

The Imperatives λέγε and εἰπέ in the Dialogues of Plato: A Conversation Analysis Approach*

Rodrigo Verano

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

rverano@ucm.es

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6489-4491>

Los imperativos λέγε y εἰπέ en los diálogos de Platón: aproximación desde el Análisis de la Conversación

This paper addresses certain uses of the imperatives of λέγειν in Plato's dialogues. With the help of the methodological framework of Conversation Analysis, two clear trends are distinguished, each of which performing different functions in interaction. These trends are consistent with the positioning of the imperative either in the first or in the second part of an adjacency pair. In the first case, imperatives play a role in turn design, facilitating the recognition of the main action of the turn as a question. In the second case, imperatives function primarily as 'go-ahead' formulae. After examining this distinction, the article explores certain nuances generated by expressions used as alternatives to the imperative, such as the potential optative, in terms of politeness and characterization.

Key words: imperative; verbs of speech; sequence organization; talk-in-interaction; ancient Greek; dialogue; Conversation Analysis.

Este trabajo estudia ciertos usos de los imperativos de λέγειν en los diálogos de Platón. Con la ayuda del marco metodológico del Análisis de la Conversación, salen a la luz dos tendencias claras, cada una con funciones diferentes en la interacción, que se relacionan con la posición que ocupa el imperativo en estructura secuencial del diálogo, especialmente si se encuentra en la primera o en la segunda parte de un par adyacente. En el primer caso, los imperativos desempeñan un papel en el diseño del turno. En el segundo caso, los imperativos funcionan sobre todo como fórmulas de expresión de conformidad. Tras examinar esta distinción, el artículo explora ciertos matices asociados al uso de otras expresiones alternativas al imperativo, como el optativo potencial, en términos de cortesía y caracterización.

Palabras clave: imperativo; *uerba dicendi*; organización secuencial de la conversación; interacción hablada; griego antiguo; diálogo; análisis de la conversación.

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I. INTRODUCTION: IMPERATIVES IN CONVERSATION

Imperatives are very common in the language of Plato. A single page of one of his dialogues will certainly provide a substantial number of instances used by the characters to convey instructions to one another, as in the following passages from *Euthyphro*¹:

- (1) *Euthyphr.* 5d {ΣΩ.} Λέγε δὴ, τί φῆς εἶναι τὸ ὅσιον καὶ τί τὸ ἀνόσιον; SOCRATES. Tell me then, what do you say holiness is, and what unholiness?

Euthyphr. 9d {ΣΩ.} Οὐδὲν ἐμέ γε, ὦ Εὐθύφρων, ἀλλὰ σὺ δὴ τὸ σὸν σκόπει, εἰ τοῦτο ὑποθέμενος οὕτω ῥᾶστά με διδάξεις ὃ ὑπέσχου.

SOCRATES. Nothing, so far as I am concerned, Euthyphro, but consider your own position, whether by adopting this definition you will most easily teach me what you promised.

Euthyphr. 12d {ΣΩ.} Ὅρα δὴ τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο.

SOCRATES. Now observe the next point².

The speech acts that host such imperatives are not likely to be considered prototypical commands. They refer to simple activities—look, hear, say—that every participant in a conversation is expected to carry out. In general, they are received as neutral and even cooperative indicators of how to proceed in a communicative exchange. If they maintain a certain coercive force, this seems to be overshadowed as these forms take on new functions in interaction³.

¹ De la Villa (2017, p. 32) collects more than thirty examples of speech acts with imperatives and subjunctives in prohibitions in Plato's *Euthyphro*.

² The Greek text quoted throughout this paper is that of J. Burnet (1900-1907), with the exception of *Republic* (Slings 2003). The English translations are those published in the Loeb Classical Library.

³ A similar observation was made by Miller (1892, pp. 405-408) on the use of the imperative of some specific verbs by Attic orators, to which there seems to be no special harshness connected. More recently, some scholars have used the label «metadirectives» (Risselada

Delving into the role of such imperatives in the performance of conversation in ancient Greek is the first and central aim of this paper. To do so, I will focus on the 2nd person singular imperative forms of λέγειν and study their functions in Plato's dialogues using Conversation Analysis. My proposal is that the identified core values have a correlate with the position of the turns in the sequential organization of talk, as reproduced in the literary dialogue. The starting point of the research is given in section II. My methodological framework and main results are presented in III. Then, in section IV, I contrast the instances in which the potential optative is used as an alternate expression for the imperative and explore some of its nuances regarding politeness and characterization.

II. THE IMPERATIVES ΛΕΓΕ AND ΕΙΠΕ IN THE DIALOGUES OF PLATO

Λέγε and ειπέ have drawn a great deal of attention among scholars, especially in relation to the possible differences in the use of the aorist and present stems⁴. It is not for nothing that these are forms of very high frequency in Greek literature, with many potential functional values, given the variety of pragmatic contexts in which they may appear. In Plato's dialogues, however, most of the instances can be broadly arranged into two prototypes, namely, the one illustrated by the two examples listed in (2), and the one shown in (3):

- (2) *Th.* 145c {ΣΩ.} Λέγε δὴ μοι· μανθάνεις που παρὰ Θεοδώρου γεωμετρίας ἅττα;
 {ΘΕΑΙ.} Ἔγωγε.
 SOCRATES. Now tell me; I suppose you learned some geometry from Theodorus?
 THEAETETUS. Yes.

1993, p. 259; Revuelta 2017, p. 18) to denote directive expressions that elicit some sort of reaction from the addressee, but do not constrain their will (cf. Denizot 2011, pp. 246-248).

