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Toward the Parameter Hierarchy of Embedded Imperatives

Hiroaki Saito
University of Connecticut

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Abstract

This paper investigates cross-linguistic variation in embedded imperatives in terms of syntactic environments in which they can(not) appear, focusing on the availability of embedded imperatives in the clausal complement of verbs and nouns, and relative clauses. I demonstrate that there are four distinct types of languages regarding the possibility of embedded imperatives. I also suggest that there is an implicational relation among these types, which is captured through a parameter hierarchy.

Toward the Parameter Hierarchy of Embedded Imperatives

Hiroaki Saito*

1 Introduction

It has often been argued or simply assumed that imperatives cannot be embedded cross-linguistically, as illustrated in (1a) (see e.g., Katz and Postal 1964, Sadock and Zwicky 1985, Palmer 1986, Rivero and Terzi 1995, Platzack and Rosengren 1997, Han 1998).^{1,2}

- (1) *Modern Greek*
a.*O Yannis se dietakse grapse
the Yannis you ordered.2SG write.2SG.IMP
'Yannis ordered you to write.'
cf. b. O Yannis se dietakse grapsis
the Yannis you ordered.2SG write.2SG.SBJV
'Yannis ordered you to write.'
(Han 1998:39)

However, many instances of embedded imperatives have been observed recently (e.g., Kaufmann 2015 and references therein, see also (10)). For example, Korean, which has a dedicated morpheme for imperatives, allows embedded imperatives, as shown in (2). In (2), the imperative clause appears in the complement of *mal* 'say'.

- (2) *Korean*
John-i Tom-ekey [cip-ey ka-la-ko] mal-ha-ess-ta
John-NOM Tom-DAT home-to go-IMP-C say-do-PAST-DEC
'John ordered Tom to go home.'
(Pak et al. 2008)

This paper investigates cross-linguistic variation in the availability of embedded imperatives, by examining syntactic environments in which they can(not) appear. In the next section, I will examine the distribution of embedded imperatives across languages, focusing on the clausal complement of verbs and nouns, and relative clauses. I will demonstrate that there are four distinct types of languages regarding the availability of embedded imperatives in these contexts. Furthermore, it will be suggested that there is an implicational relation among languages. In Section 3, reviewing Medeiros (2013), I will propose a parameter hierarchy to capture the observations from Section 2. Section 4 is the conclusion.

2 Where Can You Embed Imperatives?

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¹It should be noted that Han (1998: 144–145) states that Japanese may be an exception to the generalization that imperatives cannot be embedded.

²As shown in (1b), subjunctives can be embedded in the same context. In this paper, I use the term 'imperatives' to refer to constructions with imperative morphology, putting aside subjunctives or modals, which may involve similar speech acts. However, it should be noted that some languages like English do not have a dedicated morpheme for imperatives. One unique property of imperatives is the addressee restriction (person restriction); the subject of imperatives must be the addressee(s). Consequently, the subject cannot be first person. (Notice that this person restriction does not hold in embedded imperatives in some language, see e.g., Oshima 2006.)

It should also be noted that I will focus on positive imperatives because imperatives are incompatible with negation in some languages (e.g., Han 1998) (but see footnote 4 for Chinese).

In this section, I will show that there are at least four types of languages regarding embedded imperatives in the clausal complement of verbs and nouns and in relative clauses. I will also suggest that there is an implicational relation in the availability of embedded imperatives.

2.1 Clausal Complements of Verb and True Embedding

As exemplified in (1), many languages do not allow embedded imperatives. However, as noted in Section 1, it has been observed that there are languages that allow them. In the literature, the term ‘embedded imperatives’ typically refers to embedding in the clausal complement of (certain types of) verbs, as in (2) above and in (3).

- (3) *Japanese*
 John-ga Tom-ni [ie-ni kae-re-to] i-tta
 John-NOM Tom-DAT home-to go.back-IMP-C say-PAST
 ‘John told Tom to go home.’

Crnič and Trinh (2009) also argue that even English, which has been assumed to lack embedded imperatives, allows embedded imperatives.

