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**Author**

Lakoff, George

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# I. STATIVE ADJECTIVES AND VERBS IN ENGLISH\*

George Lakoff

Traditional grammarians have known for many years that the imperative construction in English has a wide variety of uses, the main use being to express commands or requests.

For example,

1. a. Slice the salami.
- b. Be careful.

But the imperative construction has a number of other uses — which Jespersen refers to as pseudo-imperatives. For example, there is the conditional use of the imperative.

2. a. Slice the salami and I'll make you an egg cream.
- b. Be careful and your insurance company will love you.

As Jespersen<sup>1</sup> and Poutsma<sup>2</sup> correctly observed, these are understood in the same way as:

3. a. If you slice the salami, I'll make you an egg cream.
- b. If you are careful, your insurance company will love you.

\*An earlier version of this paper was presented at the meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, December 29-31, 1965.

<sup>1</sup>Jespersen, 1940, Section 24.3.

<sup>2</sup>Poutsma, 1904, p. 482.

Similarly there are the negative conditionals:

4. a. Slice the salami or I won't make you an egg cream.
- b. Be careful or your insurance company won't love you.

These are understood in the same way as:

5. a. If you don't slice the salami, I won't make you an egg cream.
- b. If you are not careful, your insurance company won't love you.

There are other pseudo-imperatives as well.

6. a. Be glad that we didn't take all of your fellowship money away.
- b. Be happy that you have only three exams next Monday.

These cannot be true imperatives, since they can neither be interpreted as commands or requests, nor can they take the tag "will you".

- 6'. a. \*Be glad about that, will you.
- b. \*Be happy about that, will you<sup>3</sup>.

Although there are true imperatives:

- c. Be careful, will you.
- d. Be polite, will you.

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<sup>3</sup> True imperatives take "do" at the beginning of the sentence:

Do be careful.  
Do eat your dinner.

But these pseudo-imperatives do not take such a "do".

\*Do be happy that you passed your exams.  
\*Do be glad that you're beautiful.

A plausible source for the sentence of (6) would be:

7. a. You should be glad that we didn't take all of your fellowship money away.
- b. You should be happy that you have only three exams next Monday.

Similarly there is the negative variety of the welcome-advice imperatives:

8. a. Don't be ashamed because you flunked your generals.
- b. Don't be despondent because your girl left you and stole all your money.

These would be derived from:

9. a. You shouldn't be ashamed because you flunked your generals.
- b. You shouldn't be despondent because your girl left you and stole all your money.

Facts like these, if not exactly these facts, have been known for some time. Good traditional grammars mention such facts and usually deal with them correctly and insightfully — as far as they go. Unfortunately, the lack of concern that traditional grammarians showed for ungrammatical sentences caused them to miss an interesting phenomenon. For instance, the verbs and adjectives that can occur in true imperative constructions, that is, in command imperatives, are not the same as those that can occur in pseudo-imperative constructions of the type we have illustrated.

10. a. If you doubt that you will succeed, you will not succeed.
- b. Doubt that you will succeed, and you will not succeed.
- c. \*Doubt that you will succeed.

11. a. If you know the answer, you will get an A.  
 b. Know the answer and you will get an A.  
 c. \*Know the answer<sup>4</sup>.
12. a. If you are rich, you will be respected  
 b. Be rich and you'll be respected.  
 c. \*Be rich
13. a. If you are intelligent, you'll get into M.I.T.  
 b. Be intelligent and you'll get into M.I.T.  
 c. \*Be intelligent.

<sup>4</sup>Although "know the answer" does not exist as a command imperative, it does exist as a threat, namely, as a reduced form of "Know the answer or else!", which is understood as "If you don't know the answer, something will happen to you". (See example 15) whatever the grammatical source of such threats is, it is clear that a sentence such as "Know the answer" cannot be a command imperative, for grammatical as well as semantic reasons. Verbs, in the command imperative, may be preceded by "go and" or simply "go" as in:

Go and put the wastebasket in the corner.  
 Go slice the salami.

But we cannot have:

- \*Go know the answer.
- \*Go and know the answer.

All command imperatives may be preceded by a "do" as in:

Do put the wastebasket in the corner.

But we cannot have:

- \*Do know the answer.

And certainly not:

- \*Do know the answer or else!

The same is true of the negative conditionals.