⁴ Imperatives of λέγειν are commonplace examples in almost every study of the aspect of the Greek verb (cf. Bakker 1966, pp. 31-66; Lorente 2003; Rijksbaron 2002, pp. 43-48). Rijksbaron 2000 and de la Villa 2017 focus specifically on the stem opposition between λέγε and ειπέ in the language of Plato. Closely related instances are also treated in other studies collected by Jacquinod 2000, some of which will be properly cited in the following pages.

Grig. 481b {ΚΑΛ.} Εἰπέ μοι, ὦ Χαιρεφῶν, σπουδάξει ταῦτα Σωκράτης ἢ παίζει;

{ΧΑΙ.} Ἐμοὶ μὲν δοκεῖ, ὦ Καλλίκλεις, ὑπερφυῶς σπουδάξειν· οὐδὲν μέντοι οἷον τὸ αὐτὸν ἐρωτᾶν.

CALLICLES. Tell me, Chaerephon, is Socrates in earnest over this, or only joking?

CHAEROPHON. To my thinking, Callicles, prodigiously in earnest; still, there is nothing like asking him.

- (3) *Phdr.* 271c {ΣΩ.} Αὐτὰ μὲν τὰ ῥήματα εἰπεῖν οὐκ εὐπετές· ὥς δὲ δεῖ γράφειν, εἰ μέλλει τεχνικῶς ἔχειν καθ' ὅσον ἐνδέχεται, λέγειν ἐθέλω.

{ΦΑΙ.} Λέγε δῆ.

SOCRATES. It is not easy to tell the exact expressions to be used; but I will tell how one must write, if one is to do it, so far as possible, in a truly artistic way.

PHAEDRUS. Speak then.

Each of the prototypes has its own syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties, which can be roughly described as follows. Instances resembling the one shown in (3) usually host the imperative as the only significant element in the turn. At the most, the verbs may be accompanied by particles (λέγε δῆ), adverbials (λέγε μόνον), or in a few cases, an indication of the theme (λέγε τίνα), always referring to a piece of information that can be easily retrieved from the previous context. However, instances displaying either absolute or highly elliptical syntactic frames are the most frequent. The forms are —exclusively— those of the present stem (λέγε). The meaning of such instances has been described as formulaic, inviting the interlocutor either to start talking or to continue with his previously initiated speech⁵.

On the other hand, instances similar to those listed in (2) show forms embedded in more elaborate turns: indirect objects are often explicit (μοι), and imperatives are typically followed —less frequently preceded— by

⁵ Cf. Rijksbaron's (2000, p. 165) description of some of the uses of λέγε found in Plato's *Philebus*: «Les λέγε de Protarque (tout comme celui de Philèbe) ont pour la plupart une forme et une fonction tout à fait formulaire. Leur forme: λέγε, λέγε μόνον, λέγε πῶς ὅπη τίνος, λέγε σαφέστερον etc. Leur fonction primaire: ils invitent Socrate ou bien à commencer (une partie de) son raisonnement, son λόγος, ou bien à le continuer».

questions that stand as their complements⁶. Their status in relation to the surrounding syntactic framework, however, is not entirely clear. They are usually situated in the so-called left margin of the utterance and fit well into the class of parentheticals or extra-clausal constituents. Both present (λέγε) and aorist (εἶπέ) stems seem to be very productive in this prototype, although the aorist appears more frequently (see Table 1). Despite the possibility that some aspect-related semantic traits can be perceived in specific cases, most of the instances analyzed show no apparent difference between the use of either stem⁷.

Table 1. Imperatives of λέγειν in the dialogues of Plato.

	λέγε	εἶπέ	Total	Percentage
Prototype 1 ex. (2) a / b	96	146	242	68%
Prototype 2 ex. (3)	64	--	64	18%
Other uses	30	21	51	14%
Total cases	190	167	357	100%

The two models do not cover the total uses of λέγε and εἶπέ in the *corpus platonicum* but stand behind a great number of instances. As the table shows, more than 85% of the imperatives fall under the proposed types⁸. The first one comprises almost every case of εἶπέ and a great part of λέγε. The second one is also well attested. Other uses refer to cases that do not fit either category and fall beyond the scope of interest of this research,

⁶ Revuelta (2017, p. 20) points at this prototype in his study on illocutionary force in ancient Greek: «interrogatives that formulate questions can be framed at the beginning or end by the imperative forms lége (λέγε) or eipé (εἶπέ) of the verb λέγω: ‘to say’, since the speaker’s intention is to elicit an answer from his interlocutor».

⁷ Aspect does play a role in distinguishing the two prototypes, since the present imperative is restricted to the first one; however, in light of the passages analyzed in this study, there seems to be no difference in the use of one or the other stem when it comes to the cases adscribed to the the second prototype, except for the higher frequency of the aorist stem.

⁸ Instances of λέγε and εἶπέ have been traced with the help of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* database. The thirty-two tetralogical dialogues and the *Apology* were searched. Letters, epigrams, and extra-tetralogical texts have been excluded.

however compelling they may be⁹. The aim of this study is not to provide an exhaustive account of the pragmatic values of every instance of λέγε and εἰπέ in the language of Plato; it is instead to approach the major trends in use represented by the highlighted prototypes by examining them in the light of Conversation Analysis. Namely, I will consider the position of the turns in which imperatives are placed within the structure of sequence organization that underlies the conversational exchanges displayed in the literary dialogues¹⁰.