- (4) John said [call Mary]

They suggest that constructions like (4) involve true embedding, but direct quotation. For example, in (5a), the embedded pronoun *his* can refer to John (but not the actual speaker); this reading is not allowed when *his* is contained in a direct quotation, as in (5b). Example (6) shows that the embedded indexical *that* can be accompanied by the speaker’s pointing gesture in (6a), but not in (6b).³

- (5) a. John₁ said [call his₁ mom]
 b. #John₁ said: “Hey, call his₁ mom”
 (6) a. John said [buy *that* book]
 b. #John said: “Hey, buy *that* book”

Japanese, which allows scrambling, provides further evidence for true embedding. In Japanese, long-distance scrambling out of an embedded imperative clause is possible. In (7b), the object of *yom-e* ‘read-IMP’ is scrambled out of the embedded clause.

- (7) a. Mary-ga John-ni [Bariaazu-o yom-e to] i-tta
 Mary-NOM John-DAT *Barriers*-ACC read-IMP C say-PAST
 ‘Mary told John to read *Barriers*.’
 b. Bariaazu-o_i Mary-ga John-ni [t_i yom-e to] i-tta
Barriers-ACC Mary-NOM John-DAT read-IMP C say-PAST
 ‘Mary told John to read *Barriers*.’

If (7a) must involve direct quotation, extraction out of the embedded clause should not be allowed. In fact, if the direct quotation is forced by the use of interjections like *hora* ‘hey’ and the sentence final particle, scrambling out of reported speech is impossible, as in (8).

- (8) *Bariaazu-o_i Mary-ga John-ni [hora, t_i yom-e-yo to] i-tta
Barriers-ACC Mary-NOM John-DAT hey read-IMP-SFP C say-PAST
 ‘Mary told John: “Hey, read *Barriers*!”’

Another piece of evidence for true embedding comes from Osaka Japanese. Osaka Japanese

³See Crnič and Trinh (2009) for additional evidence for embedded imperatives in English. Even though English does not have a dedicated overt morpheme for imperatives, they also claim that (4) does not involve *to*-infinitives or bare verbs where the auxiliary has been deleted based on the distribution of past participles and negation.

has complementizer *te*, which is the equivalent to *to* in Tokyo Japanese (Saito 1986). It allows deletion of *te* when it appears with CP complements, but not when it is attached to direct quotations (Uchibori 1997). The deletion of *te* is allowed in the equivalent construction to (7), as shown in (9).

- (9) Mary-ga John-ni [Bariaazu-o yom-e (te)] yuu-ta
 Mary-NOM John-DAT *Barriers*-ACC read-IMP C say-PAST
 ‘Mary told John to read *Barriers*.’

Regarding imperatives embedded in the clausal complement of verbs, we have a dichotomy in (10). By the ‘embedded imperative in the clausal complement of verbs’, I refer to constructions which involve true embedding, not direct quotation.

- (10) Are (truly) embedded imperatives allowed in the clausal complement of (some) verbs?^{4,5}
YES: Ancient Greek (Medeiros 2013), English (Crnič and Trinh 2009), Japanese (Oshima 2006, Schwager 2006), Korean (e.g., Pak et al. 2008), Mandarin Chinese (Chen-Main 2005), Old Germanic (Platzack 2007), Slovenian (Sheppard and Golden 2002, Dvořák 2005, Stegovec and Kaufmann 2015), Spanish (Rivero 1994), Turkish
NO: Brazilian Portuguese, French (Han 1998), Italian (Han 1998), Modern Greek (Medeiros 2013), Romanian, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, etc.

Importantly, ‘embedded imperatives’ are not confined to in the clausal complement of verbs as we have observed in this subsection. In the following subsections, I will discuss two different types of embedded imperatives; those in the clausal complement of nouns and in relative clauses.

2.2 Clausal Complements of Noun

There are languages which allow embedded imperatives in the clausal complement of nouns such as *order*, *advice*, and *wish*, as illustrated in (11).

- (11) a. *Slovenian*
 Zakaj te [moj nasvet, da bodi pameten] tako jezi?
 why you.CL.ACC my advice that be.IMP.2SG sensible so angers
 ‘Why does my advice that you must be sensible make you so angry?’
 (Sheppard and Golden 2002:251)
- b. *Japanese*
 John-wa [kono hon-o yom-e toiu meeree/sizi]-o musisi-ta
 John-TOP this book-ACC read-IMP that order/instruction-ACC ignore-PAST
 ‘John ignored the order/instruction that he should read this book.’

