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Rado L. LENCEK

(Columbia University, New York)

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TRUNCATED FORMS OF THE IMPERATIVE IN SERBOCROATIAN

O. As two non-native linguists put it,¹ in the Serbo-Croatian standard one usually hears *činite* beside *činite* (2 pl. imperative), *recte* and *recite*, *būдите* and *būdite*, though the „syncopation“ is rarely indicated graphically; if it is, as, e.g., in folk songs, an apostrophe is used for the truncated *i*: *čin'te*, *rec'te*, *bud'te*. The fact itself is very well known:² in a more fortis articulation and in a more rapid tempo the modal morpheme *-i-* is frequently truncated. This may happen in singular, but it is frequent, even „normal“, in plural. The Serbo-Croatian imperative in this respect does not differ from the tendency of the imperative structure in other Slavic languages.

The use of apostrophe for truncated sounds is an old rhetorical convention. In imperative forms it appeared already before Vuk, mostly in poetic texts, where the phenomenon was noticed first and was identified as poetic license. In today's literary norm a truncated imperative form is always marked with an apostrophe, e.g.: *Skin' oružje, neznana delijo, pa nos' glavu kud je tebi drago*; it is still treated as a rhetorical device of poetic language.³ In the present note we should like to argue that the truncated

¹ Cf. A. Meillet, and A. Vaillant, *Grammaire de la langue serbo-croate*, 2nd rev. ed. (Paris, 1952), 1968.

² T. Maretić and A. Leskien registered the use of apocopated and syncopated imperative forms in poetry and prose, admitting that they occur also in faster tempo of everyday speech. Cf. T. Maretić, *Gramatika hrvatskog ili srpskoga književnog jezika*, 3rd ed. (Zagreb, 1963), 237—238; and A. Leskien, *Grammatik der serbo-kroatischen Sprache*, 1. Theil: *Lautlehre, Stammbildung, Formenlehre* (Heidelberg, 1914), 552.

³ Cf. *Pravopis srpskohrvatskoga književnog jezika sa pravopisnim rečnikom* (Novi Sad, Zagreb, 1960), 122. It is interesting to note that of three verbal forms which in colloquial speech frequently occur truncated (infinitive, e.g.: *neću kazati*; present gerund, e.g.: *kazajući*; and imperative, e.g.: *kaž', kaž'te*), the first two may be used today without apostrophe.

imperative of Serbocroatian is essentially a linguistic phenomenon, more of morphological than phonetic nature, which should be accounted for in the grammar of the language.

1. In a linguistic system of a Slavic language, as P. Ivić noted, the forms of imperative without *i* are not so anomalous as they would seem to be.⁴ In Serbo-Croatian speech area they have been reported from almost all dialects, notably and most systematically from all neo-Štokavian regions.⁵ They have been observed, e.g., in the dialects of Vojvodina,⁶ in the speech of Gallipoli Serbs,⁷ in Kosovo—Resava,⁸ Prizren—Timok,⁹ most Montenegro,¹⁰ Hercegovina,¹¹ and in many other dialects. Interestingly, they have been found to be a regular feature of the dialects of Tršić in Podrinje,¹² and of Piva and Drobñjak in East Hercegovina (e.g., *drž ti òvò, donèzde mi sèkiru, kùpte, zamólte*),¹³ on which Vuk's codification of the modern standard is based.

The phenomenon itself is relatively old. The oldest notations of synco-pated imperative forms in prose texts (in poetry elisions may be induced by meter requirements), are from the old Dubrovnik correspondence: 2pl. *исправте* (1388), *погыте* and (1412), the latter from a Rusko Kristofanović's letter.¹⁴ A number of such forms appear in the oldest prose texts based on

⁴ For P. Ivić's statement see his: „О говору галипољских Срба“, *Српски Дијалектолошки Зборник XII* (Belgrade, 1957), 271.

⁵ Cf. M. Rešetar, *Der štokavische Dialekt* (= *Schriften der Balkankommission, Linguistische Abteilung*, 4) (Vienna, 1907), 195. See also; П. Ивић, *Дијалектологија српскохрватског језика, Увод и шипокавско наречје* (Нови Сад, 1956), 137.

⁶ The following survey is not meant to be exhaustive. For Vojvodina, cf., e.g., Б.М. Николић, „О говору Срема“, *Јужнословенски Филолог XX* (Belgrade, 1953-54), 277; idem, „Сремски говор“, *СДЗб XIV* (1964), 317.