III. SEQUENCE ORGANIZATION AND IMPERATIVES OF ΛΕΓΕΙΝ

1. *The Sequential Organization of Talk-in-Interaction*

According to Conversation Analysis, talk-in-interaction is a succession of actions performed —verbally and otherwise— through turns-at-talk following specific patterns in a very orderly manner¹¹. One of the most important features of such patterns is that they are usually organized sequentially in units made of two different turns unavoidably connected to one another, known as adjacency-pairs. Turns-at-talk, therefore, cannot be approached as single and independent entities. Instead, they are expected to be produced in pairs so that the first pair-part (1PP) finds an immediate reaction in a second pair-part

⁹ Such uses include prohibitions (e. g. *Lg.* 638a «Ἦ ἄριστε, μὴ λέγε ταῦτα»); instances with semantic specialization: λέγε as ‘read’ in *Phdr.* 263e and *Thl.*143c; εἰπέ as ‘deliver a speech’ in *Mx.* 236c (cf. Rijksbaron 2000, pp. 167-168); providing instructions involving third parties (e. g. *Ly.* 211a «εἰπέ καὶ Μενεξένῳ»; *Ly.* 211b «ἀλλὰ τι ἄλλο αὐτῷ λέγε»); and, in general, other cases that convey values that are expected of an imperative of λέγειν in a conversation (invitations to talk, guidelines for interaction, etc.) but not quite akin to the proposed prototypes.

¹⁰ For an overview of Conversation Analysis, see Heritage 2008, Hutchby & Wooffitt 1998, pp. 13-69, and Sidnell & Stivers 2013, pp. 9-100. The essentials of the discipline were stated in the courses dictated by Harvey Sacks in the 1960s and 1970s (collected in Sacks 1992), and in the seminal papers published with his collaborators (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974; Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks 1977). Conversation Analysis has been successfully applied to the study of classical languages. In ancient Greek, see Person 1995 and 2017, Minchin 2007, Schuren 2014, pp. 11-49, Bonifazi, Drummen & De Kreij 2016, §III.4, van Emde Boas 2017, and Verano 2021, among others.

¹¹ For an introduction to the dynamics of talk-in-interaction with a special focus on the structure of sequence organization that is presented in this section, see Schegloff 2007.

(2PP): questions are followed by answers, requests are accepted or denied, greeting formulae are reciprocated, etc. A very basic instance of adjacency-pair can be seen in Table 2:

Table 2. Base adjacency-pair.

Speaker A:	What time is it?	1PP
Speaker B:	It's nine o'clock.	2PP

Adjacency-pairs are the minimal units of which conversational exchanges are made. The turns produced by the speakers pair up, and the pairs follow one another, building up sequences as long as needed. Also, this minimal unit can be expanded by adding accessory pairs before (pre-expansion), after (post-expansion), or between (insert-expansion) the first and the second parts of the base pair¹². The following table shows the outline of a complex sequence in which the base pair is surrounded by pre-, insert- and post-expansions, as shown in table 3:

Table 3. The structure of the adjacency pair.

Pre-expansion	1PP	
	2PP	
Base pair	1PP	Insert-expansion
	1PP	
	2PP	
Post-expansion	1PP	
	2PP	

Pre-expansions are preparatory sequences designed to promote the success of the main action intended in the first base pair-part. They normally pave the way for requests, invitations and offers, announcing the upcoming event by resorting to well acknowledged formulations. In (4), Hippothales'

¹² See Schegloff (2007, pp. 28-57) for a complete account of the different types of expansions with examples in English. Sequence expansion is also treated and discussed in Liddicoat 2007, pp. 125-170, Sidnell 2010, pp. 95-109, and Stivers 2013, pp. 193-200. See van Emde Boas (2017, pp. 411-416) for an approach to sequence organization in Greek tragedy.

request for Socrates to join his party is preceded by a question through which the former seeks to test the latter's availability before extending the invitation in the first base pair part (Table 4), thus preventing a possible dispreferred negative answer from his interlocutor¹³.

- (4) *Ly.* 203a-b. ἽΩ Σώκρατες, ἔφη, ποῖ δὴ πορεύῃ καὶ πόθεν;
 Ἐξ Ἀκαδημείας, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, πορεύομαι εὐθὺ Λυκείου.
 Δεῦρο δὴ, ἦ δ' ὅς, εὐθὺ ἡμῶν. οὐ παραβάλλεις; ἄξιον μέντοι.
 Then Hippothales, as he saw me approaching, said: Socrates, whither away, and whence?
 From the Academy, I replied, on my way straight to the Lyceum.
 Come over here, he said, straight to us. You will not put in here? But you may as well.

Table 4. Sequential organization of (4).

Turn 1 (Hippothales)	Pre-expansion	1PP
Turn 2 (Socrates)		2PP
Turn 3 (Hippotales)	Base pair	1PP

Insert-expansions, among other functions, appear after unsuccessful first pair-parts, featuring other-initiated repair sequences, by which the addressees ask for clarifications, repetitions or reformulations, as in (5):

- (5) *Cra.* 400b-c. {EPM.} Ἀλλὰ δὴ τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο πῶς φῶμεν ἔχειν;
 {ΣΩ.} Τὸ σῶμα λέγεις;
 {EPM.} Ναί.
 {ΣΩ.} Πολλαχῆ μοι δοκεῖ τοῦτό γε· ἂν μὲν καὶ σμικρόν τις παρακλίνῃ,
 καὶ πάνυ.

¹³ The concept of preference refers to a structural tendency to react in a certain way to actions initiated in the first part of an adjacency pair. Thus, while a first pair-part performing a given action may trigger a set of different reactions, not all of them are equally preferred in each particular context. The principle of conversational preference explains the tendency to avoid non-preferred actions or to mitigate and attenuate them if there is no choice but to use them. For an overview on the organization of preference, see Schegloff 2007, pp. 58-96, Liddicoat 2007, pp. 110-124, Sidnell 2010, pp. 77-94, and Pommerantz & Heritage 2013, pp. 210-227. For an application of this concept to Plato's dialogue technique, see Verano 2022.