Notice that constructions like (11) involve true embedding. The embedded imperative in (11a) appears in the clause introduced by the complementizer *da*, which introduces embedded finite clauses, but not direct quotations (see Stegovec and Kaufmann 2015). The Japanese data (11b) also involves true embedding. For example, the embedded indexical *kono* ‘this’ can be accompanied by the speaker’s gesture. This type of embedded imperatives are observed in Slovenian, Ancient Greek (Medeiros 2013), Japanese, and Korean; these languages also allow imperatives embedded in the clausal complement of verbs.

Turning to English and Turkish, which allow embedded imperatives in the clausal complement

⁴To examine the distribution of imperatives in Chinese, Chen-Main (2005) uses the negative marker *bie*, which is specific to imperatives, since Chinese does not have any inflection on verbs. Following her, I used *bie* when testing the distribution of imperatives in Chinese (Section 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3), although I investigate distribution of positive imperatives in other languages (see footnote 2). Another imperative-specific element given by Chen-Main (2005) is the advisative *ba*, but the judgments seem to vary under embedding; for some speakers, *ba* is restricted to in matrix clauses.

⁵Russian may allow this type of embedded imperatives. However, given the diagnostics offered by Crnič and Trinh (2009), it seems that Russian ‘embedded imperatives’ involve direct quotation rather than true embedding.

of verbs, cannot embed imperatives in the clausal complement of nouns.

- (12) *John followed [the order /advice that read the book!]
 Intended: John followed the order/advice that he should read the book

More importantly, languages that do not allow embedded imperatives in the clausal complement of verbs (e.g., Italian, Modern Greek, Romanian), do not allow embedded imperatives in the clausal complement of nouns.

In (13), I give language classification regarding the possibility of embedded imperatives in the clausal complement of nouns.

- (13) Are embedded imperatives allowed in the clausal complement of nouns?⁶
YES: Ancient Greek (Medeiros 2013), Japanese, Korean, Slovenian (Sheppard and Golden 2002) (Chinese)
NO: Brazilian Portuguese, English, Italian, Modern Greek (Medeiros 2013), Romanian, Spanish, Turkish, etc.

2.3 Relative Clause

Embedded imperatives in relative clauses are the most restricted type cross-linguistically. English does not allow this type of embedded imperatives.

- (14) *That professor, to whom introduce yourself, was my advisor!
 Intended: That professor, to whom you must introduce yourself, was my advisor.
 (Medeiros 2013:9)

Even Japanese, which allows embedded imperatives in the clausal complement of verbs and nouns, as we have observed in the previous sections, cannot embed imperatives in relative clauses.⁷

- (15) *John-wa [yom-e hon]-o ka-tta
 John-TOP read-IMP book-ACC buy-PAST
 ‘John bought a book which he/we should read.’

In contrast, Slovenian and Ancient Greek are reported to allow embedded imperatives in relative clauses. It should be noted that these two languages also allow embedded imperatives in the clausal complement of verbs and nouns.

- (16) *Slovenian*
 Na mizi je [kozarec vina, ki ga daj mami]
 on table is glass wine.GEN which it.ACC give.IMP mom.DAT
 ‘The glass of wine which you should give to mom is on the table.’
 (Stegovec and Kaufmann 2015:622)

⁶In (13), Chinese is categorized as a language allowing imperatives in the clausal complement of nouns. However, it should be noted that the judgments of examples like (i) vary.

- (i) % John bixu fucong bie dao zher-lai de minling
 John must obey not come here-come DE order
 ‘John must obey the order that he should not come here (=where the speaker is).’

⁷The term ‘embedded imperatives in relative clauses’ refers to imperatives directly embedded in relative clauses. In Japanese, it is possible relativize an element from a clause with a verb which takes an imperative clause, as in (i). I do not count this kind of data as ‘embedded imperatives in relative clauses’.

- (i) John-ga [[Mary-ga ka-e to i-tta] hon-o] mi-ta
 John-NOM Mary-NOM buy-IMP C say-PAST book-ACC see-PAST
 ‘John saw the book which Mary said he should buy.’

| | Complement of V | Complement of N | Relative clause |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Brazilian Portuguese, Italian, Modern Greek, Russian, Romanian, etc. | * | * | * |
| English, Turkish | ✓ | * | * |
| Japanese, Korean | ✓ | ✓ | * |
| Ancient Greek, Slovenian | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Table 1: Variation in embedded imperatives.

