

การตีความทางอรรถศาสตร์ของโครงสร้างประโยคคำสั่ง  
ในนวนิยาย  
Semantic Denotations of Imperative Structures  
in Novels

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยครั้งนี้ศึกษาระบบอรรถศาสตร์ของโครงสร้างประโยคคำสั่งในนวนิยาย งานวิจัยนี้เก็บข้อมูลจากตัวบทที่แตกต่างคือตัวบทสนทนาในนวนิยายภาษาอังกฤษจากหนังสือ นวนิยายที่ขายดีเป็นจำนวนสามเล่มประกอบด้วย 1. Wuthering Heights ซึ่งแต่งโดย Bronte 2. The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King ซึ่งแต่งโดย Tolkein และ 3. Dracula ซึ่งแต่งโดย Stoker คลังข้อมูลจำนวน 150,000 คำ ประกอบด้วย 29 ตัวอย่าง การวิเคราะห์เชิงอรรถศาสตร์ดำเนินการตามแบบของ Stefanowitch อาจารย์ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษจำนวน ทั้งสิ้นสามท่านทำการตรวจผลการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงอรรถศาสตร์เพื่อความถูกต้องและความ น่าเชื่อถือ ผลการศึกษานี้สอดคล้องกับหลักการวิเคราะห์ของ Stefanowitch ในมุมมองของการ ใช้โครงสร้างคำสั่ง เชิญชวนและเรียกร้อง ผลการศึกษานี้จะเป็นประโยชน์ต่อผู้เรียน ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาที่สองและผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

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#### ABSTRACT

This study examined the semantic denotations of imperative structures in English novels. This study contributes by using English novels in order to investigate the imperative structure in conversation dialogues. The data collection of English novels in this study was gathered from three best-selling English novels, which are 1. Wuthering Heights by Bronte 2. The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King by Tolkein and 3. Dracula by Stoker. Approximately 150,000 words are made up of 29 tokens of imperative structures. Regarding the data analysis, the semantic denotations of imperative structures in this study follow Stefanowitch. Concerning the data validation, three English instructors were asked to validate the data analysis to ensure its accuracy and reliability. The results show that the semantic denotations comply with Stefanowitch's semantic denotations of instruction, invitation and request. It is hoped that this study will be beneficial to learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) and learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) concerning the use of imperative structures in narrative writing.

**KEYWORDS:** Semantic denotations, Imperative structures, English novels

#### Introduction

Today, English has been prevalently used as an international language. Since we are living in the era of globalization, knowing English is viewed as if opening the door to the world. Improving our English skills is not only beneficial to our English learning abilities inside English classrooms, but it will lead one to better job opportunities and global connections. Accordingly, knowing the English language is the pathway of successful accomplishment in one's life.

In order to know the English language, it is unavoidable to say that it is important to know the form, meaning and use of the English language at the same time. As mentioned by Radford (2016), form and functions are viewed as the core of a language to study. Our *linguistic performance*, referring to accurate and fluent use of language, will be mastered.

Regarding the structure of English, the English language is known as the language where the subject must be present (Radford, 2016). In other words,

omitting the subject of sentences as in *\*loves coffee* results in ungrammaticality and this leads to unacceptability. Despite having this requirement, there is the structure in English known as *imperative*, such as *Look!* which does not require a subject. This construction is special, being classified under the null category in English (Radford, 2016).

Without the subject requirement, the imperative structures in English are considered special. When the subject is omitted, it can be doubtful as to who is *the agent*, referring to a person or an instigator who performs the action. Another issue to consider about imperatives is when and why this structure will be used in different text varieties. The third perspective to look at is which lexical items frequently occur with this structure.

In regard to text varieties, different text varieties are likely to have their own preferences of grammatical structures. Learning grammar from text varieties allow us to learn their form, meaning and use concurrently. The use of the imperative frequently appears in English novels as they contain the dialogue of conversation (Takahashi, 2007) and they are viewed as a reliable source to learn this structure. This way of learning is considered as implicit learning of grammar whereby grammar is not separately taken from context to be studied alone. Learning grammar from English novels is likely to be useful for learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) and learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Despite having different text varieties that are used with imperative structures, such as advertisements and cooking recipes, this study contributes to the field by applying the study of imperative structures to English novels. In regard to their suitability and availability, English novels are reading materials that are suitable for everyone and they are also available in every household.