HERMOGENES. Now what shall we say about the next word?

SOCRATES. You mean «body»?

HERMOGENES. Yes.

SOCRATES. I think this admits of many explanations, if a little, even very little, change is made.

Table 5. Sequential organization of (5.)

Turn 1 (Hermogenes)	Base pair	1PP
Turn 2 (Socrates)	Insert-expansion	1PP
Turn 3 (Hermogenes)	(repair)	2PP
Turn 4 (Socrates)	Base pair	2PP

Finally, post-expansions can lengthen sequences by adding subsequent new pairs to the base, but they are more commonly used to introduce final agreement or confirmation tokens, leading to sequence closure.

Sequentiality in conversation raises coherence and congruity issues across turns-at-talk. Speakers of second pair-parts are constrained by their interlocutors' previous actions, since those actions call only for a limited number of relevant responses: second pair-parts are always interpreted in the light of such expectations. Actions intended by the speakers in first pair-parts, on the other hand, determine the turns' design and ultimately shape —also linguistically— their content. The positioning of turns in their hosting sequences is therefore crucial to describing the functions of the different components that make up those turns. With that in mind, the values of the imperatives of λέγειν stated in the previous section will be now analyzed from this perspective, attending to their position in sequence organization.

2. Imperatives of λέγειν in First Pair Parts (1PP)

In the first of the proposed prototypes, illustrated in (2), the imperatives appear in the first part of an adjacency-pair. These imperatives always introduce questions, either indirect or, more frequently, direct interrogatives as shown in the following passages:

- (6) *Men.* 82b. ΣΩ. Εἰπέ δὴ μοι, ὦ παῖ, γινώσκεις τετράγωνον χωρίον;
ΠΑΙ. Ἔγωγε.
SOCRATES. Tell me, boy, do you know that a square figure is like this?
BOY. I do.

Table 6. Sequential organization of (6).

Turn 1 (Socrates)	Base pair - Question	1PP
Turn 2 (Boy)	Base pair - Answer	2PP

- (7) *Tht.* 145c. ΣΩ. Λέγε δὴ μοι· μανθάνεις που παρὰ Θεοδώρου γεωμετρίας ἅπτα;
 ΘΕΑΙ. Ἔγωγε.
 SOCRATES. Now tell me; I suppose you learn some geometry from Theodorus?
 THEAETETUS. Yes.

Table 7. Sequential organization of (7).

Turn 1 (Socrates)	Base pair - Question	1PP
Turn 2 (Theaetetus)	Base pair - Answer	2PP

The position of the imperative at the beginning of the turn has an impact on the so-called processes of action ascription and recognition¹⁴. As conversation analysts have often pointed out, a major issue in the production of talk is how to most effectively translate an action into a turn. For the interaction to move on successfully, speakers must efficiently convey any actions they intend to carry out in their turns, so their addressees can recognize them as soon as possible and simultaneously prepare an appropriate reaction. By placing these forms at the opening of their turns, speakers indicate to their interlocutors that they are about to pose a question. If we consider this to be the main contribution of these imperatives, it cannot be surprising to find that their directive force ceases as they assume a new function in interaction.

The rendering of a specific pragmatic function at the level of interaction makes any linguistic item a good candidate to become a conversational discourse marker through grammaticalization¹⁵. In the case of the forms ana-

¹⁴ See Levinson (2013, pp. 103-104) for an introduction to the concepts of action formation and ascription; see Levinson (2013, pp. 110-117) and Drew (2013, pp. 140-145) for the implications of both processes in turn design.

¹⁵ In the case of *εἰπέ μοι*, Zakowski (2014) has provided strong arguments for the grammaticalization of the formula in classical Greek (but note the important caveats to his analysis in López Romero 2020), and Nordgren (2015) points in the same direction by including the phrase in his catalog of secondary interjections.

lyzed in this section, this is suggested by certain observable features such as their tendency to appear in the left margin, their loose attachment to the main sentence of the utterance, closely resembling parenthetical or extra-clausal constituents, and the possible clusterization of formulae with the 1st person dative, such as λέγε μοι or ειπέ μοι—all of them highly prototypical traits of elements undergoing such processes—. From my point of view, the more accurate identification of a precise context of use proposed in this article could be a further argument in support of the pragmaticalization of the form¹⁶.

In addition to their role in turn design, these imperatives participate in the dynamics of turn allocation, specifically as current-selects-next techniques, by identifying the next interactant¹⁷. Therefore, they facilitate turn switching and contribute to interaction management. This is observable especially in the case of particularly long turns, which are not very common in natural speech, but frequent in literary dialogue. Thus, after completing a—rather monological—long turn, the speaker can favor the transition back to interaction by adding the formulae *καί μοι ειπέ* or *καί μοι λέγε*, at the beginning of his last utterance, thus repurposing his turn into a question:

- (8) *Hp. Ma.* 283c. ΣΩ. Τέρας λέγεις καὶ θαυμαστόν, ὦ Ἴππία. καί μοι ειπέ: πότερον ἢ σοφία ἢ σὴ οὐχ οἷα τοὺς συνόντας αὐτῆ καὶ μανθάνοντας εἰς ἀρετὴν βελτίους ποιεῖν;
SOCRATES. That is a prodigious marvel that you tell, Hippias; and say now: is not your wisdom such as to make those who are in contact with it and learn it, better men in respect to virtue?
- (9) *Euthphr.* 3a. ΕΥΘ. Βουλοίμην ἄν, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἀλλ' ὀρρωδῶ μὴ τοῦναντίον γένηται· ἀτεχνῶς γάρ μοι δοκεῖ ἀφ' ἐστίας ἄρχεσθαι

¹⁶ It goes without saying, however, that this is not a historical study, but a synchronic analysis and, therefore, these traits cannot be taken in isolation as evidence of the occurrence of diachronical linguistic change.

