

# A grammatical description of Warao imperatives: Formal brevity and morphological complexity

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## Abstract

Warao is a morphologically complex language isolate, spoken in Guyana and Venezuela. This paper focuses on the critically endangered Guyanese dialect. First-hand data are used to provide a descriptive analysis of Warao imperative constructions, identify their grammatical features and illocutionary forces, and clarify relevant distinctions concerning telicity. The Warao imperative mood is composed of canonical (2<sup>nd</sup> singular and 2<sup>nd</sup> plural) and non-canonical (1<sup>st</sup> person and 3<sup>rd</sup> person) imperatives, which are expressed by a set of person-specific verbal suffixes. Both canonical and non-canonical imperatives are negated by the same standard negator. These imperatives commonly express instructions, requests, invitations, warnings, prohibitions, and optatives. As compared to verb forms in other moods, Warao imperatives are syntactically and formally simple; however, the imperative suffixes attach to the morphologically complex Warao verb, thus adding complexity to the compositional meaning of the imperative. In addition to bearing numerous other affixes, the Warao imperatives are often marked as telic. The common marking of telicity in the imperative has led to the reassessment of previous analyses by Osborn (1959) and Romero-Figueroa (2003). The ways in which Warao imperatives adhere to and differ from cross-linguistic trends are also explored. This paper draws on Speech Act Theory, as well as Dixon's Basic Linguistic Theory more broadly.

Keywords: *Warao, imperative, morphology, telicity, indigenous language documentation*

## 1 Introduction

Imperative constructions are a typologically interesting category of language for several reasons, including their tendency toward simplicity of form. What does and does not appear in imperatives, as compared to other constructions, offers insight into the interconnections between form and function in manipulative speech acts. This paper focuses on imperative constructions in Warao, an endangered, poorly described language isolate spoken in northwestern Guyana and northeastern Venezuela. In Warao, an agglutinative, morphologically complex language, imperatives follow certain cross-linguistic trends proposed by Aikhenvald (2010), but do not uphold others. Warao imperatives adhere to the trend of formal brevity, in as much as they are often prosodically short speech acts, relative to those in other constructions, but do not tend toward grammatical simplicity as do imperatives in many languages. Zanuttini (2008), Zhang (1990), and Mauck (2005) posit a cross-linguistic trend, wherein, “imperative verbal morphology tends to be meager or reduced” (Zanuttini 2008: 189). In Warao, however, verbal affixes, ancillary verbs, and numerous other verbal and syntactic features regularly add nuance to imperative forms, resulting in a broad range of semantic possibilities.

This analysis is the first in-depth study of Warao imperatives. The aim of the paper is to provide a descriptive analysis of Warao imperative constructions, identify their grammatical features and illocutionary forces, and clarify relevant distinctions conveyed by stem alternation and the suffix *-n*. First-

hand data are used to describe the morphological, syntactic, and semantic properties of Warao imperatives.

The Warao are traditionally a riverine people, living primarily in the Orinoco Delta in Venezuela and along a series of smaller rivers in the Barima–Waini region of Guyana. Historically, smaller Warao communities also existed in Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname (Romero-Figueroa and Rybka, n.d.). As a result of this current geographical distribution, there are two main Warao dialects: Venezuelan and Guyanese Warao. An estimated 33,000 people speak Warao today, of which 28,000 live in Venezuela (Eberhard et al., 2019). This analysis focuses on the more endangered Guyanese dialect. Fieldwork was conducted in the indigenous village of Waramuri, located on Guyana’s Moruca River. According to local accounts, between nine and twenty fluent Warao speakers remain in Waramuri today, of an approximate population of 900 people. All fluent speakers are in their fifties or older. As in other northwestern communities of Guyana, these speakers are bilingual in Warao and English, or more precisely, variants of English on the spectrum between Guyanese English and Guyanese Creole English. Guyanese English, the national language of Guyana, and Guyanese Creole English, the local *lingua franca*, have likely influenced modern Guyanese Warao syntactically and lexically (e.g. partially anglicized word order, as discussed in §3.2). While this analysis is based on first-hand data from the Guyanese Warao, it also considers previous and ongoing research on both dialects, conducted by Romero-Figueroa and Rybka (n.d.), Romero-Figueroa (2003), Osborn (1959), and Barral (1979).

The following sections focus on the form and function of Warao imperatives. §2 describes and evaluates the methods of data collection. To provide background, §3.1 presents a typological overview of imperatives, and §3.2 discusses general grammatical features of Warao relevant to the analysis of imperatives. §4 presents the Warao imperative paradigm, including both canonical (§4.1) and non-canonical imperatives (§4.2), as well as their negative counterparts (§4.3). §5 and §6 survey the verbal features and syntactic properties exhibited by imperatives, respectively. §7 looks more broadly at the category of commands in Warao and describes semantic differences. §8 provides potential explanations for phenomena such as telicity preferences in positive and negative imperatives, and the special status of 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives. §9 summarizes the findings.

## 2 Methodology

This fieldwork was conducted in the indigenous village of Waramuri, located on Guyana’s Moruca River. The research was carried out over the course of six weeks in August and September 2018, as part of a Warao Documentation and Revitalization project directed by Dr. Konrad Rybka. Original data were collected from six native speakers of Warao, ranging in age from 58 to 85. The group was composed of two men and four women, all of whom are bilingual in Warao and English. These consultants were compensated for their time and contribution, receiving an equivalent wage to primary school teachers in Guyana. Data were collected during a series of audio-recorded sessions lasting one to two hours at a time. Two sessions were also filmed. Primary data can be accessed at The Language Archive at The Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics (Archive: Warao, Contributor: Allegra Robertson).

This study sought to clarify the distinctions expressed by stem alternation and the suffix -n, as they are of structural and semantic importance to Warao imperatives. Based on preliminary data collection, three hypotheses were formed and tested: 1) Stem alternation encodes punctual–durative contrast, and -n is part of the punctual allomorph -an due to an aspect-specific phonological constraint. 2) Stem alternation encodes punctual–durative contrast, while -n marks semelfactivity. 3) Stem alternation or the suffix -n mark telicity, depending on a phonological constraint specific to lexical aspect. Three methods were used to collect data: a speaker-addressee task, an elicitation task, and a cultural scenario task.

In the speaker-addressee task, the speaker instructed the addressee through each step of a culturally important subsistence practice, in this case, the traditional baking of manioc bread. While this task created a natural context for imperatives, it only produced 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives and thus

provided no insight on plural or non-canonical imperatives; the speaker directed all imperatives at the addressee (the baker) without variation. Examples from this task, such as (14), (15), and (16) are included throughout the text.

In the elicitation task, the consultant translated a series of imperatives, used in a wide range of contexts, from English to Warao, in all person categories. This exercise accumulated enough data to reveal an important trend: many English imperatives yield two, or even three, Warao forms per person category. These data revealed that Warao imperatives encode lexical aspectual distinctions that English imperatives do not encode, leading to the three hypotheses mentioned above. This task, however, fell short of verifying any hypothesis, due to the difficulty of translating aspectual distinctions to a non-aspect-encoding language like English. Examples from this task, including (19) and (20), can also be found throughout the text.

In the cultural scenario task, the consultant was provided with a more specific, culturally relevant context (e.g. baking, paddling, farming, child rearing), a timeframe cue to discern lexical aspect (e.g. *for a while, for a moment, one time*), and an imperative alternation. The consultant then approved or rejected each provided scenario. This task, evidenced in examples such as (17) and (18), was successful in clarifying translations and confirming the third hypothesis, as described in §4.

## 3 Background

### 3.1 Typological overview of imperatives

A helpful framework for understanding the intentions and effects of imperative constructions is provided by Speech Act Theory, and particularly the concept of *illocutionary force*. According to Sadock (2006) and Levinson (2017), the illocutionary force of an utterance is the speaker's intention in uttering it (e.g. requesting, warning, or promising). This force is critical for the addressee in hearing any utterance, as “it is the illocutionary force, not the meaning, that we primarily respond to” (Levinson, 2017). Illocutionary acts, or “acts done in speaking” are distinguished from perlocutionary acts, “the consequence[s] or bi-product[s] of speaking” (Sadock, 2006: 54–55). However, Searle (1969) points out that speakers typically perform illocutionary acts with a specific perlocutionary effect in mind (Sadock, 2006: 59). When relevant, this paper discusses illocutionary force in imperatives and, to a lesser extent, their perlocutionary effect on imperative subjects.

The imperative mood, or simply *the imperative*, is a grammatical feature of a verbal clause used by the speaker to express directive illocutionary force. *Imperative* is a short-hand for one or more imperative forms within this mood. Imperatives exhibit a wide range of illocutionary forces cross-linguistically and within a given language. In Warao, such forces range from instructing and warning to inviting and advising (§7.1). These illocutionary forces are also commonly attributed to commands, but here an important distinction must be drawn. Whereas an *imperative* refers to the grammatical form of an utterance, a *command* refers to the function of the utterance (Aikhenvald 2010: 1). Given this distinction, imperative and command can, but do not always, apply to the same utterance (§7.2). For example, in English, *Have a great day!* is imperative in form, but functions as a farewell rather than a command. *Quickly!* on the other hand, is not a verb, let alone an imperative verb form, yet it commands the addressee to pick up the pace.

As mentioned above, imperatives tend toward grammatical simplicity and brevity of form cross-linguistically. These characteristics align with the principle of iconicity, the idea that there is a perceivable correlation between a linguistic form and its meaning (Aikhenvald 2010: 44). Direct, informal, or urgent commands, therefore, are often expressed by prosodically short imperative forms, while indirect, formal, or non-urgent commands are expressed by forms that have been lengthened in some way (e.g. by the inclusion of subordinate clauses). Iconicity in Warao imperatives is discussed in §8.

Whether the imperative mood is confined to utterances directed solely at the 2<sup>nd</sup> person or includes all persons is a much-debated topic among linguists (Aikhenvald 2010: 24). According to Lyons (1977: 747), the 2<sup>nd</sup> person (addressee) is considered the invariable subject of imperatives. Kuryłowicz (1964: 137) echoes this line of thought, specifically considering the 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative to be the fundamental imperative form. As an example, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative sentence, *Billy, pass the salad*, the subject refers to the salad passer, *Billy*, who is the addressee in this speech act. Plural subjects may also refer to the addressees, as in *Boys, pass the salad*. This addressee-oriented categorization of imperatives, however, excludes forms whose illocutionary forces concern the 1<sup>st</sup> person (e.g. *Let us pass the salad*) or 3<sup>rd</sup> person (e.g. *Let Greta pass the salad*) because the subjects (*us* and *Greta*) are not 2<sup>nd</sup> person. Aikhenvald (2010: 17) proposes a system of categorization that includes 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> persons within the scope of imperatives by distinguishing between *canonical* and *non-canonical* imperatives. Canonical imperatives are the most cross-linguistically common category of imperatives, in which the subject is 2<sup>nd</sup> person and refers to the addressee. On the other hand, non-canonical imperatives express directive illocutionary force to non-addressees, such as the speaker (1<sup>st</sup> person) or a third party (3<sup>rd</sup> person). When canonical and non-canonical imperatives have different formal exponents in a language, the non-canonical imperatives (i.e. non-addressee-oriented imperatives) may be referred to with dedicated terms: 1<sup>st</sup> person imperatives are called *hortatives*, and 3<sup>rd</sup> person imperatives are known as *jussives*. As Warao imperative forms differ by person (and number in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person), this analysis distinguishes between canonical imperatives and non-canonical hortatives and jussives.