3 Parameterizing Embedded Imperatives

In the previous section, we have observed that there are four types of languages regarding embedded imperatives, and that there is an implicational relation among them. In the literature, cross-linguistic variation in embedded imperatives has not been studied in any detail. As far as I know, Medeiros (2013) is the first work which explicitly suggests a syntactic parameter in embedded imperatives, comparing Ancient Greek and English. He proposes the parameter below, assuming Feature Transfer (Chomsky 2008).

- (19) a. $C_{[+phi]}$ cannot select imperative T (English)
 b. $C_{[+phi]}$ can select imperative T (Ancient Greek)

Given the observations from Section 2, the parameter in (19) has two major problems. First, it does not capture the variation in Table 1; the dichotomy in (19) is not sufficient to capture the four patterns in embedded imperatives found cross-linguistically. Moreover, it does not capture the implicational relation of the possibility of embedded imperatives.

It should also be noted that English is categorized under the ‘non-embedding’ type. Medeiros (2013: 39) suggests that the ‘richness of morphology’ determines the parametric choice in (19), where this is defined as ‘having overt and distinct morphological imperative verb forms beyond 2nd person’. This morphological property differentiates Ancient Greek and Slovenian from the English and Korean type. Consequently, his account puts aside embedded imperatives in English and Korean. Medeiros himself notices this point and claims that embedded imperatives in Korean and English are restricted when compared to those in Slovenian and Ancient Greek in that the subject of the embedded imperative must co-refer with the referent of the matrix indirect object or subset thereof if present (Medeiros 2013: 19–20).

- (20) *Korean*
 John-i Tom-ekey [(**Ney/*Mary-ka*) cip-ey ka-la-ko] mal-ha-ess-ta.
 John-NOM Tom-DAT (you/Mary-NOM) home-to go-IMP-C say-do-PAST-DEC
 ‘John ordered Tom to go home’
 (Pak et al. 2008)
- (21) John said to Watson call Mary
 (grammatical if Watson is being ordered to call Mary, ungrammatical otherwise)
 (Crnič and Trinh 2009)

However, this does not extend to at least Japanese, which has a similar structure to Korean in (20). Japanese, which, like Korean, has morphologically poor inflection under Medeiros’ definition of morphological richness, allows ‘non-control’ type embedded imperatives: the embedded subject can differ from the indirect object even when the indirect object is present. Suppose that Taro and John are doing joint-work. They are thinking either Taro or John should write a paper as a single-authored one. Only Taro asked Mary what they should do, then Mary said that John should write a paper (as a single author). The speaker, who knows the situation, can felicitously utter (22) to someone, which does not have to be John.

- (22) Mary-ga Taro-ni [John-ga ronbun-o kak-e to] i-tta
 Mary-NOM Taro-DAT John-NOM paper-ACC write-IMP C say-PAST
 ‘Mary said to Taro that John should write a paper.’

Also, *wish* type verbs allow non-addressee subjects as well. Again, in (23), the embedded subject John does not have to be an actual addressee.

- (23) Mary-ga (kami-ni) [John-ga siken-ni oti-ro to] nega-tta
 Mary-NOM god-DAT John-NOM exam-DAT fail-IMP C wish-PAST
 ‘Mary wished (to God) that John would fail the exam.’

One might wonder whether (22) and (23) involve true embedding or not. The answer is positive; for example, the embedded pronoun *watasi-no* ‘my’ can refer to the speaker of (24a/b), not Mary.

- (24) a. Mary-ga Taro-ni [John-ga *watasi-no* ronbun-o yom-e to] i-tta
 Mary-NOM Taro-DAT John-NOM my paper-ACC read-IMP C say-PAST
 ‘Mary said to Taro that John should read my (=the speaker’s) paper.’
 b. Mary-ga (kami-ni) [John-ga *watasi-no* heya-ni ko-i to] nega-tta
 Mary-NOM god-DAT John-NOM my room come-IMP C wish-PAST
 ‘Mary wished (to God) that John would come to my (=the speaker’s) room.’