¹⁷ They comply with both requirements of such techniques, since they are located in a first pair-part recognized as such, and they address to a specific interlocutor (Hayashi 2013, pp. 169-170). For an overview on turn allocation techniques in conversation including current-selects-next and self-selection, see Liddicoat 2007, pp. 63-67; Sidnell 2010, pp. 45-48. The dynamics of turn taking and turn allocation procedures were stated by Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974, pp. 716-720.

κακουργεῖν τὴν πόλιν, ἐπιχειρῶν ἀδικεῖν σέ. καί μοι λέγε, τί και ποιοῦντά σέ φησι διαφθεῖρειν τοὺς νέους;

EUTHYPHRO. I hope it may be so, Socrates; but I fear the opposite may result. For it seems to me that he begins by injuring the State at its very heart, when he undertakes to harm you. Now tell me, what does he say you do that corrupts the young?

Since these two —turn-initial or opening of last utterance— are the only positions of imperatives of this type documented in our corpus, it can be said that they also have a demarcative function, signaling turn boundaries. Notice in the following example how the formula «λέγε δῆ» followed by a vocative indicates a change of addressee, pointing to two different turns within the same floor:

- (10) *Tht.* 162c. ΣΩ. Ἄλλ' εἰ οὕτως, ᾧ Θεόδωρε, σοὶ φίλον, οὐδ' ἔμοι ἐχθρόν, φασὶν οἱ παρομιαζόμενοι. πάλιν δὴ οὖν ἐπὶ τὸν σοφὸν Θεαίτητον ἰτέον. λέγε δὴ, ᾧ Θεαίτητε, πρῶτον μὲν ἂ νυνδὴ διήλθομεν, ἄρα οὐ σὺ θαυμάζεις εἰ ἐξαίφνης οὕτως ἀναφανήση μηδὲν χεῖρων εἰς σοφίαν ὄτουσὺν ἀνθρώπων ἢ και θεῶν; ἢ ἥττόν τι οἶει τὸ Πρωταγόρειον μέτρον εἰς θεοὺς ἢ εἰς ἀνθρώπους λέγεσθαι;

SOCRATES. Well, Theodorus, if that pleases you, it does not displease me, as the saying is. So I must attack the wise Theaetetus again. Tell me, Theaetetus, referring to the doctrine we have just expounded, do you not share my amazement at being suddenly exalted to an equality with the wisest man, or even god? Or do you think Protagoras's «measure» applies any less to gods than to men?

Finally, some imperatives hosted in first pair-parts are involved in repair-initiating moves¹⁸, which frequently assume the form of insert-expansions after first pair-parts, when the interlocutor asks for repetitions or clarifications, as in (11):

- (11) *Sph.* 238d-e. {ΞΕ.} ὦ θαυμάσιε, οὐκ ἔννοεῖς αὐτοῖς τοῖς λεχθεῖσιν ὅτι και τὸν ἐλέγχοντα εἰς ἀπορίαν καθίστησι τὸ μὴ ὄν οὕτως, ὥστε, ὅποτεν αὐτὸ ἐπιχειρῆ τις ἐλέγχειν, ἐναντία αὐτὸν αὐτῷ περὶ ἐκεῖνο ἀναγκάζεσθαι λέγειν;

¹⁸ Repair mechanisms in talk-in-interaction have been extensively studied by conversation analysts since Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks 1977. For an updated state of the art see Kitzinger 2013.

{ΘΕΑΙ.} Πῶς φής; εἰπέ ἔτι σαφέστερον.

{ΞΕ.} Οὐδὲν δεῖ τὸ σαφέστερον ἐν ἐμοὶ σκοπεῖν. ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ ὑποθέμενος οὔτε ἐνὸς οὔτε τῶν πολλῶν τὸ μὴ ὄν δεῖν μετέχειν, ἄρτι τε καὶ νῦν οὕτως ἐν αὐτὸ εἴρηκα· τὸ μὴ ὄν γὰρ φημί. συνίης τοι.

STRANGER. Why, my dear fellow, don't you see, by the very arguments we have used, that not-being reduces him who would refute it to such difficulties that when he attempts to refute it he is forced to contradict himself?

THEAETETUS. What do you mean? Speak still more clearly.

STRANGER. You must not look for more clearness in me; for although I maintained that not-being could have nothing to do with either the singular or the plural number, I spoke of it just now, and am still speaking of it, as one; for I say «that which is not measure». You understand surely?

Example (11) is somewhat different from the cases previously shown. The imperative appears postposed to the question and has, in addition, complements that are not found in prototypical uses. Moreover, its function does not seem to be that of framing the question it follows. Instead, it seems to be an elaboration of that same question, in the manner of a reformulation. Other-initiated repair in conversation usually involves recurrent formulae and, therefore, it is possible that these cases point to a new prototype, although it is difficult to say with so few cases. As far as the data go, the imperatives found in these contexts do not contradict the basic characteristics of the type as they have been outlined in this section.

As shown Table 1, the majority of uses of εἰπέ in the dialogues of Plato, as well as a great number of those of λέγε, belong to this prototype. In terms of sequence organization, they all appear in the first parts of pairs. They perform several functions in interaction, assisting in the processes of action ascription and recognition, and in turn allocation techniques.

3. Imperatives of λέγειν in Second Pair Parts (2PP)

In contrast to the cases examined in the previous section, instances related to the second prototype share a common feature: they are located in the second parts of adjacency-pairs, as in (12).