Another distinction worth noting is that which separates negative imperatives and prohibitives. Sadock and Zwicky (1985: 175) posit that approximately half of the world's language exhibit a negator in imperatives that is not found in other moods. Imperatives with their own unique negator are categorized as prohibitives. On the other hand, if imperatives bear a negator that is also found in other moods, they are considered negative imperatives. Warao (like English) has a category of negative imperatives, because the standard negator *-naka* occurs both in imperative and indicative moods. No prohibitives have been detected in current data.

### 3.2 Relevant grammatical background

This section addresses grammatical phenomena relevant to the analysis of Warao imperatives, namely verb formation, stress assignment rules, final-vowel elision, ellipsis of core arguments, standard negation markers, ancillary verbs, and telicity.

Firstly, it is important to note that most verb stems require inflection. In (1) and (2), the verb stem *hoho* 'burn' would be ungrammatical without further suffixation.<sup>1</sup> One exception to this rule that appears throughout the paper is the copula *ha*, which can take inflection but does not require it in all cases. The copula is discussed in greater depth later in this section.

Secondly, two phonological features are pertinent to imperative forms: stress assignment and elision. In Warao, primary stress is typically penultimate, and secondary stress is assigned on a right-to-left iterative trochaic basis (Romero-Figueroa and Rybka, n.d.). For verb forms, this means that when suffixes attach to a verb stem, stress is assigned accordingly to maintain the penultimate position. For example, in (1) the verb stem *hoho* 'burn' bears the monosyllabic future suffix *-te*, and primary stress is placed on the penultimate syllable, *ho*, as predicted. In (2) the same verb stem bears the disyllabic conditional suffix *-kore*, so primary stress is assigned to the penultimate syllable, *ko*.

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<sup>1</sup> Although verb stems are ungrammatical without inflection, n-dashes are not included when stems are mentioned in isolation, so as to distinguish them from prefixes.

- (1) /ho.'ho.te/  
*hoho-te*  
 burn-FUT<sup>2</sup>  
 ‘[you] will burn’<sup>3</sup>
- (2) /,ho.ho.'ko.re/  
*hoho-kore*  
 burn-COND  
 ‘if [you] burn’

In some words, however, primary stress is assigned to the ultimate syllable. §4.2 illustrates how primary stress is regularly assigned to the ultimate syllable of hortatives.

Another common phenomenon in Warao is the optional elision of word-final vowels. Such elision is illustrated in (3), in which the final vowel of the future verbal suffix *-te* is elided.

- (3) ['koko 'ine ,eso'bat]  
*koko ine esoba-te*  
 coconut 1SG.SBJ chop-FUT  
 ‘I will chop [the] coconut.’<sup>4</sup>

The elision of word-final vowels is common in Guyanese Warao and does not change the meaning of utterances (Romero-Figueroa and Rybka, n.d.). To best represent Warao morphology, examples are glossed phonemically throughout this paper, unless otherwise indicated. Crucially, vowel elision applies to canonical and negative imperatives (§4.1 and §4.3), which end in unstressed vowels, but not to hortatives and jussives (§4.2), which end in stressed vowels and vowel clusters, respectively.

Moving on to morphological features, it is worth mentioning the standard negator, *-naka*, which occurs in both the indicative and imperative moods. The suffix *-naka* attaches to verbs and, like many other Warao suffixes, blocks further attachment of verbal suffixes to the stem, thus requiring an ancillary verb to bear any additional morphology (Romero-Figueroa and Rybka, n.d.). This is illustrated in (4), where the verb *namina* ‘know’ bears the suffix *-naka*; the auxiliary verb *ta* therefore carries the intensifying suffix *-bu* and future suffix *-te*. This standard negator is further described in the context of imperatives in §4.3.

- (4) *ine namina-naka ta-bu-te*  
 1SG.SBJ know-NEG AUX-INTS-FUT  
 ‘I really do not know.’ (Romero-Figueroa 2003: 28)

Moving on to syntactic features, the standard word order in Warao is OSV (Romero-Figueroa 1985), although SOV order is also common in the Guyanese dialect, a likely result of interference from the contact languages. Subjects and objects can be explicit or omitted (Romero-Figueroa and Rybka, n.d.). Example (5) illustrates SOV word order in a sentence with both an explicit subject, the pronoun *ine* ‘I’, and an explicit object, the noun *koko* ‘coconut’. Conversely, in (6) the subject is omitted and inferred from context.

<sup>2</sup> A complete list of abbreviations used in examples throughout the text is enumerated in §11.

<sup>3</sup> Original audio and audio-visual data from which all examples have been sourced (unless otherwise indicated) are accessible at *The Language Archive* at Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics. For a complete citation and direct link to archived materials, see §10.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this paper, square brackets indicate ellipses of constituents that have been included in the English translation for clarity or grammatical accuracy.

- (5) *ine*        *koko*        *esoba-te*  
 1SG.SBJ    coconut    chop.TLC-FUT  
 ‘I will chop [the] coconut.’
- (6) *wahibaka* *nona-te*  
 canoe        make-FUT  
 ‘[I] will make [a] canoe.’

Ellipsis of constituents may, and very often does, occur if a word is easily recoverable from context. Imperatives in particular usually lack overt subjects, as evidenced by the examples quoted in the text, because the subject is morphologically marked by the imperative suffix: hortatives have, by definition, 1<sup>st</sup> person subjects, jussives a 3<sup>rd</sup> person, and canonical imperatives imply a 2<sup>nd</sup> person subject. Subject suffixation, which is obligatory in the imperative, is uncommon in the indicative.

Apart from subjects and objects, it is important to mention that the copula *ha* is optionally deleted in copular clauses. In (7) *ha* is explicit, linking the subject, *tai tira* ‘that girl’, to the nominal predicate, *kirichana* ‘foreigner’. On the other hand, in (8), *ha* is deleted and the link between the subject and predicate are inferred from context. Ellipsis is relevant to the analysis of 2<sup>nd</sup> singular negative imperatives (§4.3).

- (7) *tai*        *tira*        *kirichana* *ha*  
 ANPH.DEM girl    foreigner    COP  
 ‘That girl is [a] foreigner.’
- (8) *tai*        *tira*        *kirichana*  
 ANPH.DEM girl    foreigner  
 ‘That girl [is a] foreigner.’

The copula *ha* mentioned above is one of two Warao ancillary verbs, which both occur in imperative constructions.<sup>5</sup> The other ancillary verb is *ta*. While *ha* and *ta* each have copular functions with verbal predicates and auxiliary functions with non-verbal predicates, *ha* is the default copula, and *ta* is the default auxiliary verb. Although these ancillary verbs often occur in the same environments, they have lexical equivalents which impart different meanings: copular *ha* co-occurs with stative predicates, whereas the auxiliary *ta* co-occurs with dynamic predicates (Romero-Figueroa and Rybka, n.d.). In (9), *ha* bears the future suffix *-te* and conveys that the subject (*ine* ‘I’) is in a sustained state of silence. By contrast, in (10) *ta* bears the future suffix and conveys the same subject’s action of being in silence. The role of ancillary verbs in imperatives is described in §5.2.

- (9) *ine*        *inare*        *ha-te*  
 1SG.SBJ    silence        COP-FUT  
 ‘I will be silent.’
- (10) *ine*        *inare*        *ta-te*  
 1SG.SBJ    silence        AUX-FUT  
 ‘I will stay silent.’

Finally, telicity, or telic lexical aspect, is critical to imperative form, function, and meaning in Warao. Telicity is marked in a verb to express an action that has an inherent endpoint, regardless of the action’s duration (Comrie, 1976: 45). Punctual achievements (e.g. arriving at the dock) and durative

<sup>5</sup> The category of ancillary verbs in Warao is comprised of two verbs that function as auxiliary verbs or copulas, depending on their environment (Romero-Figueroa and Rybka, n.d.).

accomplishments (e.g. chopping down a tree) are telic because they have inherent endpoints. Conversely, atelicity is marked in a verb to convey an action that lacks an inherent endpoint (Comrie, 1976: 45). Activities (e.g. walking on the dock) and states (e.g. owning a tree) are atelic because their endpoints are variable or intangible.

Telic contrast is by no means exclusive to imperatives in Warao; in fact, telicity is overtly marked on verbs in the indicative constructions as well (e.g. past and future forms). Overt marking of telicity takes two structurally divergent forms in Warao, depending on its environment. It is marked by verb stem alternation when followed by a suffix beginning in a consonant (as is the case for the majority of verbal suffixes). Alternatively, telicity is marked by the suffix *-n* when followed by a vowel-initial suffix (i.e. the past suffix *-ae* and its allomorph *-e* and 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative suffix *-u*).

This analysis distinguishes between two verb classes, as each class interacts differently with telicity. In the *a-stem class*, verbs have one stem, which always ends in /a/. These verb stems do not take overt lexical aspect marking, the reasons for which are discussed in §8. Table 1 provides examples of verb stems in the a-stem class and their respective future forms.

Stem	STEM-FUT
<i>nisa</i> ‘take’	<i>nisa-te</i> ‘will take’
<i>waka</i> ‘wait’	<i>waka-te</i> ‘will wait’
<i>sinaria</i> ‘try’	<i>sinaria-te</i> ‘will try’

Table 1: A-stem verbs and their future forms

In the *V-stem class*, verbs have one or two stems. Verbs with one stem (*non-alternating stems*) end in stem-final vowels /o, u, i, e/ and are also unmarked. Table 2 provides examples of non-alternating V-stem verbs and their respective future forms.

Stem	STEM-FUT
<i>nao</i> ‘come’	<i>nao-te</i> ‘will come’
<i>konaru</i> ‘carry’	<i>konaru-te</i> ‘will carry’
<i>mi</i> ‘see’	<i>mi-te</i> ‘will see’
<i>yewere</i> ‘beat’	<i>yewere-te</i> ‘will beat’

Table 2: Non-alternating V-stem verbs and their future forms

The V-stem class also contains verbs that have two stems (*alternating stems*). These verbs have one unmarked stem that ends in /o, u, i, e/. To mark telicity, the stem-final vowel changes to one of the two telic allomorphs: *-a* or *-e*. Note that the telic allomorphs *-a* and *-e* are unrelated to the stem-final vowels /a/ and /e/. All four vowels (i.e. /o, u, i, e/) alternate with telic *-a*, while only /i/ alternates with both *-a* and *-e*. Table 3 exemplifies stems and future forms of alternating V-stem verbs. For the sake of transparency, both unmarked and telic stems are provided in the table. Moving forward, all V-stem verbs (including alternating verbs) will be represented by their unmarked stems, unless otherwise indicated.