Furthermore, in Osaka Japanese, the deletion of *te* is allowed in these contexts, as illustrated in (25), which confirms that true embedding is involved in (22) and (23).

- (25) a. Mary-ga Taro-ni [John-ga ronbun-o kak-e (te)] yuu-ta
 Mary-NOM Taro-DAT John-NOM paper-ACC write-IMP C say-PAST
 ‘Mary said to Taro that John should write a paper.’
 b. Mary-ga [John-ga siken-ni oti-ro (te)] omoo-ta
 Mary-NOM John-NOM exam-DAT fail-IMP C think-PAST
 ‘Mary wished that John would fail the exam.’

Hence, Japanese is a counterexample to Medeiros’s claim that Slovenian/Ancient Greek embedded imperatives are distinct from those in other languages due to a variation regarding a restriction on the interpretation of the embedded subject (the obligatory control reading). However, his claim that Slovenian and Ancient Greek are the least restricted languages regarding embedded imperatives is still right in the sense that they allow more types of embedded imperatives (Section 2).

To sum up the discussions so far, Medeiros’s proposal is not sufficient because it cannot capture the four patterns or the implicational relation from Table 1, and because neither morphological richness nor the lack of the obligatory control interpretation is necessary or sufficient to determine which type(s) of embedding is allowed in a given language. Furthermore, the theory of embedded imperatives should not put aside the English/Japanese/Korean type embedded imperatives.

In order to capture the typological variation we have observed in Section 2, I suggest that there is a parameter hierarchy regarding embedded imperatives (cf. Baker 2001). Specifically, I propose a descriptive hierarchy as structured in (26).

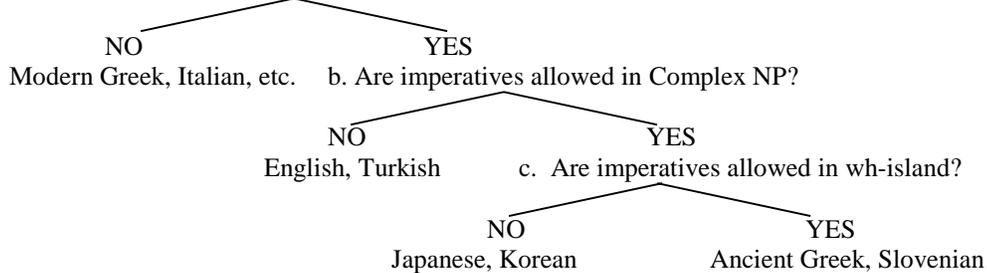
- (26) a. Are imperatives allowed in the clausal complement of (some) verbs?
 NO ————— YES
 Modern Greek, Italian, etc. b. Are imperatives allowed in the clausal complement of (some) nouns?
 NO ————— YES
 English, Turkish c. Are imperatives allowed in relative clauses?
 NO ————— YES
 Japanese, Korean Ancient Greek, Slovenian

The hierarchy in (26) captures the two observations from the previous section; namely, that there are four types of language in the relevant respect and that there is an implicational relation in the availability of embedded imperatives. Due to the way it is structured, it also captures the fact that the ‘non-embedding’ type (i.e., the language group which does not allow embedded imperatives at all) is relatively common compared to the other types (see Table 1), and that the Japanese type and the Ancient Greek type are rare (if we assume that each parametric choice is determined rather arbitrarily depending on the language, cf. Baker 2001).

4 Conclusion and Remaining Issues

Before concluding the paper, one important question is to be addressed; why is the parameter hierarchy structured as in (26)? I will not be able to provide a comprehensive account here, but suggest that the structure of the hierarchy reflects syntactic islands, as shown in (27). The complement of (bridge) verbs is relatively transparent for extraction but the clausal complement of nouns and its head form a Complex NP island configuration. Relative clauses can be considered a combination of a Complex NP island and a wh-island due to a filled Spec-CP (plus adjunct island due to the adjunct status of relative clauses). In other words, the ‘difficulty’ of extraction parallels the relevant hierarchy. (In (27), I use the term ‘wh-island’ for the combination of Complex NP and wh-island.)

(27) a. Are imperatives allowed in embedded CP?