⁷ Cf. П. Ивић, „О говору галипољских Срба“, *СДЗб XII* (1957), 92.

⁸ Cf., e.g., Д. Јовић, „Трстенички говор“, *СДЗб XVII* (1968), 138.

⁹ Cf., e.g., М. Стевановић, „Баковачки говор“, *СДЗб XI* (1950), 125.

¹⁰ Cf. М. Стевановић, „Источноцрногорски дијалекат“, *ЈФ XII* (1933), 88—90; В. Томановић, „Акцент у говору села Лепетана“, *ЈФ XIV* (1935), 93—94; Б. Милегић, „Прмнички говор“, *СДЗб IX* (1940), 449; М. Б. Пешикан, „Староцрногорски средњокатунски и љшански говори“, *СДЗб XV* (1965), 175.

¹¹ Cf. А. Пецо, „Говор источне Херцеговине“, *СДЗб XIV* (1964), 45.

¹² Cf. Б. Николић, „Данашњи тршићки говор“, *ЈФ XXIII* (1958), 269—270.

¹³ Cf. Ј. Л. Вуковић, „Говор Пиве и Дробњака“, *ЈФ XVII* (1938—39), 69—71.

¹⁴ Cf. Љ. Стојановић, *Старе српске њовеле и њисма*, I, 1 (Belgrade, Sr. Karlovci, 1929), letters №. 141 (line 4), and №. 553 (line 19), both taken from М. Пуцић, *Споменици српски*, I—II (Belgrade, 1858—62). Cf. also Ђ. Daničić, *Istorija oblika srpskoga ili hrvat-skoga jezika do svršetka XVII. vijeka* (Belgrade, 1874), 335—346. Note that Daničić quotes

vernacular, as, e.g., in the Cyrillic *Libro od mnozijeh razloga* (1520), e.g.: поћъ, чннъ, чнтѣ, рѣцѣ, понесмо,¹⁵ or in different copies of the *Bernardinov lektionar*, e.g.: поћ, поћѣ, појмо, појте, doneste.¹⁶ From the XVIth century on the truncated imperative forms are quite frequent; most often they occur in poetic texts from Dubrovnik and Hvar, e.g.: *ved'*, *ved'te* in Marulić; *rec'*, *pod'* in Š. Menčetić; *dopus me* in Dž. Držić; *živ'*, *poj'mo*, *tec'te*, *otvor'* in M. Vetranić; *ne brin' se* in D. Zlatarić.¹⁷ In poetic texts, of course, such forms function as a syllable centrolling device; they would never appear so frequently in the poetry, however, if they were not supported by the use in everyday speech. It was the spoken language that provided the system of doublets used in poetry, as, e.g., in I. Gundulić: „*Slijed' me, slijed' me, družbo hrla, (slijed' me, ko god živjet haje! (. . . Slijedite me i hrlite, (. . . tlač'te, dav'te, sijec'te, bi'te) itko nam se uzopira . . .*“ (Osman XVIII, 169—176),¹⁸ making the poetic language flexible and responsive to the needs of line and meter.

Eighteenth century Vojvodina writers, beginning with Gavriilo V. Venclović, and after him Jovan Rajić, Dositej Obradović and Milan Vidaković, used the truncated imperative forms in their prose more often than usually though. Thus the forms as држ'те and држете се, буд, ите, остан'се, хоте, откажете in Venclović,¹⁹ or бѣжъ, бѣжмо, вичте, скачте, станте, помзте ми in Obradović,²⁰ or гледъ, не забораваъ, дозволте in Avram Mrazović,²¹ or держсе, извол'те, ид'те, отмортесе, устан'те, неговар'те

also a third form from early Dubrovnik correspondence, УПРОВАРТЕ (1388) which Lj. Stojanović corrected into УПРОВАРѢТЕ (letter No. 128, line 7). I owe this information to Professor Gojko Ružičić with whom I had opportunity to discuss the problems of Serbocroatian imperative.

¹⁵ Cf. M. Rešetar, *Dubrovački Zbornik od god. 1520* (= *Посебна издања СКА*, 100, *Филозофски и филолошки списи*, 24) (Belgrade, 1933), 240.

¹⁶ Cf. M. Rešetar, *Bernardinov lektionar i njegovi dubrovački urejisi* (= *Посебна издања СКА*, 99, *Филозофски и филолошки списи*, 23) (Belgrade, 1933), 77.