- (12) R. 601c Μὴ τοίνυν ἡμίσεως αὐτὸ καταλίπομεν ῥηθέν, ἀλλ' ἰκανῶς ἴδωμεν.
Λέγε, ἔφη.

Ζωγράφος, φαμέν, ήνίας τε γράψει και χαλινόν;
Ναί.

Then let's not leave it half told, but make an adequate job of it.

Do go on.

A painter paints some reins and a bridle, let's say.

Yes.

As stated before, the actions performed by second pair-parts are conditioned by those advanced in their respective firsts. In (12), a long series of question-answer pairs is preceded by a pre-expansion that serves to announce the upcoming sequence and to engage the addressee in that project. The nature of the action of the first part can be discussed: it may be considered an offer, an invitation, or a request. Either way, the addressee is expected to react to that action by accepting or refusing. The imperative λέγε is used in these cases as a 'go-ahead' formula, showing compliance and allowing the first speaker to go on¹⁹. Pre-tellings or pre-announcements usually host such imperatives of λέγειν, as in (13):

- (13) *Phlb.* 61d. {ΣΩ.} Ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀσφαλές. ἦ δὲ ἀκινδυνότερον ἂν
μειγνύοιμεν, δόξαν μοι δοκῶ τινα ἀποφήνασθαι ἄν.

{ΠΡΩ.} Λέγε τίνα.

SOCRATES. But that is not safe; and I think I can offer a plan by which we can make our mixture with less risk.

PROTARCHUS. What is it?

In this type of pre-expansion, speakers seek to raise their interlocutors' interest by willingly omitting a certain piece of information that the addressee demands —note the presence of τίνα connected to the narrow focus δόξαν τινα—. Such 'go-ahead' markers can be interrogatives or quasi-interrogatives, thus facilitating the introduction of the intended announcements or tellings as the answers to those questions²⁰. But it is important to note that those questions, in terms of sequence organization, are second pair-parts:

¹⁹ On the different types of pre-expansions and the 'go-ahead' function of second pair parts, see Schegloff 2007, pp. 28-53.

²⁰ Cf. English «Guess what? / What?» (Schegloff 2007, p.38). An example combined with a question in *Plt.* 277e. «Τί οὖν; λέγε μηδὲν ἐμοῦ γε ἔνεκα ἀποκνῶν».

they are used to express agreement to the first speaker's proposal, as in (14) and (15):

- (14) *Lg.* 832b. ΑΘ. Κάλλιστα, ὦ ξένοι, ἐπεπλήξατε· καὶ τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο ἀκούοιτ' ἄν, ὡς ἔοικε.
ΚΛ. Ἀέγε μόνον.
ATHENIAN. Your rebuke is just, Strangers; you want, it seems, to hear what comes next.
CLINIAS. Only say on.
- (15) *R.* 436c. Σκόπει δὴ ὁ λέγω.
Ἀέγε, ἔφη.
Consider now what I am saying.
Go on.

To a certain extent, such pre-expansions are conventional. Through them, the speakers propose and negotiate the terms of the conversation. Accordingly, first parts of such pre-expansions show intersubjectivity markers seeking to test the addressee's involvement or asking for their permission. In that sense, the imperatives can be said to participate in protocolary moves that precede the main exchange and through which some of the features of such exchange are agreed on²¹.

Other instances akin to this prototype show cases in which the imperatives are used as tokens of backchanneling or participatory listenership, as in the following example:

- (16) *Plt.* 286c. {ΞΕ.} Ἔν τοίνυν χάριν ἅπανθ' ἡμῖν ταῦτ' ἐρρήθη περὶ τούτων, μνησθῶμεν.
{ΝΕ. ΣΩ.} Τίνων;
{ΞΕ.} Ταύτης τε οὐχ ἥκιστα αὐτῆς ἔνεκα τῆς δυσχερείας ἦν περὶ τὴν μακρολογίαν τὴν περὶ τὴν ὑφαντικὴν ἀπεδεξάμεθα δυσχερῶς, καὶ τὴν περὶ τὴν τοῦ παντὸς ἀνείλιξιν καὶ τὴν τοῦ σοφιστοῦ πέρι τῆς τοῦ μὴ

²¹ Lallot (2000, p. 32) ascribes a similar function to some instances of ἀποκρίνειν in Plato. According to him, the use of ἀποκρίνειν in the present stem relates to the roles of the participants in the conversation, whereas the use in the aorist serves as to introduce questions. The prototypical situations («situations de base») proposed by Lallot for ἀποκρίνειν are close to those presented here for λέγειν, but ἀποκρίνειν seems to maintain a more uniform aspectual distribution between both types.

ὄντος οὐσίας, ἐννοοῦντες ὡς ἔσχε μῆκος πλέον, καὶ ἐπὶ τούτοις δὴ
 πᾶσιν ἐπεπλήξαμεν ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς, δείσαντες μὴ περίεργα ἅμα καὶ μακρὰ
 λέγοιμεν. ἴν' οὖν εἰς αὐτοῖς μηδὲν πάσχωμεν τοιοῦτον, τούτων ἕνεκα
 πάντων τὰ πρόσθε νῶν εἰρηῆσθαι φάθι.

{NE. ΣΩ.} Ταῦτ' ἔσται. λέγε ἐξῆς μόνον.

STRANGER. Let us, then, remember the reason for all that we have said
 about these matters.

YOUNGER SOCRATES. What is the reason?

STRANGER. The reason is chiefly just that irritating impatience which
 we exhibited in relation to the long talk about weaving and the revo-
 lution of the universe and the sophist's long talk about the existence of
 not-being. We felt that they were too long, and we reproached our-
 selves for all of them, fearing that our talk was not only long, but irrel-
 evant. Consider, therefore, that the reason for what has just been said
 is my wish to avoid any such impatience in the future.