The readers can select stories that they enjoy reading themselves. With their enjoyability, this could attract learners to read books more frequently. Novels provide conversational dialogues that allow English language learners to learn the use of imperative structure easily. Normally, English language learners learn grammar in their English classrooms. Learning grammar from authentic text such as English novels themselves allows English language learner to become more autonomous learners and less dependent on their English teachers. So, English language learners could learn form, meaning and use at the same time. With this information, it leads to the following research question, as in, what are the semantic denotations of imperative structures in English novels?

## Objective of the Study

To examine semantic denotations of imperative structures in English novels

## Literature Review

This section provides the information of imperative structure in English (Radford, 2016). The analysis of semantic denotations of imperative structures is explained via Stefanowitsch's (2003) framework. Finally, previous studies examining imperative structures in different text varieties will be also addressed.

## Imperative Mood

In addition to the psychology of language learning, the following section indicates the linguistic information of imperative structures. Imperative is one of the moods in English, which is discussed commonly (Katz, 2020). One of the prevalent uses of imperative mood is the interpersonal communication of command and order, as in *Take this to the kitchen* (Katz, 2020). Not only is the verb in this sentence used for the addressee to follow the action, the command or order is used in relation with politeness strategy or making a polite request (Katz, 2020). In imperative structures, the structure is covert, which will be explained in the following section. In traditional grammar, the deleted subject is understood as the second pronoun *you*. This may be convincing; however, it is argued later that it can be the first-person pronoun as in *I am telling you to take this to the kitchen*. Although having this interpretation, it is also interpreted as the second pronoun anyway, as it appears in an *object control construction*. The subject of the verb *take* is controlled by the pronoun *you*.

## Syntactic Structure of Imperatives

As mentioned above, imperative structures lack the subject, so they are classified into the *null subject* category, such as *Look!* (Radford, 2016). What is the null subject? The subject in the English language is compulsorily required in all clauses. This requirement is to fulfill *Extended Projection Principle*, sometimes known as an *EPP feature* (Radford, 2016). However, there are several exceptions for the subject in English. One of them is called *truncation*. This is frequently found in writing a diary, where the omitted subjects are known to be the writers themselves, such as *go shopping*. The second case appears in non-finite clauses, as in *Peter wants PRO to eat mango*. Based upon generative grammar, the subject of non-finite

clauses is PRO which has a coindexation with the matrix subject referring to *Peter* (Radford, 2016). The last category is the imperative structure, such as *Sit here*.

Along the same lines as Zanuttini (2007), the imperative is syntactically classified as the null subject category, sometimes known as the overt pronoun *you*. In language analysis, the categories of subject are divided into the categories of null subject and non-null subject. In English, the null subject is an exceptional case, as in (1).

(1) Stand up!

The null subject in (1) is interpreted as the second pronoun, referring to *you*. This could be tested by the question tag (Zanuttini, 2007), as in (2).

(2) Stand up, won't you?

The overt subject is interpreted as the second pronoun *you*. It would be ungrammatical if one were to interpret the null subject as the first pronoun or the third pronoun.

(3)

(a) You stand up.

(b) \*He/I stand up.

The null subject in imperative structure is not the same the covert subject PRO in non-finite clauses as the covert subject PRO in non-finite clauses as in *I want PRO to eat mango*, has the coreferential subject, as in *I*. Accordingly, the covert subject of the imperative structure refers to the second pronoun *you*. In addition, there are several characteristics of the imperative structure in English. Since imperative structure is an exceptional case, it cannot receive tense such as *\*Passed me the salt*. Also, modal verbs cannot be used with imperative as in *\*will pass me the salt*.

### Semantic Denotations of Imperative Structures

Aside from the syntactic theory of imperative structure, the main focus in this study is the semantic denotation of imperative structures in English. The framework of semantic denotations in the structure of imperative follows Stefanowitsch (2003) who classified the senses of imperative structures as follows:

**Table 1***Framework of Semantic Denotation of Imperative Structures (Stefanowitch, 2003, p. 4)*

(4)

Semantic Denotations	Examples
Request	(a) <i>Pass the sour cream please.</i>
Advice	(b) <i>If you feel uncomfortable with your fellow passenger, move to another carriage at the next station.</i>
Instruction	(c) <i>Melt the butter and the remaining oil in a separate saucepan.</i>
Permission	(d) <i>Uh yeah go on then.</i>
Wishes	(e) <i>Have a great birthday.</i>
Invitations	(f) <i>Please let me know if there is anything else that you need.</i>
Please	(g) <i>Please write soon.</i>
Warning	(h) <i>Just be careful.</i>

Table 1 presents the framework of semantic denotation in order to analyze imperative structures in English. The framework is based upon Stefanowitch (2003) who divided the sense of imperative into eight categories. There are request, advice, instruction, permission, wishes, invitation, please and warning.