¹⁷ Cf. Ђ. Даничић, *Историја облика*, 335—346; also: A. Vaillant, *La langue de Dominko Zlatarić, Poète Ragusain de la fin du XVIe siècle*, II (Paris, 1931), 224—228.

¹⁸ Cf. *Djela Ćiva Frana Gundulića* (= *Stari pisci hrvatski*, 9), Ed. by Ђ. Körbler and M. Rešetar, 3rd ed. (Zagreb, 1938), 527).

¹⁹ Cf. B. C. Јовановић, „Гаврило Стефановић Венцловић,“ *СДЗБ II* (1911), 154, 199.

²⁰ Cf. H. Kuna, *Jezičke karakteristike književnih djela Dositeja Obradovića* (= *Djela ANU BiH*, 36, *Odjeljenje društvenih nauka*, 21) (Sarajevo, 1970), 71—72. — For examples from Jovan Rajić, see: A. Младеновић, *О народном језику Јована Рајића* (Нови Сад, 1964).

²¹ Cf. A. Албин, „Језик у делима Аврама Мразовића (1756—1826),“ *Зборник за филологију и лингвистику*, XII/2 (Novi Sad, 1970), 158.

весел'те, задрж'те in Vidaković,²² obviously cannot be simply dismissed as isolated phonetic vowel reductions.²³ We should prefer to see in these forms an element of Serbian verbal morphology used to counteract the Russian Slavonic tradition, but primarily and above all a linguistic fact whose utilization illustrates the vacillation in the process of stabilization of Serbian literary language before Vuk.

Although Vuk knew the truncated imperative forms probably from the dialects of Tršić and Drobñjak, he never used them in his own prose. They abound in his folk songs texts, and often enough appear in the examples to individual entries in his *Rječnik* of 1818 to suggest that their use most likely reflects the situation in the dialects of the time.²⁴ Vuk might have been fully aware of the contradiction which the existence of morphological doublets represented for his dictum that the grammar should be „*kao što narod govori*“, and he never considered the possibility to encode such forms in the grammar. In the conflict between the vernacular and grammar, he stood for the spoken language but for a morphologically congruous, etymologically and euphonically regulated form system. „*Kad se . . . jedne riječi u narodu govore dvojako i trojako, ne treba li onda spisatelji da pišu onako, kao što je najpravičnije?*“²⁵ Since the full forms exhibit a higher degree of morphological congruity, they are to be considered correct forms, while the truncated forms, although possible in everyday speech, are not literate. They are used in the language of folk poetry; in a rigidly organized metric line, the doublets differing in number of syllables, may be functional for the realization of metric patterns. Vuk writes them in the recorded folk songs by marking, according to the rhetorical tradition, the elided *i* by the apostrophe, although this seems to be inconsistent with his own criticism of Luka Miladinov's practice.²⁶ Vuk recorded truncated imperative forms also in his folklore texts in prose and, as it is known, they have been used since in the poetic

²² Cf. J. Kašić, *Језик Милована Видаковића* (Novi Sad, 1968), 49—51.

²³ This has been done quite often in recent studies on the language of these authors. Cf., e.g., in H. Kuna, „*Језичке карактеристике*“, 136.

²⁴ Cf. П. Ивић, „О Вуковом Рјечнику из 1818. године.“ In: *Српски Рјечник (1818), Сабрана Дела Вука Стефановића Караџића*, II (Belgrade, 1966), 170.

²⁵ Cf. „Критика у језику,“ *Пешићанско-будимскиј Скоростеча (Courier)*, 1843. In: *Скупиљени грамајички и њолемички списи Вука Стеф. Караџића*, Државно издање,

language of the literary prose quite often; they function as an expressive stylistic device at variance with the normative literary language.²⁷

South Slavic rhetorics from Jovan Subotić and Luka Zima on, treated the truncated imperative forms among the syllable controlling schemes: elision, apocope, syncope.²⁸ When linguists discussed these forms they very often used the same terminology: elision as a cover term for both; apocope for the loss of a final sound (e.g., *rec'*), and syncope for the loss of a middle sound in a word (e.g., *rec'te*). Only recently, an attempt has been made to discriminate between the use of these terms in poetry and in grammar, though, unfortunately, with much less clarity as we would expect some one hundred years after L. Zima.²⁹

2. It seems to be perfectly clear that when the truncated imperative forms occur in the speech, in the dialects and in their texts, they reflect a linguistic feature of those particular dialects. This is so even in fixed metrical schemes of folklore texts; the use of the apostrophe in such forms in a folk song, we would venture to say, reflects more the attention of the collector to the numerical decorum of the line than a conscious preoccupation of the singer with the verse. Thus in principle, the truncated imperative forms in speech are part of „sentence phonetics“, concerned with phonetic changes taking place in forms according to the function of the word in the sentence. If such forms do not occur at random, i.e., not arbitrarily as individual and sporadic alternations, but systematically and predictably in a language, they belong to the morphophonemics of that language and become a relevant problem of its morphology.