Unmarked / telic stems	STEM-FUT	STEM.TLC-FUT
<i>esobo / esoba</i> ‘chop’	<i>esobo-te</i> ‘will chop’	<i>esoba-te</i> ‘will chop once’
<i>dibu / diba</i> ‘speak’	<i>dibu-te</i> ‘will speak’	<i>diba-te</i> ‘will say something’
<i>hobi / hobe</i> ‘drink’	<i>hobi-te</i> ‘will drink’	<i>hobe-te</i> ‘will gulp’
<i>wiri / wira</i> ‘paddle’	<i>wiri-te</i> ‘will paddle’	<i>wira-te</i> ‘will paddle a stroke’
<i>bere / bera</i> ‘sweep’	<i>bere-te</i> ‘will sweep’	<i>bera-te</i> ‘will sweep up/out’

Table 3: Alternating V-stem verbs and their future forms

As mentioned above, a verb is marked as telic by the suffix *-n* when followed by a consonant-initial suffix. Such is the case in verb forms of both stem classes that bear the past allomorphs *-ae* or *-e* (the latter of which only attaches to verb stems ending in /a/). Examples (11) and (12) illustrate semantic contrast between the past form of the unmarked a-stem verb stem *tuara* ‘rest’ and the same verb stem when both the telic and past suffixes are attached. In (13), *-n* attaches to the V-stem verb stem *duhu* ‘sit’.

- (11) *ine tuara-e*  
 1SG rest-PST  
 ‘I rested.’ (Romero-Rigueroa and Rybka, n.d.)

- (12) *ine tuara-n-ae*  
 1SG rest-TLC-PST  
 ‘I stopped.’ (Romero-Rigueroa and Rybka, n.d.)

- (13) *tida duhu-n-ae*  
 girl sit-TLC-PST  
 ‘[The] girl sat down.’

It should be noted that the allomorph *-a* is the most common marker of telicity, and this alternation is thought to be regularizing, occurring with growing frequency in unexpected contexts (Romero-Figueroa and Rybka, n.d.). This regularization is of particular relevance to 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives (§4.1).

Whereas telicity is marked through stem alternation, suffixation, or both, atelicity is never morphologically expressed. In other words, telic contrast entails explicit telic marking or its absence. For this reason, the unmarked forms of alternating verbs (whose counterparts express telicity) are atelic in their meaning, but not in their morphology. Similarly, non-alternating verbs in both stem classes may have atelic semantic value without morphological indications. This is an important distinction because if all non-alternating verb stems were marked as atelic, they would conflict with the telic suffix *-n*; a verb like *tuaranae* ‘stopped’ in (11) would be marked as both telic and atelic. For the sake of clarity, this paper will primarily categorize verbs as unmarked or telic, but will indicate atelic value where relevant to the argument.

## 4 The Warao imperative paradigm

In Warao, imperatives are expressed by a set of suffixes that attach to the verb stem. The category of imperatives is subdivided into canonical (i.e. addressee-oriented, §4.1) and non-canonical (i.e. non-addressee-oriented, §4.2) imperatives. Both types can be negated by the standard negator *-naka* (§4.3). Imperatives may be marked as telic, with some structural differences specific to person–number category. While many verbs permit both telic and atelic (unmarked) forms, others reject one form because of the incompatibility of their lexical meaning with telic or atelic lexical aspect.

## 4.1 Canonical imperatives

Canonical imperatives are addressee-oriented imperatives that command the 2<sup>nd</sup> person addressee. In Warao, canonical imperatives distinguish singular and plural persons. These two canonical subcategories are discussed in turn.

2<sup>nd</sup> person singular imperatives are marked by the suffix *-u* and its allomorph  $-\emptyset$ . Note that this morphological zero (the sole known morphological zero in Warao) is unrelated to the phonological process of elision, described in §3.2. The morphological zero is analyzed as an allomorph of the 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative morpheme, and not simply an absence of imperative marking on the verb, because most Warao verb stems never occur without suffixation.<sup>6</sup>

The two 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular imperative suffixes appear in complementary distribution. The underlying morpheme *-u* attaches to verb stems ending in /a/ (i.e. all verbs in the a-stem class) as well as any verb stem bearing the telic suffix *-n*, which is further described below. The suffix *-u* cannot attach to stems ending in /o, u, i, e/. Conversely, the allomorph  $-\emptyset$  marks verb stems ending in /o, u, i, e/ (i.e. all verbs in the V-stem class) but not /a/. Note that V-stem verbs can bear the suffix *-u* only if they express telicity, by bearing *-n* before the imperative suffix. Table 4 demonstrates this complementary distribution.

Environment	<i>a, n</i> _	<i>o, u, i, e</i> _
Allomorph	<i>-u</i>	$-\emptyset$
A-stem examples	<i>ewiha-u</i> ‘dig’ <i>ewiha-n-u</i> ‘dig [a hole]’	<i>Not possible</i>
V-stem examples	<i>sikare-n-u</i> ‘break’ <i>tori-n-u</i> ‘touch’	<i>denoko-<math>\emptyset</math></i> ‘ask’ <i>etuku-<math>\emptyset</math></i> ‘shake’ <i>wabi-<math>\emptyset</math></i> ‘sell’ <i>yewere-<math>\emptyset</math></i> ‘beat’

Table 4: Complementary distribution of 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative allomorphs

Examples (14), (15), and (16) illustrate 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives formed with the two allomorphs. In (14), the a-stem verb *ibasata* ‘flatten’ bears the imperative suffix *-u*. In (15), the V-stem verb *enisabu* ‘sift’ bears the imperative allomorph  $-\emptyset$ , generating an imperative form whose final syllable is phonetically identical to that of (14) but morphologically different. In (16), the V-stem verb *wihi* ‘scrape’ is also marked as imperative by  $-\emptyset$ .

- (14) *yami isiko a-koho ibasata-u*  
fan with POSS-edge flatten-2SG.IMP  
‘Flatten its edge with [the] fan.’

- (15) *dubuida sabuka enisabu- $\emptyset$*   
quick more sift-2SG.IMP  
‘Sift [it] faster.’

<sup>6</sup> Notable exceptions to this rule are intransitive stative verbs and the copula *ha*. While *ha* does not require inflection, it can bear a variety of suffixes, as exhibited in (9) and (49).

- (16) *aru*            *wihi-Ø*  
 manioc        scrape-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Scrape [the] manioc.’

Telicity affects the imperative forms of each stem class differently. We have seen that a-stem verbs are non-alternating and unmarked by default. A-stem verbs can, however, express telicity through suffixation (see §3.2). Telic imperatives are formed when the telic suffix *-n* is attached to the verb stem, followed by the imperative suffix *-u*. Examples (17) and (18) demonstrate formal and semantic contrast between the unmarked (17) and telic (18) alternations of the a-stem verb *iwara* ‘drag’.

- (17) *nahoro-noko*    *iwara-u*  
 eat-PLACE        drag-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Drag [the] table.’
- (18) *nahoro-noko*    *iwara-n-u*  
 eat-PLACE        drag-TLC-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Give [the] table a tug.’

Telicity is marked on verbs in the V-stem class (whose stems end in /o, u, i, e/) by bearing the telic suffix *-n*, followed by the suffix *-u*, as per the complementary distribution demonstrated in Table 4. The telic contrast is illustrated in (19) and (20), where (19) exhibits the verb *bere* ‘sweep’, which bears the 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative allomorph Ø, and (20) exemplifies the same verb bearing the telic suffix in addition to the imperative suffix *-u*.

- (19) *borohoro*    *bere-Ø*  
 floor        sweep-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Sweep [the] floor.’
- (20) *ha-noko*            *bere-n-u*  
 hammock-PLACE    sweep-TLC-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Sweep out [the] house.’

Notice that in (19) no endpoint to the commanded action is entailed; the addressee might sweep the floor for one minute or three hours in reaction to this imperative. On the other hand, the imperative in (20) commands an action with an inherent endpoint (i.e. stop sweeping when the house has been swept out).

Roughly half of the V-stem verbs examined in this study are double-marked as telic in their 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative forms, meaning that telicity is expressed through both suffixation and stem alternation. Such double-marking is likely due to the regularization of stem alternation, as mentioned in §3.2. In (21), *bere* ‘sweep’ appears once more, this time double-marked as telic: the stem alternates to the telic *bera* ‘sweep out’ and bears the telic *-n* before the imperative *-u*. Note that the imperative forms in (20) and (21) are structurally different but semantically equivalent, as indicated by the Warao consultants.

- (21) *kokotuka*    *tamaha*    *ha-noko*            *bera-n-u*<sup>7</sup>  
 all            DEM.PROX    hammock-PLACE    sweep.TLC-TLC-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Sweep out [the] whole house.’

<sup>7</sup> This data resulted from an elicitation session. As there is currently no spontaneous data available that attests the semantic distinction described in (20) and (21), future research is needed to corroborate this assessment.

As the 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative alternations of the verb *bere* demonstrate in (19), (20), and (21), V-stem verbs can yield up to three 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative forms (of which two have the same meaning). Table 5 exemplifies telic contrast in other V-stem verbs. Some alternations are not attested, either because the appropriate context did not arise, or because such alternations do not occur due to pragmatic restrictions.

Stem	STEM-2SG.IMP	STEM-TLC-2SG.IMP	STEM.TLC-TLC-2SG.IMP
<i>boro</i> *‘drill’	boro-Ø ‘Bore [into it].’	boro-n-u ‘Give [it] a jab.’	bora-n-u ‘Give [it] a jab.’
<i>yabukaoru</i> *‘kick’	yabukaoru-Ø ‘Kick [it].’	<i>not attested</i>	yabukaora-n-u ‘Give [it] a kick.’
<i>abu</i> *‘bite’	<i>not attested</i>	abu-n-u ‘Bite [it].’	aba-n-u ‘Bite [it].’
<i>hobi</i> *‘drink’	hobi-Ø ‘Drink.’	<i>not attested</i>	hobe-n-u ‘Gulp [it] down.’
<i>tori</i> *‘touch’	<i>not attested</i>	tori-n-u ‘Place a hand on [it].’	tore-n-u ‘Place a hand on [it].’