### Imperative Structures in Text Varieties

This section reviews the studies of imperative structures in text varieties. Text varieties refer to different genres of data collection in order to examine their form and meaning. One of the well-known studies in this field is Ren's (2011) research article examining imperative in English netvertising. He found that imperative is used with lexical cohesion reiterating, referring to *repetition*, as in (5).

(5) *Save 50% on a second box of the sweetest fruit to bend a bough...Save on two luscious boxes (a \$55.90 value), shipped to one address.*

(Ren, 2011, p. 746)

The imperative in (5) applies with the technique of repetition, referring to using the word *save* twice. The word *save* that is used twice has an impact on consumers in order to make a decision to purchase the product.

In addition to Ren (2011), Takahashi (2007) studied the structure of imperative in fictive stories, which are *The Sky is Falling*, *The Pelican Brief* and *The Deception*. As claimed by Takahashi (2007), dialogues in narrative writing could represent actual conversation. The top-four words that are frequently used in these tokens are *Let's*, *Let*, *Look* and *Tell*. Concerning the use of *let's*, several examples are given as in (6).

(6)

(a) “*Let's go for a walk*”.

(b) “*Let's chat*”.

(Takahashi, 2007, p. 97-98)

*Let's* in (6) is used with the semantic denotation of either agreement or refusal. It is the speaker's address to invite the listener to joint proposed activities or events with a polite manner called *tact* or *politeness strategies* (Takahashi, 2007). Another denotation of the use of *let's* is instruction, referring to inviting someone to do something, as in (7).

(7) “*Now, let's get down to business*”.

(Takahashi, 2007, p. 99)

*Let's get down to business* as in (7) is the speaker's instruction for the listener to get into the topic of their talk. In addition to the word *let's* and its denotation, the verb *let* usually co-occurs with *me* as in (8).

(8)

(a) “*Let me see*”.

(b) “*Let me say*”.

This pattern of occurrence is a predominant use of the verb *let*. Aside from this, the verb *Look* in the imperative is used with different senses as in (9).

(9)

(a) “*Look, where are you now?*”

(b) “*Well, look who's here*”.

(Takahashi, 2007, p. 117)

The verb *Look*, as in (9a), calls the listener's attention, technically known as *interjection* (Takahashi, 2007). *Look*, as in (9b), is used with the sense of perception. Another common verb that is used with the structure of imperative in fictive stories is the verb *tell*, as in (10).

(10) “*Well, tell us what’s happening*”.

(Takahashi, 2007, p. 108)

In (10), the verb *tell* shows that it is common to be used with the colligation of indirect interrogative.

O’neill and Casavas (1997) studied the use of imperative in English advertisement. The results of the study reveal that the semantic denotation of instructions is the most common patterns in television advertisement, where an example is presented as in (11).

(11) Coleman’s Sauces

Voice-over (woman): For a proper family meal, pop some chicken in a dish. Then pick a Coleman’s sauce, empty it out, add some water, stir it up, and pour over the chicken. Cook until tender and serve with nice fresh vegetables. Coleman’s makes a real meal.

(O’neill & Casavas, 1997, p. 227)

O’neill & Casavas (1997) indicated that instruction is likely to be used often in the advertisement of a recipe when making a meal. Furthermore, Jary and Kissine (2016) provided a number of imperatives, exemplified as follows.

(12)

- (a) Shut the door.
- (b) Watch out for pickpockets.
- (c) Read the comments carefully.
- (d) Don’t smoke here.
- (e) Enjoy the show.

Jary and Kissine (2016) indicated that imperative belongs to the category of directive speech acts, which could include request, as in (12a), warning, as in (12b), advice, as in (12c), prohibition, as in (12d) and a good wish, as in (12e)

### English Novels

This study selected English novels as they contain conversation dialogues and are a practical source to investigate the use of imperative structures. English novel is a kind of narrative writing. It is a kind of writing to entertain readers. This kind of writing is regarded as a special kind of writing. In order for the readers to continue reading a written story from the start until the end, it is important for the writers to develop the plot of the stories in an interesting way. This requires writers to have a good orientation, referring to the plot, setting and the protagonist.



Although many people claim that imperative structures occur in spoken register, Takahashi (2007) pointed out that imperative structures are also commonly found in conversational interaction between protagonists in stories. This can be used to represent spoken language to investigate imperative structures in English novels as shown below.

(13)

“Who has taught you those fine words, brain?” I inquired. “The curate?”