Furthermore, as it was shown first by K. Bühler and was later elaborated by R. Jakobson,³⁰ the verbal structure of a message necessarily depends on the predominant function it fulfills in verbal communication. A conative message, oriented toward the addressee, might very well differ from a message of referential language, directed toward the context. It is not surprising that the imperative and vocative, two grammatical cate-

²⁷ Cf. P. Димитријевић, *Теорија књижевности са примерима*, 3rd ed. (Belgrade, 1967), 67ff, Who discusses these forms as dialecticisms and provincialisms.

²⁸ Cf. J. Суботић, *Наука о српском стихотворенију* (Belgrade, 1845); and L. Zima, *Figure u našem narodnom pjesništvu s njihovom teorijom* (Zagreb, 1880), 204—207.

²⁹ See *elizija, apokopa, sinkopa* in: R. Simeon, *Enciklopedijski rječnik lingvističkih naziva na 8 jezika* (Zagreb, 1969). The linguistic aspect of truncated imperative forms should have been discussed, however, under *skraćemica* 1 or 2.

³⁰ Cf. K. Bühler, *Sprachtheorie, Die Darstellungsfunktion der Sprache* (Jena, 1934); R. Jakobson, „Linguistics and Poetics“, *Style in Language*, ed. Th. A. Sebeok (New York, London, 1960), 350—377.

gories representing the purest grammatical expression of the appellative function with their total orientation toward the addressee, deviate from other nominal and verbal categories on syntactical, morphological, and often even on phonemical level.³¹ The systematic and predictable deviations in the forms of such categories may, therefore, represent patterns attributable to their specific function in verbal communication. Thus, the truncated imperative forms, in as far as they stand for formal patterns of an appellative category in a language, do belong to the morphology of a specific „plane of appeal“.

The structure of the truncated pattern of the imperative of Slavic languages, including most Serbocroatian dialects, does seem to exhibit such systematic and predictable features which in our view may be part of a „morphology of appeal“.³² They result from a general and fundamental tendency of imperative forms to be defined simply within the appeal situation (-imperative's usual place is either in isolation or as the first word in a phrase-), and consequently, to reduce the number of formally expressed grammatical categories which define finite verbal forms. In imperative only the grammatical number needs to be explicitly expressed, person and mood are defined by the situation. Thus, unmarked singular form is reduced to the present tense stem without grammatical ending. To this, one can easily add agglutinative suffixes, phonologically treated as enclitic particles, whose normal position in Slavic sentence is the second place in a phrase. While the appellative function in its marked plural form comes to be concentrated in the stem, the old personal endings tend to be reduced to the status of enclitics.³³

The imperative of most Štokavian dialects does exhibit these tendencies. In a large part of neo-Štokavian area the imperative paradigm has only two forms, singular and 2nd plural, with only grammatical number explicitly expressed (e.g.: *něsi*, *něsite*, vs. *da nēsěmo*),³⁴ in a great majority of dialects a tendency appears to replace *i* by 'zero' before a person-number suffix (e.g.: *poněste*) or before an enclitic (e.g.: *poněsi*, but *ponēs ga*); a more general tendency toward generalization of a 'zero' pattern in the singular form (e.g.: *ponēs*); and finally, a tendency to combine intensifying enclitic

³¹ Cf. R. Jakobson, „Zur Struktur des Russischen Verbums“, *Charisteria Guilelmo Mathesio quinquagenario . . . oblata* (Prague, 1932), 74—83.

³² Cf. R. L. Lencek, „On the Morphophonemic Patterning of Slavic Imperative“ (forthcoming).

³³ Cf. R. Jakobson, „Les enclitiques slaves,“ *Atti del III Congresso Internazionale di Linguistica tenuto in Roma il 19—26 settembre 1933* (Florence, 1935).

³⁴ Cf. T. Maretić, *Gramatika*, 236.

particles with and within imperative forms (e.g.: *donèzde mi sèkiru, zat-vòr' dete*)³⁵.

