factors to determine whether we are examining true imperative questions or optative questions.

Based on empirical data from Turkish, the study investigates how imperatives can (or cannot) function as questions and analyzes the implications for current theories of imperatives. The paper tries to explain why canonical second-person imperative questions (2) are ungrammatical while both first-person (1) and third-person imperative questions (3) are possible in Turkish, in light of two major theoretical approaches to imperatives, namely, Portner's (2004) to-do list approach and Kaufmann's (2016) modal approach.

(1)  
Yemek            yap-ayım            mı?  
food            make-IMP/OPT.1SG    Q  
“Shall I cook?”

(2)  
\* Yemek            yap            mı?  
food            make.IMP.2SG    Q  
Intended: “Shall you cook?”

(3)  
Yemek            yap-sın            mı?  
food            make-IMP/OPT.3SG    Q  
“Shall they (sg) cook?”

Portner's to-do list approach treats imperatives and questions as mutually exclusive clause types, making it impossible to discuss the Turkish data provided.

The ungrammaticality of second-person canonical imperative questions is explained by Kaufmann's modal approach, which posits that imperatives have certain presuppositions based on the discourse context.

Kaufmann says imperatives are basically necessity modals and they additionally trigger two presuppositions: Non-descriptivity and epistemic authority.