“Damn the curate, and three! Give me that,” he replied.

“Tell us where you got your lessons, and you shall have it,” said I. “Who’s your master?”

“Devil daddy,” was his answer.

“And what do you learn from daddy?” I continued.

(Bronte, 2019, p. 85)

In (13) we are reading a conversation between characters in the story of *Wuthering Heights*. The conversation in written stories is regarded as having high practicality in order to use them to replace spoken language. This information leads to the following method.

## Method

The investigation of imperative structure in this study is gathered from the data collection of three popular English novels.

## The Data

The data collection in this study is English novels, which are written with the dialogue of conversation. This indicate that it is the protagonists’ spoken language. With this occurrence, the researcher could investigate the imperative structure from this section (Takahashi, 2007).

The data in this study is gathered from *Wuthering Heights* (Bronte, 2019), *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2020) and *Dracula* (2021). These are best-selling novels (www.amazon.com). A total of 150,000 words contains 29 tokens of imperative structures. The imperative structure begins with the verb without the subject and it could be tested by an adverbial phrase *internationally*. An example of conversation dialogue is given as follows:

“Let me in-let me in!”

“Who are you?” I asked, struggling, meanwhile, to disengage myself.

“Catherine Linton,” it replied, shiveringly (why did I of *Linton*? I had read *Earnshaw* twenty times for Linton)- “I’m come home: I’d lost my way on the moor!”

With this data collection, the data analysis is presented in the following section.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis of imperative in this study follows Stefanowitch (2003) who classified the semantic denotation of imperative into types where the pilot study is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Semantic Denotation of Imperative Structures in Selected English Novels*  
(14)

Semantic Denotations	Examples
Invitation	(a) “ <i>Come, come,</i> ” he said, “you are flurried, Mr. Lockwood
Request	(b) The intense horror of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed, “ <i>Let me in-let me in.</i> ”
Instruction	(c) “ <i>Stop, Miss Catherine, dear!</i> ”-I Interrupted.

Table 2 presents semantic denotation of imperative structures. In regard to the data analysis of the imperative in this study follow the definition and example as provided below.

The semantic denotation of invitation provides the sense of asking someone politely and sometimes it is used with words of repetition, such as *Come, Come as in (14a)* (Stefanowitch, 2003). Requesting provides the sense of asking for permission to do something, such as *let me in-let me in as in (14b)*. (Stefanowitch, 2003). In (14c), *stop* represents an *instruction*, referring to informing someone to do something or it is a must to do it (Stefanowitch, 2003).

### The Results and Discussion

This section presents the result and discussion of the study. In the total of 150,000 words, there are 29 tokens of imperative structures in this study. In the

selected English novels, three semantic denotations of imperative structures are found as in invitation, request and instruction. It seems that each semantic denotation of imperative structures in the selected English novels is used with limited lexical choices.

### Overall Semantic Denotation of Imperative Structures in Selected English Novels

The frequencies and percentages of semantic denotations of imperative structures in the selected English novels are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3** *Frequencies and Percentages of Imperative Structures in the Selected English Novels*

Semantic Denotations	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Instruction	13	44.82
Invitation	11	37.93
Request	5	17.24
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100</b>

The higher percentages occur with the imperative of instructions and invitation at 44.82 percent and 37.93 percent, respectively. The lowest percentage of imperative structures are requests at 17.24 percent.

### Semantic Denotations of Instructions

The imperative structure to denote instruction is the most frequent pattern used in the selected English novels. This result goes along the same lines as Qassim and Hussein (2013) who studied the use of imperative structures in the novel called *Oliver Twist*, where the result of semantic denotation of instruction occurs among the top 5.

(15)

(a) “Leave the room, Ellen!” she repeated, trembling all over.

(Bronte, 2019, p. 56)

(b) “Look!” she cried eagerly, “that’s my room with the candle in it, and the trees swaying before it; and the other candle is in Joseph’s garret.”

(Bronte, 2019, p. 97)

(c) “Get away this moment! How dare you touch me?”

(Bronte, 2019, p. 224)

(d) *“Look!”* he cried.

(Tolkien, 2020, p. 875)

(e) *“Look! Isten szek!”-“God’s seat”*

(Stoker, 2021, p.10)

With regard to the imperative structures of instructions as occurred in this study, it seems that various lexical items occur with this study as compared with a previous study. Qassim and Hussein (2013) used only one novel to investigate the imperative structure, this would be a reason why there is a limitation in the result of their study where only the lexical item *leave* was found. However, the current study found more verbs that are used in this pattern: *look, get up, put on, stop, get away* and *tell me*.