Table 5: Telic contrast in 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives

We now turn to plural canonical imperatives. 2<sup>nd</sup> plural imperatives are canonical imperatives that are directed at two or more addressees. The suffix *-kotu* marks verbs as such. This suffix attaches to verb stems in both classes. A-stem verbs, which have only one stem, produce a single, unmarked 2<sup>nd</sup> plural imperative form. This is illustrated in (22), in which the a-stem verb, *buara* ‘harvest’ bears the 2<sup>nd</sup> plural imperative suffix.

- (22) *aru hakotai buara-kotu*  
 manioc DET harvest-2PL.IMP  
 ‘[You all] harvest the manioc.’

V-stem verbs yield unmarked 2<sup>nd</sup> plural imperative forms by the same process, as shown in (23). Here, the non-alternating V-stem verb *deniabu* ‘tell story’ bears the 2<sup>nd</sup> plural imperative suffix.

- (23) *ma-saba deniabu-kotu*  
 1SG.OBJ-BEN tell.story-2PL.IMP  
 ‘[You all] tell me [the] story.’

With few exceptions, telicity is always marked in alternating V-stem verbs by changing the stem-final vowels /o, u, i, e/ to *-a*, or /i/ to *-e*, preceding the 2<sup>nd</sup> plural imperative suffix.<sup>8</sup> Some of these imperatives also yield atelic forms (i.e. forms that lack telic marking), while others do not. This tendency toward telic imperatives is exemplified in (24) and further discussed in §8. In (24a) the alternating verb stem *seoro* ‘look’ always alternates to express telicity (*seora* ‘glance’) in its 2<sup>nd</sup> plural imperative form. Consultants reject its atelic counterpart, shown in (24b).

- (24) a. *kwai seora-kotu*  
 high look.TLC-2PL.IMP  
 ‘[You all] glance up.’

<sup>8</sup> \**hobekotu* and \**wirekotu* are the only known exceptions to this rule. For these verbs, only *hobikotu* ‘[you all] drink’ and *wirikotu* ‘[you all] paddle’ are possible 2<sup>nd</sup> plural imperative forms, neither of which is telic.

- b. \**kwai seoro-kotu*  
 high look-2PL.IMP  
 ‘[You all] look up.’

On the other hand, the alternating V-stem verb *esobo* ‘chop’ yields both telic and atelic forms in 2<sup>nd</sup> plural imperatives, as in (25) and (26). In (25), the verb is unmarked, thus conveying an event, chopping, without an inherent endpoint, as opposed to (26), in which the telicity conveys an event with an endpoint: a single chop.

- (25) *koko arau esobo-kotu*  
 coconut tree chop-2PL.IMP  
 ‘[You all] chop [the] coconut palm.’
- (26) *koko arau esoba-kotu*  
 coconut tree chop.TLC-2PL.IMP  
 ‘[You all] chop [the] coconut palm once.’

Table 6 provides more examples of telic and atelic imperative forms of alternating V-stem verbs. Having seen alternation in a verb stem ending in /o/, we now turn to stems ending in /u, i, e/.

STEM-2PL.IMP	STEM.TLC-2PL.IMP
<i>namu-kotu</i> ‘[You all] plant [them].’	<i>nama-kotu</i> ‘[You all] plant one.’
<i>ari-kotu</i> ‘[You all] pick them.’ (as in fruit)	<i>are-kotu</i> ‘[You all] pick one.’ (as in fruit)
<i>bere-kotu</i> ‘[You all] sweep.’	<i>bera-kotu</i> ‘[You all] sweep up.’

Table 6: Telic contrast in 2<sup>nd</sup> plural imperatives

## 4.2 Non-canonical imperatives

Non-canonical imperatives are a category of imperatives that are not addressee-oriented. The subject of a non-canonical imperative is either the 1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> person. In Warao, there are two non-canonical imperative categories: hortatives and jussives. Hortatives are directed at two or more people including the speaker. Jussives are directed at one or more people, other than the speaker and addressee. Each category is discussed in turn.

In Warao, hortatives are plural and inclusive; they express directive illocutionary force concerning the speaker and at least one addressee. Consultants translate hortatives as ‘Let’s do’ or ‘We must do’. To produce these imperatives, the suffix *-ki* is attached to verb stems of both stem classes. This is illustrated in (27) and (28), in which *-ki* attaches to the a-stem verb *waka* ‘wait’ and the V-stem verb *noko* ‘listen’, respectively.

- (27) *tatuma saba waka-ki*  
 DEM.COLL BEN wait-HORT  
 ‘Let’s wait for them.’
- (28) *naha naka-ya-ha noko-ki*  
 rain fall-PROG-REL listen-HORT  
 ‘Let’s listen to the rain that is falling.’

Some verbs with alternating stems exhibit telic contrast in two hortative alternations, as in (29) and (30), where the hortative suffix attaches to the unmarked stem *esiari* ‘hammer’ and its telic counterpart *esiare*, respectively.

- (29) *esiari-ki*  
hammer-HORT  
‘Let’s hammer.’
- (30) *watohota esiare-ki*  
nail hammer.TLC-HORT  
‘Let’s drive in a nail.’

Warao consultants often only accept telic forms of hortatives, similarly to 2<sup>nd</sup> plural imperatives. For example, *kanamu* ‘stand’ always alternates to express telicity in hortatives, as seen in (31a), while its atelic equivalent is judged ungrammatical (31b).

- (31) a. *kanama-ki*  
stand.TLC-HORT  
‘Let’s stand up.’
- b. \**kanamu-ki*  
stand-HORT  
‘Let’s stand.’

In hortatives, primary stress is regularly placed on the word-final suffix *-ki*, at odds with typical stress assignment in Warao, which is penultimate (§3.2.). This ultimate stress assignment in hortatives is common, though not obligatory; the same imperatives can be uttered with penultimate stress, but such utterances are rare. Examples (32) and (33) illustrate two different stress patterns assigned to the same imperative, the former of which is more prevalent in the Guyanese dialect.

- (32) /na,horó'noko ye,hisa'ki/  
*nahoro-noko yehisa-ki*  
eat-PLACE push.TLC-HORT  
‘Let’s push the table.’
- (33) /na,horó'noko ,yehi'saki/  
*nahoro-noko yehisa-ki*  
eat-PLACE push.TLC-HORT  
‘Let’s push the table.’

Osborn (1959) and Barral (1979) assert that in the Venezuelan dialect, hortatives with ultimate stress are more forceful or exhortative than their ultimate-stressed counterparts. This correlation between ultimate stress and exhortation is also found in other morphemes (e.g. *-turuuu*, with its extra-long stressed ultimate vowel typical of Warao ideophones, is a forceful version of the desiderative suffix *-turu*, according to Barral (1979) and Romero-Figueroa and Rybka (n.d.)). In the Guyanese dialect, however, such semantic contrast in imperatives has (presumably) largely disappeared; there is no current evidence from Guyanese consultants that stress assignment produces a change in meaning. Whereas penultimate- and ultimate-stressed hortative forms in the Venezuelan dialect are considered different words given their semantic contrast, these same forms are phonetic alternations of the same word in the Guyanese dialect. Penultimate-stressed hortatives likely occur on occasion in the Guyanese dialect because the speakers are regularizing the imperative forms to the general penultimate stress rule.

As mentioned above, 1<sup>st</sup> person singular hortatives have not been attested. Eliciting ‘Let me do’ produces emphatic responses in the future indicative mood from all consultants. For example, the translation of the sentence, ‘Let me drink.’ is illustrated in (34).

- (34) *ine*            *hobi-te*  
 1SG.SBJ      drink-FUT  
 ‘I will drink!’

Jussives are non-canonical imperatives that express directive illocutionary force concerning a third party, who is not directly involved in the exchange. This category of imperatives does not morphologically distinguish singular and plural persons. Jussives are formed by bearing the suffix *-kunarae* to verb stems in both stem classes. Warao jussives exhibit permissive or exhortative overtones, as illustrated in (35) and (36) respectively. In (35), the telic form of the V-stem verb *dibu* ‘speak’ bears the jussive suffix, while in (36), the non-alternating V-stem verb *wabi* ‘sell’ bears the same suffix.

- (35) *tai*            *warao*      *a-ribu*            *diba-kunarae*  
 ANPH.DEM Warao      POSS-speech      speak.TLC-JUSS  
 ‘Let that [man] say [something] [in the] Warao language.’

- (36) *tai*            *witu*      *wabi-kunarae*  
 ANPH.DEM INTS      sell-JUSS  
 ‘[She] really must sell.’

To conclude this description of the Warao imperative paradigm, table 7 summarizes the canonical and non-canonical imperative forms, as seen in §4.1 and §4.2.

Person–number category	Imperative suffix	Example
2 <sup>nd</sup> singular	<i>-u, -Ø</i>	<i>Moa-u.</i> ‘Give [it].’ <i>Konaru-Ø.</i> ‘Carry [it].’
2 <sup>nd</sup> plural	<i>-kotu</i>	<i>Moa-kotu.</i> ‘[You all] give [it].’
Hortative	<i>-ki</i>	<i>Moa-ki.</i> ‘Let’s give [it].’
Jussive	<i>-kunarae</i>	<i>Moa-kunarae.</i> ‘Let [them] give [it].’

Table 7: The Warao imperative paradigm

With these imperative forms in mind, we now turn to their negative counterparts.

### 4.3 Negative imperatives

Negative imperatives express directive illocutionary force with the perlocutionary effect that the addressee (or non-addressee referent of the subject) does *not* perform an action. To form a negative imperative, the standard negator *-naka* attaches to verb stems of both stem classes. As previously mentioned, *-naka* blocks further attachment of verbal suffixes to the stem, thus requiring an ancillary verb, *ta* or *ha*, to bear additional morphology. As described in §3.2, *ta* and *ha* have overlapping functions but are best distinguished by their default functions: *ta* is the default auxiliary verb, whereas *ha* is the default copula (Romero-Figueroa and Rybka, n.d.). Although *ta* and *ha* can both bear imperative suffixes, *ta* is more commonly found in negative imperatives. The preference for *ta* over *ha* in imperatives is possibly due to the “active” meaning of *ta*, described by Barral (1979: 409) as an ‘essentially active verb’.

Pragmatically, *ta* suits the circumstances of the imperative mood: expressing the illocutionary force of requesting action from the subject. Examples (37) and (38) demonstrate subtle semantic differences between the ancillary verbs in negative imperative constructions. In (37), the intensified verb *obono* ‘think’ bears the standard negator, so the 2<sup>nd</sup> plural imperative suffix must attach to the auxiliary *ta*, resulting in the active imperative ‘Don’t worry’. By contrast, in (38) the copula *ha* bears the imperative suffix, conveying the stative imperative, ‘Do not be worried.’

(37) *obono-bu-naka ta-kotu*  
 think-INTS-NEG AUX-2P.IMP  
 ‘[You all] do not worry.’ (lit. ‘[You all] do not think a lot.’)

