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English imperatives range from fairly prototypical directive uses in which a speaker clearly orders a hearer to do something (Eat your salad!) over discourse interactional routines (Let me just say that ...) to more expressive speech act functions (Get well soon!). In order to provide a full account of all these various uses, the present book combines insights from cognitive grammar, prototype theory, and construction grammar.

In the introduction, Hidemitsu Takahashi outlines the basic aims and scope of his book and gives a short overview of the various uses of English imperatives. On top of that, he also provides information on the book’s theoretical background and the data used for his study, as well as a short summary of the individual chapters. Ch. 2, ‘Observing English imperatives in action’, then contains the results from T’s corpus study. Drawing on more than 1,700 tokens sampled from four selected American novels, his results unearth several important features of English imperatives, including which verbs occur most frequently in English imperatives (let’s, tell, let, and look), which of these prefer first person objects, and which of these are used as discourse-organizational markers.

Next, based on his empirical findings, T provides a construction grammar analysis of the various imperative uses identified by his empirical study. In Ch. 3, he puts forward a cognitive grammar account of the meaning of the English imperative that crucially relies on the notions of schema and prototype. The insights from this analysis are then used to provide an explanation for apparently non-prototypical uses in Ch. 4, ‘Accounting for some of the findings in Chapter 2 and the choice between imperatives and indirect directives’. After that, T shows how voice and aspect interact with imperatives in Ch. 5, ‘Mixed imperative constructions’, and discusses ‘Conditional imperatives in English’ (Ch. 6) as well as ‘English imperatives in concessive clauses’ (Ch. 7). Finally, after a contrastive analysis of ‘Japanese imperatives’ (Ch. 8), the book ends with a short chapter entitled ‘Conclusion and prospects’.

This book offers a usage-based as well as cognitive account of the various types of English imperatives. While future research will definitely have to draw on more authentic (that is, non-fictional) data, T’s book nevertheless offers a very compelling and careful analysis of the phenomenon that should be of great interest to syntacticians, cognitive linguists, and researchers working within a constructionist framework.