YOUNGER SOCRATES. Very well. Please go on with what you have to say.

The preceding dialogue extract opens with a pre-expansion that is quite
 similar to those examined before, which closes with a question —*τίνων*;—
 as 'go-ahead' second pair-part. This question allows Socrates to present a
 series of arguments that lays out over several turns, intertwined with brief
 interactions by which his interlocutor shows his listening and understand-
 ing. The last turn in (16) hosts two elements related to this function: an
 expression of agreement (*ταῦτ' ἔσται*) and an invitation to continue (*λέγε
 ἐξῆς μόνον*).

In both cases of go-ahead and backchanneling formulae, the pragmatic
 value of the imperative is conditioned by its sequential positioning. The fact
 that they appear in second pair-parts determines their interpretation, since the
 actions that can be carried out in these second parts depend on those executed
 in the first parts of the pair. The use of these affirmative-valued imperatives
 aligns, moreover, with the preferred reaction according to conversational
 dynamics, as evidenced by the fact that they can be formulated —see (14)—
 devoid of accounts or politeness markers.

The cases examined in this section are, as shown in Table 1, less frequent,
 but they constitute a well-defined prototype, with clear pragmatic features,
 to which is to be added their position in the second pair-parts in sequence orga-
 nization.

4. *The Potential Optative: Notes on Politeness and Characterization*

The preceding pages have shown how the imperatives of λέγειν play certain roles in the dialogues of Plato, in which their directive force does not seem to be their main contribution. This can explain why the imperatives are not perceived as face-threatening acts, and consequently why they are not attenuated by the mitigation strategies that frequently appear next to those acts. In the case of direct commands, that effect is usually achieved by indirect formulation (in ancient Greek, the use of the optative plus ἄν, among other possibilities), or by the addition of adverbials, conditionals, or discourse markers. Indeed, the only attested case of a conditional apparently mitigating the imperative of λέγειν in the dialogues of Plato is actually ironic:

- (17) *Hp.Ma.* 301d. ΠΙ. Εἰδότε μὲν ἐρεῖς, ὦ Σώκρατες· οἶδα γὰρ ἐκάστους τῶν περὶ τοὺς λόγους ὡς διάκεινται. ὅμως δ' εἶ τι σοὶ ἥδιον, λέγε. ΣΩ. Ἀλλὰ μὴν ἥδιόν γε.
HIPPIAS. You will speak to one who knows, Socrates, for I know the state of mind of all who are concerned with discussions; but nevertheless, if you prefer, speak.
SOCRATES. Well, I do prefer.

The use of over-politeness strategies to produce quite the opposite effect is well acknowledged, and other instances can be found in ancient Greek literature²². For the purpose of this paper, the fact that imperatives are almost never attenuated, apart from this exceptional instance, suggests that they are neutral forms²³. It is, then, interesting that a few instances in the corpus show formulae containing the optative of λέγω plus ἄν in interactional contexts similar to those ascribed to the second prototype in this study—that is, in second pair parts—:

- (18) *Plt.* 268e. ΞΕ. Ἀλλὰ δὴ τῷ μύθῳ μου πάνυ πρόσεχε τὸν νοῦν, καθάπερ οἱ παῖδες· πάντως οὐ πολλὰ ἐκφεύγεις παιδιὰς ἔτη.
ΝΕ. ΣΩ. Λέγεις ἄν.

²² For an approach to over-politeness in Euripides' tragedies, see Rodríguez Piedrabuena 2020.

²³ This is also in agreement with the fact that they refer to tasks and activities that do not require a great deal of effort and which the interlocutors are expected to carry out in interaction. When those conditions are met, imperatives are not usually taken as face-threatening acts, as politeness scholars have noted (Haverkate 1994, pp. 162-168).

STRANGER. Then please pay careful attention to my story, just as if you were a child; and anyway you are not much too old for children's tales.
 YOUNGER SOCRATES. Please tell the story.

The use of the potential optative in indirect speech acts in ancient Greek is perfectly standard²⁴. Requests formulated with optatives are milder versions of those which display imperatives. However, since the analysis suggests that the imperatives of λέγειν in 2PP are not perceived as face-threatening, it is necessary to explain why the more polite variant is used in these cases. In this connection, it is worth noting that, among a dozen cases of optative plus ἄν scattered throughout different dialogues, five appear in the *Statesman* and are uttered by the young Socrates, as he talks to the unnamed character known as the Stranger.

Politeness in interaction is highly context-sensitive, since the extant relationship between the participants in a communicative situation crucially determines how their utterances will be ultimately interpreted²⁵. Speakers constantly assess the level of politeness they need to use by considering their closeness to their addressees and the possible difference in status — social, gender, and age— between them. Now, the characters in the dialogues of Plato usually treat each other as equals. Even when Socrates encounters the great figures of his time such as Gorgias, Protagoras, and Hippias, the conversation is conducted in terms of mutual respect and appreciation. In the *Statesman*, however, we find a character who is very young —as explicitly pointed out in (18)— and who is talking to a foreigner unknown to him: there is a total lack of familiarity to be added to the difference in age. The social distance between the characters then makes the use of politeness markers relevant, and so it is not surprising that the young Socrates resorts to the potential optative in contexts where, otherwise, the imperative would be perfectly valid. By using the optative, the young So-

²⁴ On the use of the potential optative in indirect requests, see Denizot 2011, pp. 409-411; Drummen 2013, pp. 89-96; more recently, Conti 2020 on the Sophoclean tragedies.