(38) *obono-bu-naka ha-kotu*  
 think-INTS-NEG COP-2P.IMP  
 ‘[You all] do not be worried.’ (lit. ‘[You all] do not be thinking a lot.’)

Despite such semantic contrast, consultants do not always differentiate the meanings expressed by *ha* and *ta* in regards to negative imperatives.

Ellipsis often occurs in 2<sup>nd</sup> singular negative imperatives, whereby the ancillary verb bearing imperative marking is deleted, leaving only the negated verb. In this person–number category, the imperative-marked ancillary verb is optionally expressed for purposes of clarity or emphasis, as exemplified in (39), while the elided form (40) is the default. Such elided negative imperatives always have a 2<sup>nd</sup> singular referent. Example (39) illustrates the complete 2<sup>nd</sup> singular negative imperative form, in which the verb *tori* ‘touch’ bears the standard negator *-naka*, thus requiring the auxiliary *ta* to bear the 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative suffix *-u*. On the other hand, in (40) the imperative-marked auxiliary is deleted, leaving only the negated verb *torinaka* ‘do not touch’ and its object *masimara* ‘my blanket’.

(39) *tori-naka ta-u*  
 touch-NEG AUX-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Do not touch [it]!’

(40) *ma-simara tori-naka [ta-u]*  
 1SG.POSS-blanket touch-NEG [AUX-2SG.IMP]  
 ‘Do not touch my blanket.’

Note that ancillary verb ellipsis is represented as *[ta-u]* throughout relevant examples, because *ta* is the more common ancillary verb in imperative constructions; however, as the ancillary is omitted, an alternate interpretation of such ellipsis would be *[ha-u]*. Reasons for 2<sup>nd</sup> singular negative imperative ellipsis are discussed in §8.

In terms of telicity, negative imperatives of verbs with only one stem match their positive counterparts (i.e. a-stem negative imperatives and non-alternating V-stem negative imperatives are unmarked, and thus atelic). Some verbs with alternating stems yield two negative forms, telic and atelic respectively. This is illustrated in (41), where the verb *ari* ‘pick’ bears the standard negator, followed by the implicit imperative-marked auxiliary. Its telic equivalent, *are* is illustrated in (42). Whereas in (41), *ari* conveys an action that entails a series of repetitive motions without a clear endpoint (i.e. pick one avocado, then repeat), the telic marking in (42) signals an inherent endpoint, meaning that the speaker is referring to a fixed number of avocados not to be picked. For this reason, in (42) the implicit article is definite and the object is either singular or plural, depending on context.

(41) *murako ari-naka [ta-u]*  
 avocado pick-NEG [AUX-2SG.IMP]  
 ‘Do not pick [any] avocados.’

- (42) *murako are-naka [ta-u]*  
 avocado pick.TLC-NEG [AUX-2SG.IMP]  
 ‘Do not pick [the] avocado(s).’

In general, consultants demonstrate a preference for atelic negative imperatives, even in cases where positive counterparts are exclusively telic. For example, positive and negative imperative forms of the verb *seoro* ‘look’ exhibit telic contrast; positive forms are always telic whereas negative forms are atelic, as shown in Table 8. These telic preferences are discussed further in §8.

	Positive imperative form	Negative imperative form
2 <sup>nd</sup> Singular	<i>seora-n-u</i> ‘Take a look.’	<i>seoro-naka [ta-u]</i> ‘Do not look.’
2 <sup>nd</sup> Plural	<i>seora-kotu</i> ‘[You all] take a look.’	<i>seoro-naka ta-kotu</i> ‘[You all] do not look.’
Hortative	<i>seora-ki</i> ‘Let’s take a look.’	<i>seoro-naka ta-ki</i> ‘Let’s not look.’
Jussive	<i>seora-kunarae</i> ‘[He] must take a look.’	<i>seoro-naka ta-kunarae</i> ‘[He] must not look.’

Table 8: Telic contrast in positive and negative polarity imperative forms

## 5 Verbal features of Warao imperatives

The following section depicts the ways in which Warao imperative suffixes interact with other verbal features, namely affixes (§5.1), ancillary verbs (§5.2), and reduplication (§5.3). This is by no means an exhaustive list of the verbal features that occur in imperatives, but rather a sample of their verbal productivity. Imperative constructions do not exhibit all verbal features of Warao. For example, Warao imperatives lack tense, whereas past and future tenses are distinguished in the indicative. Additionally, the inchoative marker *-kuna* is incompatible with imperative forms. It is worth noting that when additional morphology is present in verbs, imperative suffixes always attach last, whether to the content verb or ancillary verb.

### 5.1 Verbal affixes

So far, we have seen that telicity is regularly marked on imperatives. This section describes the occurrence of additional affixes that attach to imperative-marked content verbs in Warao.

Firstly, the facsimile *-sita* attaches to a verb to indicate that the subject is pretending to perform the action. In imperatives, this suffix attaches to the verb stem before the imperative suffix. In (43), the facsimile marks the verb stem *nahoro* ‘eat’, followed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative marker. Example (44) shows the telic alternation of the same imperative form, in which the telic suffix *-n* attaches to the verb between the facsimile and imperative markers.

- (43) *nahoro-sita-u*  
 eat-FACS-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Pretend [you] are eating.’
- (44) *nahoro-sita-n-u*  
 eat-FACS-TLC-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Pretend [you] are eating something.’

Secondly, the commandative *-moro*, meaning ‘order to do’, attaches to the verb stem, prior to the imperative suffix. Note that this valency-increasing suffix, which appears also in the indicative, is not redundant in imperatives but rather indicates that the object of the imperative is subject to an order. In (45), the speaker commands the addressee not to order the object *ine* ‘me’ (the speaker) to look, by attaching *-moro* to the verb stem *seoro* ‘look’ before the negator *-naka*. As this is a 2<sup>nd</sup> singular negative imperative, the imperative-marked auxiliary verb is elided (§4.3). In this negative imperative, the verb stem has alternated to express telicity; however, negative imperatives without commandative suffixation are typically atelic (refer to Table 8). Such aspectual alternation suggests that the commandative shortens the duration of the action encoded by the content verb.

- (45) *ine seora-moro-naka [ta-u]*  
 1SG.OBJ look.TLC-COMM-NEG [AUX-2SG.IMP]  
 ‘Do not order me to look.’

Additionally, Warao imperatives can convey the plurality of the object by bearing the pluractional prefix *no-*. Whereas in the indicative forms, *no-* can mark either subject or object number, in imperative forms, it exclusively encodes object number, as imperative suffixes always encode subject number (Romero-Figueroa and Rybka n.d.). In (46), *no-* attaches to the verb *namu* ‘plant’ to indicate that more than one object is planted, in this case, trees.

- (46) *tamatuma dau no-namu-Ø*  
 DEM.PROX.COLL tree PLR-plant-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Plant these trees.’

The intensifying suffix *-bu* conveys the intensification of an action, which may translate to iteration or plurality of the arguments. In imperatives, *-bu* is incompatible with telic marking. The intensifying suffix attaches to unmarked or atelic stems only, before the imperative suffix. In (47), *-bu* either signals that the action encoded by the verb *wiri* ‘paddle’ is intensified (‘paddle a lot’) or that the subject is emphatically plural. Note that *-bu* can convey the latter meaning without an explicit subject pronoun.

- (47) *yatu wiri-bu-kotu*  
 2PL.SBJ paddle-INST-2PL.IMP  
 ‘You all, paddle many times.’ Or ‘All of you, paddle.’

Other verbal affixes appear in imperative constructions but require an ancillary verb to bear imperative suffixes, which brings us to our next section.

## 5.2 Ancillary verbs

The ancillary verbs *ha* and *ta* may function as auxiliary verbs or lexical verbs in imperative constructions. This section discusses each function in turn.

Ancillary verbs function as auxiliaries when the content verb bears a suffix that blocks further suffixation. In these cases, an ancillary verb is required to carry additional morphology that would typically be borne by the content verb. One such suffix is the standard negator, *-naka*, as we saw in §4.3. Other suffixes that block further suffixation on the content verb include the continuative, simultaneous, and desiderative suffixes. The continuative, which conveys the continuation of an event, is marked by the suffix *-ne*. This suffix appears in (48), where it attaches to the verb *yahi* ‘lie down’ and requires the auxiliary *ta* to bear the 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative suffix.

- (48) *sanuka mate yahi-ne ta-u*  
 small still lie down-CONT AUX-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Continue lying down [for] a little longer still.’

The progressive suffix *-i* also blocks further suffixation. The progressive conveys the simultaneity of events, in contrast with the continuative (§5.1), which indicates the manner in which an event is undertaken (Romero-Figueroa and Rybka, n.d.). In (49), *-i* attaches to the a-stem verb *saneta* ‘help’, therefore *ha* is required to bear the imperative suffix.

- (49) *diana tuatane saneta-i ha-u*  
 already like.this help-PROG COP-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Keep helping [him] like this [for] now.’

The desiderative suffix *-туру* also marks imperatives. This modal suffix conveys different meanings in indicative and imperative constructions. Whereas *-туру* is translated as ‘want to do’ or ‘crave to do’ in the indicative, it is best translated as ‘try to do’ in the imperative.<sup>9</sup> The desiderative suffix is illustrated in an imperative construction in (50), where *-туру* attaches to the unmarked verb *nona* ‘make’, followed by the auxiliary verb bearing the hortative suffix.

- (50) *nona-туру ta-ki*  
 make-DESI AUX-HORT  
 ‘Let’s try to make [it].’

In addition to the above verbal affixes, ideophones also require an ancillary verb to occur in the imperative. Imperative suffixes attach only to verbs, hence the auxiliary or copula fulfills the need for a verb in such constructions. In (51), the ideophone *hii* ‘move’ functions as the lexical predicate of the imperative-marked auxiliary *ta*.

- (51) *tatuka-mo hii ta-u*  
 ANPH.LOC-SRC move.IDEO AUX-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Move from there.’

*Ha* and *ta* can also function as lexical verbs in imperatives. In such cases, *ha* (a stative verb) translates to ‘be’, ‘stay’ or ‘keep’ while *ta* (an active verb) translates to ‘do’. Examples (52) and (53) illustrate the different event realization presuppositions between these two verbs, both bearing 2<sup>nd</sup> plural imperative suffixes and the nominal predicate, *inare* ‘silence’. Whereas *ta* indicates that the event has not yet been realized, *ha* indicates that it has begun and is to be maintained.

- (52) *yatu inare ta-kotu*  
 2PL.SBJ silence AUX-2PL.IMP  
 ‘You all, be quiet!’

- (53) *yatu inare ha-kotu*  
 2PL.SBJ silence COP-2PL.IMP  
 ‘You all, keep quiet!’