14. a. If you don't appreciate literature, college girls won't like you.  
 b. Appreciate literature or college girls won't like you.  
 c. \*Appreciate literature.
15. a. If you don't know the answer, you'll flunk.  
 b. Know the answer or you'll flunk.  
 c. \*Know the answer
16. a. If you aren't rich, you won't be respected.  
 b. Be rich or you won't be respected.  
 c. \*Be rich.
17. a. If you aren't tall, won't make the basketball team.  
 b. Be tall or you won't make the basketball team.  
 c. \*Be tall.

Thus, although all verbs and adjectives occur in pseudo-imperatives, only some of them occur in true imperatives (command imperatives). The chart of Figure 18 indicates some examples:

	slice	careful	know	tall
18. TAKES COMMAND IMPERATIVES	+	+	-	-

This not an isolated fact. As we shall show, the ability of a verb or adjective to take command imperatives (as opposed to pseudo-imperatives) correlates exactly with the ability of that word to occur in a number of other, seemingly unrelated constructions. In attempting to account for these facts, we will postulate a syntactic property shared by all the verbs that occur in these constructions. We will call that property **STATIVE**. We assume that our sample verbs have the values for the property **STATIVE** as indicated in Figure 19.

	slice	careful	know	tall
19. STATIVE	-	-	+	+

It has long been known that certain verbs do not take the progressive auxiliary:

20. a. I am learning that.

b. \*I am knowing that.

21. a. I am listening to the music.

I am slicing the salami.

b. \*I am hearing the music.

\*I am doubting that the world is flat.

Although most adjectives don't take the progressive auxiliary, as in:

22. a. \*He is being tall.

b. \*He is being rich.

some adjectives do take the progressive:

23. a. He is being careful.

b. He is being noisy.

This restriction holds for the participle of the progressive auxiliary, but it does not hold for all participles ending in "-in". Thus, we may have the transformationally derived participles:

23'. a. His knowing that surprised me.

b. His hearing the music annoyed me.

c. His being tall delighted her.

d. His being rich delighted her even more.

What has not been noticed previously is that the adjectives and verbs that can take the progressive auxiliary are just those that can take command imperatives, namely, the NON-STATIVE adjectives and verbs. Those that cannot take the present progressive are exactly those that cannot take command imperatives, namely, the STATIVE verbs and adjectives.

A great many verbs can take the pro-form "do-something". If you are listening to music, you can say that you are "doing something". Similarly, you can say that you are "doing something" if you are slicing salami or looking at a painting or learning some facts. This is reflected in the grammaticality of the sentences:

24. a. What I did was listen to the music.  
 b. What I did was slice the salami.  
 c. What John did was look at the painting.  
 d. What Harry did was learn the answer to these questions.

However, certain verbs may not take a do-something pro-form:

25. a. \*What I did was hear the music.  
 b. \*What I did was doubt that the world was flat.  
 c. \*What John did was see the painting.  
 d. \*What Harry did was know that answer.

Most adjectives may not take a do-something pro-form:

26. a. \*What he did to please me was to be tall.  
 b. \*What he did to please me was to be rich.



But some adjectives may take a do-something pro-form:

27. a. What he did to please me was to be careful.  
 b. What he did to annoy Bill was to be noisy.

The verbs and adjectives that can take do-something pro-forms are exactly those that can take command imperatives and the progressive auxiliary – the NON-STATIVE verbs and adjectives. Those that cannot take the do-something pro-form are the STATIVE verbs adjectives.

There are some verbs and adjectives that take complements in which other verbs and adjectives may not occur. Consider, for instance, "persuade" and "remind".

28. a. I persuaded John to listen to the music.  
 b. \*I persuaded John to hear the music.
29. a. I persuaded John to learn the answer.  
 b. \*I persuaded John to know the answer.
30. a. I persuaded John to be careful.  
 b. \*I persuaded John to be tall.
31. a. I persuaded John to be polite.  
 b. \*I persuaded John to be asleep.
32. a. I reminded John to listen to the music.  
 b. \*I reminded John to hear the music.
33. a. I reminded John to learn the answer.  
 b. \*I reminded John to know the answer.

34. a. I reminded John to be careful.  
 b. \*I reminded John to be tall.
35. a. I reminded John to be polite.  
 b. \*I reminded John to be asleep.

Only NON-STATIVE verbs and adjectives may occur in these complements.

Stative verbs and adjectives may not<sup>5</sup>.

Manner adverbials that are subcategorized with respect to sentence subjects obey the same restriction. A typical manner adverb of this sort would be "enthusiastically" as opposed to "quickly". "Enthusiastically" must have an animate subject:

36. a. John sliced the salami enthusiastically.  
 b. \*The machine sliced the salami enthusiastically.