Based on (27), one may wonder whether Slovenian allows embedded imperatives in all contexts. This is not the case, however. Even in Slovenian, imperatives cannot appear in the clausal complement of adjectives, as shown in (28). Notice that the adjective *nujno* could take an imperative clause semantically.

(28) a. *Nujno je, da spij to zdaj
 obligatory is that drink.IMP this now
 ‘It is obligatory that you drink this now.’

It should also be noted that under (27), one may expect the Slovenian type language to allow imperatives in embedded questions. In fact, this seems to be the case; Dvořák and Zimmermann (2006) report that Slovenian allows embedded imperatives in embedded questions, as in (29).

(29) a. Zdaj veš, kam posadi palmo
 now know.PRES.2SG where plant.IMP.2SG palm.ACC
 ‘Now you know where to plan to the palm.’
 b. Povedala ti bo, kaj stori in kam pojdi
 tell.PPA.SG.FEM you.DAT.SG aux.3SG what do.IMP.2SG and where go.IMP.2SG
 ‘She will tell you what you should do and where.../what to do and where to go.’
 (Dvořák and Zimmermann 2006:175)

However, verbs like *know* are known to take free relatives as well as questions as their complements.¹⁰ When the matrix verb is the one that takes a question but not a free relative, e.g., *ask*, imperatives are disallowed in this environment, as illustrated in (30).

- (30) a.?*Janez je vprašal kam postavi računalnik
 Janez is asked where put.IMP computer.
 ‘Janez asked where you should put the computer.’
 b.?*Janez se je spraševal kaj kupi v trgovini
 Janez self is wondered what buy.IMP in shop.
 ‘Janez was wondering what you should buy in the store.’

Given this fact, I conclude that even Slovenian does not allow embedding imperatives in (embedded) questions. I suggest that the ungrammaticality of (30) is due to an independent reason; the conflicting specification of the clause type. Every C must be clause typed, and [IMP] and [Q] are incompatible in this respect.¹¹

If the formulation of the parameter hierarchy regarding embedded imperatives based on syntactic islandhood is on the right track, one obvious question to ask is why the two are related. I tentatively suggest that the imperative must have a dependency with the matrix clause (more precisely, the context which the main clause is evaluated with respect to). In Slovenian, the subject of the embedded imperative is always the actual addressee of the utterance, as illustrated in (31).

- (31) Žare₁ to Jure₂:
 Marko₃ je rekel Petru₄, da mu pomagaj
 Marko.NOM is said Peter.DAT that him.DAT help.IMP.2SG
 ‘Marko said to Peter that you_{*1/2/*3/*4} should help him.’
 (Stegovec and Kaufmann 2015:624)

Stegovec and Kaufmann (2015) suggest that a silent second person pronoun is interpreted against the actual context; the embedded imperative then must be able to have a dependency beyond the embedded clause if we assume that the information regarding the (actual) speaker and the (actual) addressee(s) is encoded in the syntax (see e.g., Speas and Tenny 2003). In this sense, the syntactic locality domain may be relevant here.¹²

In conclusion, I have shown that there are four types of languages regarding embedded imperatives by examining the distribution of imperatives in the clausal complement of verbs and nouns and relative clauses. I have also suggested that there is an implicational relation between these four types. Finally I have proposed a parametric hierarchy to capture these typological observations, which is relevant to an independent factor.

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¹⁰The verbs used in the construction in question in Dvořák and Zimmermann (2006) are *know* and *told*, both of which can take either questions or free relatives as their complement.

¹¹Kaufmann (2015) observes that imperatives can appear in matrix *wh*-questions in e.g., Colloquial German, Tatar, and Chukotko-Kamchatkan (Aikhenvald 2010), but they can be used only as rhetorical questions.

(i)% Wo stell den Computer hin
 where put.IMP the computer PART
 ‘(Come on, you know this-) Where should you put the computer? (On the right side of the desk, of course, as always...)’

I assume that this is a different case from (30) because additional speech acts are involved here.

¹²However, it should be noted that some languages like English, Korean, and Japanese, do not have this type of restriction on the subject of embedded imperatives, see also Section 2 and 3.

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Department of Linguistics
 University of Connecticut
 365 Fairfield Way, Unit 1145 Storrs, CT
 06269-1145 USA
 hiroaki.saito@uconn.edu