Historical documentation of the truncated imperative forms in Serbo-croatian points to the same structural pressures and the same evolution as found in other Slavic languages. They were primarily induced, not by phonetic processes (-truncated imperative forms are attested in a number of dialects which do not know vowel reduction!), but by the function they perform in communication; and generated, not to serve as a syllable counting device of poetic language, but to reinforce the appellative message in a speech situation.

In the earliest examples, attested for 1388 (see above), and most frequently today in the dialects, truncation occurs in the non-singular forms; i.e., in accordance with tendency to treat imperative endings as enclitical particles. The truncated singular forms are attested in the texts much later (1520; see above); in the dialects, however, — and this seems to be significant — they occur more frequently when followed by an enclitic than in isolation (e.g.: *ponèste, ponèsi*, but — *ponès ga; dŕži*, but — *dŕž ti ovò*)³⁶. Since in dialectal data the imperative forms very often are not recorded in their environment, although the environment seems to determine their morphological shape, the status of the truncated singular forms in independent position (when an imperative form is not followed by an enclitic) does not seem to be absolutely clear.

3. The loss of the morpheme *-i-* in imperative forms in the dialects has been so far most often attributed to the process of phonetic reduction. Thus, M. Rešetar saw in the truncated imperative „eine bei kräftigerer Formulierung eines Befehles oder Aufforderung leicht begreifliche Synkopierung der Form“.³⁷ Sometimes, non-phonetic factors have been adduced. B. Miletić, for instance, maintains that the truncated imperative forms occur primarily in fixed expressions and formulas.³⁸ Similarly, M. B. Pešikan stresses that these forms are conditioned semantically, and that they behave like interjections with strong emotional overstress;³⁹ J. Vuković conceived of them as basically context-conditioned forms with an optional

³⁵ Cf. J. Вуковић, „Говор Пиве и Дробњака,“ 70; Т. Maretić, *Gramatika*, 238.

³⁶ Cf. J. Вуковић, *ibidem*, 70.

³⁷ Cf. M. Rešetar, *Der štokavische Dialekt*, 194. — Similarly F. Ramovš understood these forms in Slovene dialects: they are shaped by strong stress and a vowel reduction pressure, first in the singular form, then generalized in plural. Cf. F. Ramovš, *Morfologija slovenskega jezika* (Ljubljana, 1952), 143.

³⁸ Cf. Б. Милетић, „Црмнички говор,“ 449.

³⁹ Cf. М. Б. Пешикан, „Староцрногорски говори,“ 176.

position after a short stress and before enclitics,⁴⁰ while V. Tomanović pointed to stress as the primary cause of reduction of prosodies and segments in non-initial syllable, but judiciously associated changes in the imperative with those in other appellative forms.⁴¹ In our opinion, all these interpretations are valid in so far as they point at the specificity of the appellative category in which the changes take place.

The most usual qualification given for the 'zero' forms recorded in the dialects is a standard specification: „when used for a categorical appeal“⁴². Such specification implies the existence of a double imperative pattern in language, of categorical and non-categorical forms, different from the usual allegro vs. lento level of explicitness of linguistic use. An allegro form is shorter: it is found under weak stress and at a faster tempo, whereas a lento form is longer and appears under strong stress and at a slower tempo. On the level of categoricalness, however, a shorter form tends to have stronger stress and expresses a more unequivocal appeal than the forms characterized by formal explicitness.⁴³ Under the apparent contradiction two different kinds of emphases operate: on the level of explicitness — the emphasis of prominence, on the level of categoricalness — the emphasis of intensity of expression. The latter, as it is well known, may involve the acceleration of the utterance of a phrase, but most importantly, it is by no means always achieved by increased stress. Since in parole — and we should not forget that the imperative is essentially a category of parole — the categorical forms, marked by the emphasis of intensity, reflect better the real nature of a form in purely appellative function than the non-categorical forms; their 'zero' pattern should not be dismissed simply as a form of „sporadic alternation“; on the other hand, the extent of use of the categorical forms and their status in the dialects still remain to be established.

⁴⁰ Cf. J. Вуковић, „Говор Пиве и Дробњака,“ 97.

⁴¹ Cf. В. Томановић, „Акцент у говору села Лепетана,“ 105.

⁴² Cf. В. Томановић, *ibidem*, 106; J. Вуковић, *ibidem*, 70; М. Милаш, „Današnji mostarski dijalekat,“ *Rad JAZU*, CLIII (Zagreb, 1903), 53.

⁴³ Cf. R.-H. S. Heffner, *General Phonetics* (Madison, 1960), 228—230.