<sup>9</sup> Despite semantic differences in its indicative and imperative usage, *-туру* is here categorized as a desiderative marker in the imperative because consultants assert that it is the same morpheme, consistent across moods. A deeper understanding of the semantic range of this suffix is a potential topic for future research.

### 5.3 Reduplication

Another verbal feature that occurs in imperatives is reduplication. In Warao, verb stems are reduplicated to express iterativity. Such reduplication can apply to the entire stem or to the final syllable of the stem. In (54), the entire stem of the verb *bara* ‘roll’ is reduplicated to convey a repeated action. This reduplicated stem also bears the iterative prefix *i-* and the 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative suffix *-u*. In (55) the stem-final syllable of the verb *bora* ‘fall’ is reduplicated and the jussive suffix is attached to produce an iterative imperative.

- (54) *i-bara-bara-u*  
ITER-roll-REDUP-2SG.IMP  
‘Continue rolling [it].’
- (55) *akwiuru bora-ra-kunarae*  
awara.fruit fall-REDUP-JUSS  
‘Let [the] awara fruit rain down.’<sup>10</sup>

## 6 Syntactic features of Warao imperatives

This section examines two syntactic features of imperative constructions, namely subject marking (§6.1) and a phenomenon called *imperative stacking*, in which consecutive verbs in the same clause both bear imperative suffixes (§6.2). These features are described because they demonstrate semantic complexity in Warao imperatives.

### 6.1 Subject markers

As previous examples show, subjects (including subject pronouns) need not be overt in Warao imperatives; in fact, subjects in imperative speech acts are more commonly implicit. Regardless of ellipsis, imperative verbs obligatorily inflect for person, by means of an imperative suffix that agrees with the person of the subject (and in the case of canonical imperatives, its number). As discussed in §3.2, in indicative speech, subjects need not be overt, nor expressed via agreement on the verb (Romero-Figueroa and Rybka, n.d.).

In addition to person agreement, subjects may be overt in imperatives for reasons of clarity or emphasis. In (56), the proximal demonstrative pronoun *tamaha* ‘this [girl]’ is the overt subject of the negative jussive *berenaka hakunarae* ‘must not sweep’ and the personal pronoun *ihi* ‘you’ is the overt subject of 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative *beranu* ‘sweep up’, which is double-marked as telic. These subjects are included by the speaker to help the addressee distinguish between the intended referents of the two imperatives. Similarly, in (57) the explicit subjects of the future and imperative verbs respectively help to clarify the addressee’s intended action from that of the speaker.

- (56) *tamaha bere-naka ha-kunarae ihi bera-n-u*  
DEM.PROX<sub>1</sub> sweep-NEG COP-JUSS 2SG.SBJ<sub>2S</sub> weep.TLC.TLC-2SG.IMP  
‘This [girl] must not sweep, you sweep up.’

<sup>10</sup> *Akwiuru*, or *astrocaryum aculeatum*, is a palm fruit that grows on a palm similar to awara A. vulgare, a medium-sized Amazonian palm. The fruits are orange and egg-sized, with a thin inedible skin and pulpy, oily flesh rich in fats and vitamins. Both palms are often called awara locally.

- (57) *ine naru-te takore ihi nao-naka [ta-u]*  
 1SG.SBJ<sub>1</sub> go-FUT but 2SG.SBJ<sub>2</sub> come-NEG [AUX-2SG.IMP]  
 ‘I will go, but you, do not come.’

In (58), the inclusion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> singular subject *ihi* ‘you’ serves as emphasis by reinforcing the referent of the imperative, which is also marked by the 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative suffix. Emphasis is similarly articulated in (59), in which the subject’s name is inserted between repeated imperatives (repetition which also contributes to a sense of urgency or excitement).

- (58) *kokotuka ihi hisaba-u*  
 all 2SG.SBJ cook-2SG.IMP  
 ‘You cook all [of it].’
- (59) *seora-n-u alegra seora-n-u*  
 look.TLC-TLC-2SG.IMP SBJ look.TLC-TLC-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Take a look, Allegra, take a look!’

## 6.2 Imperative stacking

Warao commands can express complex meaning through imperative stacking, in which two imperative-marked forms occur in sequence. Although multiple imperative suffixes in an utterance would typically be analyzed as two separate clauses, imperative stacks are analyzed as a single clause because together they express a novel meaning. Examples (60), (61), and (62) illustrate the individual and combined meanings of the verb *wiri* ‘paddle’ and copula *ha*. In (59), the telic equivalent of *wiri* bears an additional telic suffix preceding the vowel-initial imperative suffix, thus expressing the meaning ‘paddle one stroke’ as the head of the verb clause.

- (60) *atae sanuka wira-n-u*  
 again small paddle.TLC-TLC-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Paddle one more small stroke.’

In (61), *ha*, here conveying the meaning ‘stay’ as a lexical verb, bears an imperative suffix.

- (61) *ma-kaika ha-u*  
 1SG-with COP-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Stay with me.’

However, in (62) the imperative *wiranu* ‘paddle one stroke’ from (60) combines with the stative imperative *hau* ‘stay’ from (61), now expressing a sustained, single stroke, better known as a ‘brace’ in the culturally important practice of canoeing.

- (62) *wira-n-u ha-u*  
 paddle.TLC-TLC-2SG.IMP COP-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Brace!’

Because *wiranu hau* ‘brace’ expresses a meaning distinct from the isolated meanings of *wiranu* ‘paddle one stroke’ and *hau* ‘stay’, this utterance (62) is defined as an imperative stack.

Imperative stacks may also be employed to direct a sustained action. In (63), *hobi* ‘drink’ bears the imperative morphological zero, as this verb stem cannot occur without further inflection. The subsequent copula *ha* also exhibits imperative marking, resulting in an imperative stack.

- (63) *hobi-Ø*            *ha-u*  
 drink-2SG.IMP    COP-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Keep drinking.’

All known occurrences of imperatives stacking are composed of a content verb followed by a copula, both of which bear imperative marking. The productivity of imperative stacking in Warao remains unknown per available data, but provides an interesting basis for future research.

## 7 Semantic features of Warao imperatives

This section examines the broader category of commands in Warao, with regards to their semantic differences and the contexts in which they occur. In other words, how and when can imperatives and commands be employed in Warao? As a reminder, *imperative* refers to grammatical form, whereas *command* refers to function. §7.1 illustrates semantic differences in imperatives through the examination of different illocutionary forces in imperatives, as well as formal and informal usages. §7.2 then looks at the contexts in which imperatives and commands do and do not coincide. §7.3 describes the implications for immediate action in imperatives.

### 7.1 Illocutionary forces

In Warao, as in other languages, imperatives express a range of illocutionary forces and can be used in a variety of contexts. This section exemplifies the most common illocutionary forces expressed by imperatives, namely instructing, requesting, inviting, warning, and prohibiting. (Note that a prohibition, an illocutionary force discussed in this section, is unrelated to a prohibitive, a syntactic category discussed in §3.1.) These illocutionary forces are primarily interpreted through context, as imperative marking is consistent and present in all imperative constructions. Imperatives also commonly function as optatives, a semantic category of imperatives that is explored in the next section. In this section, we look also at Warao imperatives in formal and informal contexts.

Firstly, imperatives express instructions when employed in many traditional activities, such as cooking, farming, child rearing, or canoeing. In (64), the speaker instructs the addressee to sift manioc meal (the elided object), having just provided a brief physical demonstration of this step in the process of baking manioc bread.

- (64) *ehuhu-i*                    *tane*    *enisabu-Ø*  
 break into pieces-PROG    like    sift-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Sift [it] by breaking [it] into pieces.’

Secondly, imperatives can express requests, as in (65). Here, the speaker requests an action from the addressee by commanding the addressee to give the speaker a coconut.

- (65) *koko*            *ma-moa-u*  
 coconut    1SG.OBJ-give-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Give me [a] coconut.’

Additionally, imperatives can express invitations. Such imperatives often pertain to pleasurable or inclusive actions, and can also be interpreted as suggestions. In (66) the speaker invites the 2<sup>nd</sup> plural addressees to come (the location is implicit, as the speaker is beckoning addressees toward himself). In (67), the speaker employs a hortative construction to suggest an activity.

- (66) *yatu*      *kokotuka-ha*      *nao-kotu*  
 2PL.SBJ      all-COP      come-2PL.IMP  
 ‘You all, come [here].’
- (67) *hokohi*      *mi-kitane*      *naru-ki*  
 sun      see-INF      go-HORT  
 ‘Let’s go see [the] sun.’

Furthermore, imperatives express warnings in scenarios where perceived risk is involved. In (68), the speaker warns the addressee against running with a negative imperative, and explains the consequences of such an action in the future indicative. The imperative-marked auxiliary verb is elided here, as is common in 2<sup>nd</sup> singular negative imperatives (§4.3, §8).

- (68) *dubuida*      *witu*      *haka-naka*      [ta-u]      *ihi*      *naka-te*  
 quick      INTS      run-NEG      [AUX-2SG.IMP]      2SG.SBJ      fall-FUT  
 ‘Do not run so fast; you will fall.’

Interestingly, the future indicative clause *ihi nakate* ‘you will fall’ can be uttered in isolation to express the directive illocutionary force of warning the addressee, similarly to the above imperative clause. More non-imperative commands are explored in the subsequent section.

Finally, imperatives express prohibitions in scenarios where the speaker feels strongly that an action not be performed; prohibitions thus have exhortative overtones. In (69), the speaker utters a string of prohibitions, intended for the immediate termination of the addressee’s current activity (in this case, picking unripe fruit).

- (69) *ari-naka*      [ta-u]      *tori-naka*      [ta-u]      *iaba-n-u*  
 pick-NEG      AUX-2SG.IMP      touch-NEG      AUX-2SG.IMP      abandon-TLC-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Don’t pick! Don’t touch! Leave [it]!’

It should be noted that while all such prohibitions include the standard negator *-naka*, not all negative imperatives are prohibitions. For example, *Onanaka*. ‘Don’t cry.’ is a negative imperative but can be softer in tone than a prohibition, when expressed with the illocutionary force of comforting the addressee.

In regards to formal and informal relationships to addressees, Warao imperatives draw no grammatical distinction. For example, imperatives addressed to a family member, the village chief, and God all bear the same 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative suffix. In the following examples, a wife instructs her husband, Ronnie (70), a man bids farewell to the village chief (71), and a woman prays to God (72). In all three sentences, the verb is marked by the same 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative suffix *-u*.<sup>11</sup>

- (70) *yakera*      *roni*      *horubasaiya*      *arai*      *aba-n-u*  
 good      2SG.SBJ      griddle      on      put-TLC-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Good, Ronnie, put [the manioc meal] on [the] griddle.’
- (71) *ihi*      *aidamo*      *yakera*      *ha-u*  
 2SG.SBJ      chief      good      COP-2SG.IMP  
 ‘You be well, chief.’