"Quickly" and similar adverbs are not restricted in this way:

- c. John sliced the salami quickly.  
 d. The machine sliced the salami quickly.

We will restrict our attention to adverbs like "enthusiastically" that are subcategorized with respect to subjects.

<sup>5</sup>Susumu Kuno has pointed out some interesting cases similar to the above:  
 I saw him listening to the music.  
 \*I saw him hearing the music.  
 I found him looking at the picture.  
 \*I found him seeing the picture.

- 36'. a. John sliced the salami enthusiastically.  
b. \*John doubted that fact enthusiastically.
37. a. John listened to the music carefully.  
b. \*John heard the music carefully.
38. a. John learned the answer reluctantly.  
b. \*John knew the answer reluctantly.
39. a. John painted the picture masterfully.  
b. \*John considered Harry a fink masterfully.

Manner adverbials that are subcategorized with respect to subjects can occur only with NON-STATIVE verbs. STATIVE verbs may not take such adverbials<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> John Robert Ross has pointed out some facts which follow from this fact. Since stative verbs cannot take manner adverbials, they do not co-occur with the manner noun "way". Although we can have:

The way that John looks at pictures bothers me.

The way that John learns answers bothers me.

we cannot have:

\*The way that John sees pictures bothers me.

\*The way that John knows answers bothers me.

Moreover, certain nominalizations may be interpreted in terms of the manner noun "way" as in:

John's driving bothers me.

which may mean either

The fact that John drives bothers me.

or

The way that John drives bothers me.

However,

John's knowledge of that fact bothers me.

may mean

The fact that John knows that fact bothers me.

but it may not mean

\*The way that John knows that fact bothers me.

Only NON-STATIVE verbs may occur with the adverbial "for someone's sake"<sup>7</sup>. For example:

40. a. I learned that fact for my teacher's sake.  
 b. \*I know that fact for my teacher's sake.
41. a. I listened to the music for John's sake.  
 b. \*I heard the music for John's sake.
42. a. I looked at the painting for Harry's sake.  
 b. \*I saw the painting for Harry's sake.

The phrase "instead of" must occur between two clauses in the base P-marker. The main verb in each clause must be NON-STATIVE.

43. a. I listened to the music instead of looking at the painting.  
 b. \*I heard the music instead of looking at the painting.  
 c. \*I listened to the music instead of seeing the painting.  
 d. \*I heard the music instead of seeing the painting .
44. a. I bought the book instead of learning all those facts.  
 b. \*I received the book instead of learning all those facts.  
 c. \*I bought the book instead of knowing all those facts.  
 d. \*I received the book instead of knowing all those facts.

There is another pro-form which is very much like "do something" but which appears only with verbs, namely, "do so". "Do so" can substitute only for NON-STATIVE verbs.

<sup>7</sup>This was pointed out to me by Bruce Fraser.

45. a. I learned the answer, although Bill told me not to do so.  
 b. \*I knew the answer, although Bill told me not to do so.
46. a. I listened to the music, although Bill told me not to do so.  
 b. \*I heard the music, although Bill told me not to do so.
47. a. I looked at the painting, although Bill told me not to do so.  
 b. \*I saw the painting, although Bill told me not to do so.

We have shown that there are a large number of seemingly unrelated syntactic phenomena in English, most of which can be related only if one considers the evidence of underlying grammatical structure, and not that of superficial grammatical structure: only command imperatives must take NON-STATIVE verbs and adjectives; derived imperatives or 'pseudo-imperatives' do not obey this restriction. Only the participles of the progressive auxiliary are restricted to NON-STATIVE verbs; derived participles are not.

The grammatical distinction that we have uncovered — that between STATIVE and NON-STATIVE verbs and adjectives — partially reflects a semantic distinction. In an overwhelming number of cases, STATIVE verbs and adjectives have the semantic property, NON-ACTIVITY, and NON-STATIVE verbs and adjectives have the semantic property, ACTIVITY<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Although this is certainly true of non-stative verbs, the case of non-stative adjectives is much cloudier. Adjectives like careful, fair, foolish, polite, nasty, etc. seem to be interpretable as both ACTIVE and NON-ACTIVE. Compare

John is being foolish.

and

John is foolish.

In the former, "foolish" is ACTIVE and in the latter, "foolish" is NON-ACTIVE. Although the dual character of these adjectives seems to be regular, I do not claim to understand it.

There are very few exceptions to this generalization, and they seem to fall into classes. For example:

CLASS 1: remain, stay, keep, ...