### Semantic Denotation of Invitation

One of the common uses of imperative structures complying with Stefanowitsch’s (2003) framework is the semantic denotation of invitation as in (16).

(16)

(a) *“No, thank you.”*

*“Not bitten, are you?”*

*“If I had been, I would have set my signet on the biter.”*

*Heathcliff’s countenance relaxed into a grin.*

*“Come, come,”* he said, *“you are flurried, Mr. Lockwood.”*

(Bronte, 2019, p. 7)

(b) *“Come, come!”* I repeated. *“I’ll tie the riband.”*

(Bronte, 2019, p. 148)

(e) *“Come Master Perrian!”*

(Tolkien, 2020, p. 885)

(f) *“Come,”* he said at last.

(Stoker, 2021, p. 30)

In (16), the semantic denotation of imperative structure is invitation. When one is invited to do something, the speakers use the technique of lexical repetition, such as *come, come* as in (16a) and (16b). With this denotation, only two specific lexical choices as in *come* and *sit down* are used when inviting someone to do something.

The occurrence of lexical repetition is not only common in advertising as in *save 50% on a second box of the sweetest fruit to bend a bough....save on two*

*luscious boxes (a \$55.90 value), shipped to one address* as mentioned by (Ren, 2011, p. 746). This feature is also used in English novels, which can be common characteristics of imperative structures. So when someone is invited to do or buy something, the imperative structure of lexical repetition can be a good technique to use.

The result of this study could very well be applicable to the learning theory of behaviorism (Hummel, 2021). The imperative structures to denote invitation repetitively occur with certain words or phrases, such as *come come, come* and *sit down*. With this high frequency of occurrence, English language learners will learn the use of these words and phrases automatically.

### Semantic Denotation of Request

Another semantic denotation of imperative structure in the selected English novels that follow Stefanowitsch's (2003) framework is request. The theory of behaviorism is also applicable with the imperative structure with the semantic denotation of request as repetitively occurred in (17).

(17)

- (a) The intense horror of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed, "Let me in-let me in."

(Bronte, 2019, p. 21)

- (b) "*Let me get off my wet clothes, and I'll tell you about it Nelly,*" he replied.

(Bronte, 2019, p. 38)

- (c) "*Stay! Stay!*" cried Gandalf.

(Tolkien, 2020, p. 853)

In (17), the use of request in imperative goes along the same lines as Takahashi (2007) who said that the use of the verb *let* follows the politeness strategies.

### Pedagogical Implications

As mentioned earlier, this study is useful for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and learners of English as a Second Language (ESL). Some English language teacher applies the teaching approach of explicit learning of grammar in his/ her classroom. Although this approach is quite archaic and sometimes the result of learning in this way may not be productive. One of the recommended ways is

that English language learners could learn form, meaning and use at the same time is the practice of reading English novels outside the classroom. This way could support them to become independent language learners. Not only can reading an English novel reduce the boredom of reading as learners can select stories based on their own interest, but they can spend their free time to do their self-study of English. Based upon the data analysis of imperative structure in this study, the structure is practically presented with context of situations in different settings. This could be a simulation of actual events of how learners could apply language in actual use. The study of imperative structures is applicable with the behaviorism theories and language teaching in the classroom in that it is the structure that is filled with the repetitive lexical items, such as *let*, *come* and *look*. This is considered to have a high level of suitability for beginner level learners.

## Conclusion

This study investigated semantic denotations of imperative structures in selected English novels via answering the following research question.

“What are the semantic denotations of the imperative structures in English novels?”

In English novels, the imperative structure is likely to occur with repetitive lexical items such as *let*, *come* and *look*. They are used as formulaic patterns. This means that the usage of imperative structures in English novels is highly predictable. With this high predictability, it is suitable to apply in classroom teaching with beginners and elementary level learners.

The semantic denotations of imperative structures in English novels are used with three patterns, including invitation (i.e., “*Come*, Catherine,” I said), making a polite request (i.e., “*Let me alone. Let me alone*,” sobbed Catherine) and instruction (i.e., “*Look there!*” he said).

Due to limitations, the results of imperative structures in this study will be applicable to only the data of English novels. Applying the results of this study to other data collection sources, such as newspapers, academic textbooks and journals may not be applicable to the optimal level.

## Suggestion for Future Research Studies

For future research study, it is recommended that studying the imperative structures in other text varieties may contribute something new to the field. The future studies of English Imperatives in cookbook, medication labels, magazines is,

therefore, be recommended. In addition, the study of imperatives in different English dialects such British and American English can lead to different results.

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