²⁵ As stated by Brown & Levinson (1987) in their foundational work on Politeness Theory. According to Watts (2003, p. 21), no particular linguistic expression is inherently polite or impolite. (Im)polite behavior will be behavior perceived as such depending on the circumstances of the ongoing social interaction, and how the co-participants in that interaction accommodate themselves —linguistically and otherwise— to it. For an application of Politeness Theory to analyze requests and orders in ancient Greek, see Denizot 2011, p. 138.

crates is acknowledging —and establishing through discourse performance— his interlocutor’s superior status²⁶.

The choice of such a linguistic formulation, therefore, has an impact on characterization. The young Socrates’ literary portrait is made, among other traits, through his linguistic behavior and his choice of manners in interaction. The avoidance of imperatives in ‘go-ahead’ formulae goes together with other features that contribute to characterize him as a young person, such as his tendency to interrupt, as illustrated in example (19), where he cuts off his interlocutor before the latter has time to ask the question that follows after *καί μοι λέγε*:

- (19) *Plt.* 304a. ΞΕ. Πείρας μὲν τοίνυν ἔνεκα φανερὸς ἔσται· διὰ δὲ μουσικῆς αὐτὸν ἐγχειρητέον δηλῶσαι. καί μοι λέγε.
 ΝΕ. ΣΩ. Τὸ ποῖον;
 ΞΕ. Μουσικῆς ἔστι πού τις ἡμῖν μάθησις, καὶ ὅλως τῶν περὶ χειροτεχνίας ἐπιστημῶν;
 STRANGER. Then if it is a question of trying, he will be shown. But I think we had better try to disclose him by means of music. Please answer my question.
 YOUNG SOCRATES. What is it?
 STRANGER. Shall we agree that there is such a thing as learning music and the sciences of handicraft in general?

Interrupting an interlocutor is a violation of the general rules of talk-in-interaction and, in Plato’s dialogues, some passages show cases that can easily be labeled as impolite²⁷. But interruptions, on the other hand, are also distinctive practices of certain groups, such as young people, whose impatient character is a universal cultural stereotype. In addition to the above-cited

²⁶ It is worth noting that the choice of the variant considered more polite by the speaker is perfectly in line with the criteria of appropriateness to the social distance between the participants in the communicative situation, so that the young Socrates expresses himself in the way that is to be expected, given his position of inferiority in all relevant social parameters according to the existing power relations. In this sense, it could be considered a token of politic behavior in line with the approach to discernment politeness proposed by Ridealgh & Unceta 2020, that is, a use in context imposed by constraints based on power inequality, rather than a politeness marker as such.

²⁷ For example, see Thrasymachus in *R.* 336b, or Polus in *Grg.* 461b. On interruptions and impoliteness in the dialogues of Plato, see Verano 2021b.

example, there are other passages in the *Statesman* that reflect the same attitude of the young Socrates in contexts akin to those of the previously analyzed imperatives:

- (20) *Plt.* 264b {ΞΕ.} Ταῦτ' ἔστω. πάλιν δ' οὖν ἐξ ἀρχῆς τὴν κοινοτροφικὴν πειρώμεθα διαιρεῖν· ἴσως γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο ὃ σὺ προθυμῆ διαπεραινόμενος ὁ λόγος αὐτός σοι κάλλιον μηνύσει. καὶ μοι φράζε.
 {ΝΕ. ΣΩ.} Ποῖον δῆ;
 STRANGER. I do not deny it. So let us begin again and try to divide the art of tending animals in common; for perhaps the information you desire so much will come to you in the ordinary course of our conversation better than by other means. Tell me—
 YOUNGER SOCRATES. What?

Consequently, the use of the potential optative by the young Socrates should not be understood as a sign of over-politeness, but rather as a stylistic choice, one of the many linguistic traits that Plato uses to highlight the personality of their characters and outline their literary portrait.

IV. FINAL REMARKS

This article aimed to delve deeper into the study of the use of the imperative forms of λέγειν (λέγε and εἰπέ) in classical Greek and to contribute to the existing discussion on their values in discourse. Unlike other approaches, which have preferentially focused on aspectual opposition, politeness-related issues, or pragmatization, my study has appraised the role played by imperatives within turns-at-talk, particularly considering their position in the sequential structure of the conversation. To do so, the literary dialogues of Plato have been analyzed according to such patterns using the methodology of Conversation Analysis.

The analysis distinguished two major trends in use, as imperatives may appear in the first or second parts of adjacency-pairs. Imperatives in the first pair-parts contribute to the dynamics of action ascription and recognition, by shaping the turns in which they are embedded and identifying them as questions. Usually located in the left margin of the utterance, they function as interactional markers, providing instructions to the addressee as to how to proceed in conversation. They also play a role in turn allocation, selecting the next speaker, and sometimes facilitating the transition to interaction after

long turns. Imperatives in second pair parts, on the other hand, usually serve as ‘go-ahead’ formulae, showing agreement and compliance with the actions advanced by the previous speakers. They are frequently found in protocolary pre-expansions leading to major conversational projects or more extensive turns. This prototype can also be found in reactive turns used to convey back-channeling and participatory listenership in storytelling or similar structures.

Each of these prototypes shares a cluster of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features, some of which have been pointed out in previous studies. The main contribution of this paper is to link those clusters to specific contexts in use, which correspond to different formal positions in the sequential organization of talk. As it has been shown, the imperatives in these contexts acquire specific functions that overshadow their directive force and their face-threatening nature. This allows us to highlight the significance of negative politeness markers when they appear, and explore their possible interpretation as markers of ironic over-politeness, or their contribution to characterization. Therefore, the study of the values associated with these forms in interaction extends beyond their mere pragmatic description: it also provides important clues for understanding the dramatic nature of the dialogues of Plato and his success in portraying everyday conversation in antiquity.

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