<sup>11</sup> A lack of grammatical distinction between formal and informal addressees in imperative constructions is attested only in the Guyanese dialect. It is possible that the use of imperatives is mediated by cultural rules in Venezuela, or that formal and informal addressees entail distinct imperative constructions. In Venezuelan Warao, speech acts appear to be somewhat more constricted.

- (72) *ma-dima*            *tatuma*    *isiku*    *ha-u*  
 1SG.POSS-father    DEM.COLL    with    COP-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Stay with them, my Father.’

## 7.2 Non-commanding imperatives and non-imperative commands

As previously mentioned, not all imperatives function as commands, and not all commands are imperative in form. To begin with, we look at imperatives that do not function as commands, but as optatives. Despite their imperative form, optatives do not have the perlocutionary effect of literal action, but rather express the hope that good things will result from the imperative-marked action. One such non-commanding imperative is demonstrated in (73), where the stative verb *ha* bears an imperative suffix and the attributive subordinate *yakera* ‘good’. This imperative phrase is used frequently as a farewell.

- (73) *yakera*    *ha-u*  
 good    COP-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Be well.’ (lit. Stay good.)

Example (74) also expresses a wish instead of a command. Here the verb *naru* ‘go’ bears the 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative zero morph and the subordinate *yakera* ‘good’, but does not have an action-oriented perlocutionary effect, which would cause the addressee to depart in reaction to this utterance.

- (74) *ihi*            *diana*    *naru-ya*    *takore*    *yakera*    *naru-Ø*  
 2SG.SBJ    already    go-PROG    but    good    go-2SG.IMP  
 ‘You are already going, but safe travels.’ (lit. You are already going, but go well.)

Similarly, in (75), the jussive *takunarae* ‘let [it] be’ expresses a desired outcome for the evening, without commanding.

- (75) *yakera*    *ha-kore*    *hese*    *tamaha*    *ya*    *imanau*    *ta-kunarae*  
 good    COP-COND    same    DEM.PROX    day    dusk    AUX-JUSS  
 ‘Let this be a good evening.’

We turn now to commands that express directive illocutionary force and have clear perlocutionary effects on the addressee, but which are not imperative in form. The following examples demonstrate how exclamations, adverbs, and indicative verbs do the work of imperatives in certain contexts.

Firstly, the exclamation *oi* is an attention-grabber whose precise meaning varies by context. Warao consultants translate *oi* as ‘move’, ‘look’, or ‘be careful’.<sup>12</sup> While *oi* is non-imperative in form, it has the illocutionary force of warning an immediate reaction from the addressee, often for their safety, and thus functions as a command. The following examples (76), (77), and (78) demonstrate such exclamatory commands, in which the predicates supply context to determine the relevant meaning of *oi*. Note that these utterances lack verbs, let alone imperative-marking; however, the exclamation effectively prompts the addressee to perform an action.

- (76) *oi*    *tatuka-mo*  
 EXCLA    LOC.DEM-SRC  
 ‘Move from there!’

<sup>12</sup> Although *oi* looks suspiciously like a verb stem bearing the 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative zero morph, it is not a verb, as evidenced by consultants’ rejection of attaching verbal suffixes to *oi* (e.g. the future form is impossible: \**oi-te*).

(77) *oi tai hi-kua*  
 EXCLA ANPH.DEM 2SG.POSS-head  
 ‘Watch out! Your head!’

(78) *oi hi-hara hoha-kore*  
 EXCLA 2SG.POSS-hand burn-COND  
 ‘Be careful, your hand could burn!’

The interjection, *anaka* ‘look’, also commands addressees. Unlike the verbs *mi* ‘see’ and *seoro* ‘look’, *anaka* cannot bear verbal morphology. It is, however, successful in causing addressees to look at the intended object. In (79), the speaker draws the addressee’s attention to a bird. As in the above examples, no verb appears in this utterance.

(79) *anaka tai domo*  
 INTJ ANPH.DEM bird  
 ‘Look [at] that bird.’

Multiple adverbs can also function as commands. In these cases, the adverbs effectively modify implicit verbs. For example, when uttered alone, *diana* ‘already’ urges the addressee to stop what they are doing, as a common short-hand for ‘stop already’ or ‘that’s enough already’. Similarly, *dubuida* ‘quick’ commands the addressee to pick up the pace, or maintain a fast pace of the action at hand. In (80), *tuatane* and *tametane* are closely related adverbs meaning ‘like this’, the first of which is negated by the constituent negator *ana*. The negative and positive adverbs together convey an order for the addressee to discontinue their current technique in performing an action, and to instead imitate the speaker’s action. (In the given scenario, the action was scraping excess manioc meal off the top of the bread as it baked.)

(80) *tuatane ana tametane*  
 like.this NEG like.this  
 ‘Not like that, [do it] like *this*!’

On occasion, indicative verb forms with instructive overtones are used to command addressees. In (81) the verb *aba* ‘put’ bears the future suffix *-te*. Given the context (placing items on a griddle that has reached the desired temperature), this indicative verb expresses an action that is intended to occur immediately, thus prompting the addressee to act.

(81) *tametane ihi aba-te tametane horubasaija kaika*  
 like this 2SG.SBJ put-FUT like this pan.flat together with  
 ‘Like this, you will put [it] like this on [the] griddle.’

Such implicit immediacy brings us to our next section.

### 7.3 Implicit timeframes

Aikhenvald mentions a cross-linguistic tendency in which imperatives require immediate reaction (2010: 46). Although Warao imperatives are not explicitly marked as immediate, by default these speech acts urge addressees to act immediately. For example, the imperative sentence in (82) conveys the request for the addressee to lie down now, not in a while or eventually at their own pace. Although no specific time marker is provided, the addressee understands the intended immediacy of the command. This implicit immediacy is asserted by Warao consultants. A similar request can be made of the addressee in the

interrogative sentence (83), but this utterance lacks the straight-forward, bear-bones form of its imperative counterpart. Because the future suffix *-te* does not specify person–number category and expresses an action broadly taking place in the present or future, the subject pronoun *ihi* ‘you’ and the time marker *ama* are required for context, as confirmed by Warao consultants.

- (82) *yahe-n-u*  
 lie.TLC-TLC-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Lie down!’
- (83) *ama ihi yahe-te ra*  
 now 2SG.SBJ lie.TLC-FUT INT  
 ‘Will you lie down now?’

Warao imperatives thus exhibit a correlation between grammatical form and function. These speech acts convey their immediacy both formally and semantically, often resulting in briefer, more direct utterances than similar requests made in other moods.

## 8 Discussion

This section seeks to explain certain characteristics of Warao imperatives in the broader contexts of the Warao language and imperatives cross-linguistically. Specifically, formal brevity, the special status of 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives, analytical revisions, and telic preferences are discussed.

Warao imperatives are syntactically and formally simple, but morphologically complex. We look first at syntactic and formal simplicity. Such simplicity has a functional motivation, in that these speech acts are commonly direct, brusque, and succinct. As we saw in §7.3, imperatives convey requests for immediate reaction by default. We saw, too, that overt subject and object markers are not required in imperative constructions and are more commonly implicit (§6.1).

Formal brevity is best demonstrated by 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives. The 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative zero morph  $-\emptyset$  (§4.1) is consistent with a cross-linguistic tendency wherein a canonical imperative with a singular addressee is “the shortest verbal form in a language”, or even (as in this case) the bear stem itself (Aikhenvald 2010: 45). As 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives are considered the fundamental imperative form, it is fitting that this category of Warao imperatives stands apart from other categories (Kuryłowicz, 1964). On the other hand, 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives marked with the suffix *-u* are no shorter in form than verbs marked with, for example, the future suffix *-te*. In terms of syllable count, however, no other forms within the Warao imperative mood are shorter than 2<sup>nd</sup> singular forms. (Hortatives, composed of a verb stem marked with *-ki*, have the same syllabic count as their semelfactive 2<sup>nd</sup> singular counterparts.)

2<sup>nd</sup> singular negative imperatives are also formally shorter than other negative imperatives. As examples throughout this paper demonstrate, speakers commonly elide the imperative-marked ancillary verb in 2<sup>nd</sup> singular negative imperatives, leaving only the negative-marked lexical verb. Such ellipsis is not possible in other person categories of negative imperatives. From a cross-linguistic perspective, 2<sup>nd</sup> singular negative ellipsis is not unexpected. Aikhenvald (2010) asserts that singular canonical imperatives tend to optionally lose their marking. Additionally, as 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives are the fundamental imperative form, 2<sup>nd</sup> singular marking is easily recoverable from context. The imperative-marked ancillary verb, then, is only expressed for purposes of clarity or emphasis.

Interestingly, some telic-marked 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives are formally longer than their atelic (i.e. unmarked) counterparts, as the telic suffix *-n* adds an additional syllable to all verb forms that it marks. For example, the telic imperative *iwaranu* ‘give [it] a tug’ has four syllables whereas the unmarked imperative *iwarau* ‘drag [it]’ only has three; however, there is no perceptible difference in the immediacy implied by each imperative alternation. In this sense, telic 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives arguably adhere to the principle of iconicity to a lesser degree than do their atelic counterparts. Within the imperative mood,

such syllabic differences only occur among 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives, and are most likely explained by a phonological constraint specific to telicity. As we discussed in §3.2, telicity is marked by stem alternation before consonantal suffixes, and, less frequently, by the suffix *-n* before vocalic suffixes. The vocalic 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative suffix *-u* requires the insertion of *-n* to yield telic forms, thus lengthening the imperative by one syllable.

In addition to their formal brevity, 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives are noteworthy in their potential for increased semantic contrast, a phenomenon that is exhibited by non-alternating verbs in both stem classes. As a reminder, all a-stem verbs and some V-stem verbs have a sole stem and never alternate. Because these verbs do not alternate, they are analyzed as unmarked by default. Non-alternating verbs may express telicity by bearing *-n* in 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives; however, per current data, these same verbs are not marked for telicity in any other person–number category of imperatives. From a phonological perspective, this is unsurprising: these verbs do not alternate to express telicity, nor is *-n* applicable before the consonant-initial imperative suffixes *-kotu*, *-ki*, *-kunarae* or standard negator *-naka*. From a cross-linguistic perspective, heightened semantic contrast in 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives, as compared to other person–number categories, is also unsurprising, given their fundamental status among imperatives (Kuryłowicz 1964). Aikhenvald (2010: 45) also asserts that “not every short form is inflectionally simple”. The special features of 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives likely evolved from frequent usage, resulting in both shortened forms and increased semantic contrast. Indeed, consultants commonly produce multiple 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative forms for verbs with only one attested form in other imperative categories. From a semantic perspective, however, the unifying characteristics of non-alternating verbs, beyond an absence of default lexical aspect, remain undefined.