CLASS 2: sit, stand, huddle, squat, ...

And there are undoubtedly other such classes. What is interesting about the exceptions to this generalization is that they are all cases of semantically NON-ACTIVE verbs that are syntactically NON-STATIVE. So far as I have been able to tell, there don't seem to be any exceptions that are semantically ACTIVE and syntactically STATIVE.

There is another interesting fact about the grammatical property STATIVE. Traditional grammarians described verbs as indicating activities and adjectives as indicating properties or states. This, of course, is not entirely true, but it is true in an overwhelming number of cases. Adjectives are normally STATIVE and verbs are normally NON-STATIVE. NON-STATIVE adjectives are the exception, not the rule, as are STATIVE verbs. This is a generalization that cannot be captured in the present theory of transformational grammar. In order to state such a generalization, one would need to incorporate into present transformational theory a notion of a normal case as opposed to an exceptional case. That is, one would need a notion similar to the Prague School notion of markedness, in which the normal cases are 'unmarked' and the exceptional cases are 'marked'. Thus, for verbs, NON-STATIVE would be unmarked, while STATIVE would be marked. But

for adjectives, the opposite would be true: NON-STATIVE would be marked and STATIVE would be unmarked. Thus, the facts about the feature STATIVE provide some evidence that the present theory of transformational grammar is inadequate to the extent that it does not incorporate some notion like markedness<sup>9</sup>.

In traditional grammar, as well as in the work of structural and transformational linguists, adjectives and verbs have been treated as totally distinct and disparate entities. But, as we have seen, both adjectives and verbs must be subcategorized with respect to the property STATIVE. In this respect, adjectives and verbs are similar. But the similarity is not a superficial one. Compare this similarity with the entirely superficial similarity between verbs and nouns which is shown by the fact that both verbs and nouns may be either singular or plural. This is a fact about surface grammar. Verbs do not have inherent number. Rather they acquire number from their subject nouns by a relatively late transformational rule. But the property STATIVE or NON-STATIVE may not be distributed among verbs and adjectives by an transformational rule. Rather, the value for the property STATIVE must be indicated in the lexicon for each verb and adjective. It is not a surface property, but rather an inherent property of both verbs and adjectives.

But adjectives and verbs are not only similar in that they share the property STATIVE. On the contrary, in the examples given above, we showed adjectives

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<sup>9</sup>For discussion, see (Lakoff, 1965, Appendix C).

and verbs are treated identically with respect to many different grammatical constructions. A great many more examples of the same sort could be given, and a close study of English syntax would reveal that adjectives and verbs are treated identically with respect to a considerable number of transformational rules and have a large number of lexical properties in common<sup>10</sup>. Such facts, added to the ones we have already presented, would constitute strong evidence for the assertion that what traditional grammarians called adjectives and verbs are really members of the same major grammatical category.

#### REFERENCES

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2. Lakoff, G. (1965) On The Nature of Syntactic Irregularity (Doctoral Thesis). Mathematical Linguistics and Automatic Translation, Report No. NSF-16, Computation Laboratory of Harvard University.
3. Poutsma, H. (1904) A Grammar of Late Modern English, Part I. Groningen: Noordhoff.

<sup>10</sup>For examples, see (Lakoff, 1965, Appendix A).



## A TINY SAMPLE OF STATIVE AND NON-STATIVE VERBS AND ADJECTIVES

Non-Stative Verbs	Stative Verbs	Non-Stative Adjectives	Stative Adjectives
listen	hear	careful	tall
look at	see	cautious	short
learn	know	noisy	rich
watch	appreciate	useful	fat
hit	understand	fair	thin
throw	believe	unfair	grateful
run	think (+that)	asinine	thankful
breathe	comprehend	foolish	ashamed
sleep	doubt	polite	despondent
sit	entail	impolite	intelligent
stand	expect	obnoxious	asleep
remain	want	reasonable	fragile
keep	seem	rough	poor
ask	desire	silly	popular
persuade	appear	tactful	ready
remind	taste	pleasant	possible
slice	sound	unpleasant	impotent
call	smell	nasty	alive
say	guess (+that)	offensive	dead
begin	hate	rude	latent
practice	like	insistent	elementary
help	love	frank	dangerous
abandon	hope	discreet	advantageous
try	preclude	reckless	profitable
whisper	presuppose	persistent	accidental
divulge	perceive	officious	fortunate
write	imply	realistic	miraculous
promise	suspect	troublesome	fatal