This leads us to an examination of telicity across all person–number categories of imperative constructions. Our analysis holds that allomorphs *-a* and *-e*, as well as the suffix *-n* express telicity in some verbs, depending on environmental constraints (§3.2). However, previous analyses have attributed differing functions to the suffix *-n*. Romero-Figueroa (2003) suggests that *-n* is a singular marker in the indicative, but groups *-n* with *-u* in the imperative, proposing the imperative allomorph *-nu*. He implies a phonological constraint in which *-u* cannot follow stem-final vowels, thus necessitating the imperative allomorph *-nu*. However, many imperatives allow *-u* to directly follow stem-final /a/, one of which is exemplified in (84). Imperatives for which *-u* directly follows a vowel are not only possible, but also exhibit semantic contrast with imperative forms in which the same verb stem bears the suffix *-n*, as illustrated in (85).

(84) *yara-u*  
weave-2SG.IMP  
'Weave.'

(85) *yara-n-u*  
weave-TLC-2SG.IMP  
'Weave one [reed].'

Osborn (1959: 3) also claims that *-n* appears in a specific phonological environment, asserting that *-n* “occurs as a singularizer before vocalic suffixes”. The role of *-n* as a singularizer complements one hypothesis tested for this analysis, wherein *-n* is a semelfactive marker. Whereas Osborn’s analysis attributes singularity to the object or subject, semelfactivity attributes this singular quality to the verb, more precisely reflecting semantic nuances. Osborn’s translation of the imperative *Beranu!* ‘Sweep a stroke!’ is supported by the semelfactive hypothesis, but differs from the translations provided by Guyanese consultants (Osborn 1959: 2). Instead, these consultants consistently translated *Beranu!* as ‘Sweep a little!’, ‘Sweep it up!’, or ‘Sweep it out!’. By compiling contexts and translations of numerous imperatives marked by *-n*, it became clear that *-n* sometimes coincides with semelfactive actions, as in (86), but also coincides with iterative actions. In (87), we construe the verb ‘dig’ as iterative because the object, ‘hole’ requires serial digging to be completed. In (88), iterativity is expressed by reduplication of

the verb stem *bara* ‘roll’, which bears the causative prefix *i-* and the suffix *-n*. Note that in the following examples, *-n* is glossed as a question mark to illustrate the analytical process at hand. Per the current analysis, *-n* would be glossed as telic in all three examples.

- (86) *ibih* *kora-n-u*  
 pill swallow-?-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Swallow [the] pill.’
- (87) *hobahi* *ewiha-n-u*  
 hole dig-?-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Dig [a] hole.’
- (88) *i-bara-bara-n-u*  
 CAUS-roll-REDUP-?-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Continue rolling [it] up.’

Another hypothesis concerning the function of *-n* was tested and ultimately rejected during the development of this analysis. In this hypothesis (referred to as the punctual–durative hypothesis), stem final vowels /o, u, i, e/ encode durativity and alternate with *-a* and, to a lesser extent, *-e* to express punctuality. This hypothesis held that *-n* was part of the punctual allomorph, *-an*, due to an aspect-specific phonological constraint, by which the punctual allomorph *-a* could not be followed by a vocalic suffix, namely the imperative *-u*. However, certain pragmatic limitations in imperative forms do not align with a punctual–durative framework, which concerns the internal structure of an action as instantaneous (punctual) or lasting (durative) (Comrie 1976: 42). For example, in (89) the verb *naru* ‘go’ encodes an action that could either be punctual (e.g. the addressee takes a step away) or durative (e.g. the addressee goes fifty meters away), but there is only one possible 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative form for this verb. Similarly, in (90) the verb *yehisa* ‘push’ encodes an action that may last one second or several minutes, but the verb obligatorily bears the suffix *-n* to form a 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative. Note that (89) and (90) are glossed with question marks to represent the punctual–durative hypothesis. In the current analysis, *naru* would have no lexical aspectual marking and *yehisa-n-u* would be marked as telic.

- (89) *tatuka-mo* *naru-Ø*  
 ANPH.LOC-SRC go.?-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Go [away] from there.’  
 \**nara-n-u*; \**naru-n-u*
- (90) *nahoro-noko* *yehis-an-u*  
 eat-PLACE push-?-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Push the table.’  
 \**yehisa-u*

The shortcomings of the punctual–durative and semelfactive hypotheses helped to solidify the current conclusion that stem-final vowels are unmarked by default, but express telicity by alternation (/a/ or /e/) or suffixation (*-n*). Firstly, the punctual–durative hypothesis does not account for the fact that *-n* can follow any stem-final vowel, including stem-final vowels /o, u, i, e/. Secondly, the semelfactive hypothesis suggests that semelfactivity, marked by *-n*, can occur only in the 2<sup>nd</sup> singular category of imperatives. Additionally, neither hypothesis accounts for all semantic values of imperatives that bear *-n*, as illustrated in the examples above. Finally, the telicity hypothesis, in addition to providing the most accurate semantic interpretation of imperative alternations, presents the simplest of the three theories. This theory entails one lexical aspect (i.e. telicity), which manifests in one of two ways, depending on its

phonological environment, and which sometimes exhibits both markings due to the dominance of stem alternation (§3.2).

Having identified stem alternation and the suffix *-n* as representations of telic contrast, it is important to note how and where telicity is favored in the imperative. 2<sup>nd</sup> plural imperatives, hortatives, and jussives of alternating verbs are more commonly telic than atelic, whereas negative imperatives across all categories are overwhelmingly atelic. (2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives demonstrate high semantic contrast, and so fit this trend to a lesser extent.) As a reminder, atelicity is not morphologically marked on verbs, but the absence of telic marking on verbs with two or more imperative alternations can be interpreted as atelic. These preferences for telicity or atelicity are exemplified by the positive and negative imperative forms of the alternating verb *seoro* ‘look’ in Table 8, which has been replicated here.

	Positive imperative form	Negative imperative form
2 <sup>nd</sup> Singular	<i>seora-n-u</i> ‘Take a look.’	<i>seoro-naka [ta-u]</i> ‘Do not look.’
2 <sup>nd</sup> Plural	<i>seora-kotu</i> ‘[You all] take a look.’	<i>seoro-naka ta-kotu</i> ‘[You all] do not look’
Hortative	<i>seora-ki</i> ‘Let’s take a look.’	<i>seoro-naka ta-ki</i> ‘Let’s not look.’
Jussive	<i>seora-kunarae</i> ‘[He] must take a look.’	<i>seoro-naka ta-kunarae</i> ‘[He] must not look.’

Table 8: Telic contrast in positive and negative imperative forms

The preference for telicity in positive imperatives is likely due to their function in eliciting immediate, fulfillable action. An addressee can fulfill the requested action expressed by *seoranu* ‘take a look’ by shifting their gaze to the intended object or scene. Negative imperatives, on the other hand, convey a request to not perform an action, and such absence of action has no intrinsic terminal point. It is not clear from the imperative *seoronaka* ‘do not look’ at what point the addressee will fulfill the act of not looking, unless the speaker specifies further. Negative imperatives thus favor atelicity.

It should be noted that these telic tendencies are tendencies and not categorical rules. Telic and atelic (unmarked) alternations of the same verb stem can occur across all categories of imperatives, as exemplified throughout the paper.

## 9 Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to provide a descriptive analysis of Warao imperative constructions, identify their grammatical features and illocutionary forces, and clarify relevant distinctions conveyed by stem alternation and the suffix *-n*. We have seen that the Warao imperative mood is composed of canonical forms (2<sup>nd</sup> singular and 2<sup>nd</sup> plural imperatives) and non-canonical forms (hortatives and jussives), which are expressed by a set of person-specific imperative verbal suffixes: *-u*, *-Ø*, *-kotu*, *-ki*, *-kunarae*. All imperatives can be negated by the standard negator *-naka*, which attaches to the verb stem, hence requiring an ancillary verb (often the auxiliary *ta*) to bear imperative morphology. These imperatives express a range of illocutionary forces, including instructions, requests, invitations, warnings, prohibitions, and optatives.

We have also seen that Warao imperatives are often syntactically and formally simple but morphologically complex. For example, subject and object markers are not required in imperative constructions, and it is common for both categories to be implicit. Such formal brevity upholds the principle of iconicity, as the direct form and function of these imperatives correlate. On the other hand, imperative constructions exhibit a variety of verbal features due to the unavoidable complexity of Warao verbal morphology.

The fundamental 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperatives are both the briefest in form and richest in semantic contrast. They are among the shortest verbal forms in Warao, prosodically speaking, and due also to the common ellipsis of imperative-marked ancillary verbs in negative forms. These imperatives exhibit heightened semantic contrast; consultants commonly produce multiple 2<sup>nd</sup> singular imperative alternations for verbs with only one attested form in other imperative categories.

In terms of stem alternation and the suffix *-n* in imperatives, two hypotheses concerning punctuality, durativity, and semelfactivity were rejected in favor of a theory concerning telicity. Telicity is of particular semantic and structural importance, and is marked in imperatives through suffixation, stem alternation, or both simultaneously, due to the regularization of stem alternation. Imperatives can also bear pluractional, intensifying, facsimile, and commandative affixes, and still other verbal affixes are expressed in imperatives with the help of an ancillary verb. In terms of telic contrast, we have seen that positive imperatives are more commonly telic than not, whereas negative imperatives across all categories are overwhelmingly atelic. The preference for telicity in positive imperatives is likely due to their function in eliciting immediate, fulfillable action. Conversely, negative imperatives demand the absence of an action without an inherent endpoint, thus favoring atelicity.

## 10 References

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## 11 Glossing conventions

The following morpheme gloss abbreviations are used in this article: - ‘morpheme boundary’, Ø ‘zero morph’, 1, 2, 3 ‘1st, 2nd, 3rd person’, ANPH ‘anaphoric’, AUX ‘auxiliary’, ADJ ‘adjective’, BEN ‘benefactive’, DET ‘determiner’, DEM ‘demonstrative’, CAUS ‘causative’, COMM ‘commandative’, COND ‘conditional’, CONT ‘continuous’, COP ‘copula’, COLL ‘collective’, DESI ‘desiderative’, EXCLA ‘exclamation’, FACS ‘facsimile’, FUT ‘future’, HORT ‘hortative’, IDEO ‘ideophone’, IMP ‘imperative’, INF ‘infinitive’, INT ‘interrogative’, INTJ ‘interjection’, INTS ‘intensifier’, ITR ‘iterative’, JUSS ‘jussive’, LOC ‘locative’, NEG ‘negator’, OBJ ‘object’, POSS ‘possessive’, PL ‘plural’, PLR ‘pluractional’, PROG ‘progressive’, PROX ‘proximal’, PST ‘past’, REDUP ‘reduplication’, REL ‘relativizer’, SBJ ‘subject’, SG ‘singular’, PROG ‘progressive’, SRC ‘source’, TLC ‘telic’