Untangling the imperative puzzle:
A performative analysis of imperative sentences in Minimalism

1. The problem

2. Proposal
Imperatives contain a light verb that defines the speaker-hearer relation in a manner analogous to causative v (Kuroda 1965, Kuno 1973). This represents a return to the abstract performative hypothesis of Austin (1962) and Ross (1970): ‘go!’ = ‘I order you to go’. Their analysis was made possible by Searle’s (1968) reinterpretation of Austin’s illocutionary act as a propositional act, where the force of the sentence and the propositional content are formally distinct: $F(p)$. Our proposal is thus a radical departure from the syntax and syntax-semantics interface analyses of the last two or three decades.

3. Evidence for a second verb
The assumption of an underlying light verb is empirically justified by evidence in Italo-Romance and Ibero-Romance. The data in (1-2) concerns the relative position of pronouns in Italian imperatives (cf. Kayne 1992, Portner & Zanuttini 2003). In the affirmative command (1), the verb moves to C and the pronoun must follow. In the negative command (2) the pronoun may precede the verb. (2) is reminiscent of clitic climbing but, what would be the other verb in imperatives? Portner & Zanuttini (2003) refer to this silent verbal element as an auxiliary and note that it may be overt in Paduan (sta ‘be’) and Tarantino (scé ‘go’). However, we rather characterize it as a light verb. Consider the verbs used in English (3), Latin prohibitions (4a) and Ewe (4b). In informal varieties of Panamanian Spanish (5 cf. Lipski 1994), the verb incorporates into the light verb (compare with the English exs. in 6). The suffix Lipski describes functions as a sentence final particle in a variety of Salvadorian Spanish (7 cf. Santos Avilés, p.c.). This is evident from the fact that ve can be separated from the verb by an object in (7d) and a prepositional phrase in (7c).

4. Parallelisms with causative constructions
The proposed speaker-hearer relationship runs parallel to causatives, which project an external argument as a causer, and select a complement whose subject is the causee. The similarities do not end here. Consider imperatives where the vocative and the subject are different (8). Potsdam (1998) appeals to a pragmatic condition where the addressee has control or authority over the subject (military rank, work, family). For us disjoint reference follows from a double iteration of the light verb, which opens a position for a new argument, making the addressee and the subject formally distinct. The phenomenon is duplicated in causative constructions, which may have 1 or 2 iterations (9) of the causative morpheme (Comrie 1985, Dixon 2000). Beyond disjoint reference, the double iteration opens a uniform account of optative or desiderative mood (=3rd p. imperatives; 10-11). Said cases are generally dismissed or unanalyzed, for imperatives are assumed to involve direct address. Yet indirection is a communicative intention too, only of higher order (see Kuroda 1986). In effect, the notions of direct vs. indirect causation provide another parallel (12). Causatives can also elucidate matters of interpretation in imperatives. The semantics of imperatives relates to the notions of control and volition that often govern causative constructions. If the speaker expects the addressee to execute the command (by himself or through a third), we talk of a command. If the speaker is not in control, we speak of wishes, advice, requests…

5. Concluding remarks
The analysis reconciles insights from philosophy of language with established categories in generative grammar and promises to untangle the imperative puzzle. In light of this, syntactic typing of speech acts is viable (contra Levinson 1982, Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet 1990). Ibero-Romance shows a syntactic continuum in typing: e.g., enclisis in statements and questions used with imperative value (Kany 1951).
Examples:

(1) **Italian**
   a. *mangia-lo!
   b. *lo mangia!
   ‘eat it!’   ‘eat it!’

(2) **Italian**
   a. *non mangiar-lo!
   b. *non lo mangiare!
   Neg eat-it Neg it eat
   ‘don’t eat it!’   ‘don’t eat it!’

(3) **English**
   a. Go book it!
   b. Come look at it!

(4) **Latin**
   a. vide ne quid aliud cures ‘see that you attend to nothing else!’
   b. *yi ‘go’, *kpo ‘see’ (Agbodjo&Litvinov 2001: 398-9)

(5) **Panamanian Sp.**
   a. Oye-ve!   b. Mira-ve!
   hear-go look-go
   ‘Hear!’   ‘Look!’

(6) **English**
   a. Go tell me that it’s true!
   b. Don’t go tell me that it’s true!

(7) **Salvadorian Sp.**
   a. ¡Escuch-á ve!
   b. ¡Mir-á ve!
   Listen-2SG go Look-2SG go
   ‘Listen!’   ‘Look!’
   c. ¡And-á a la casa ve!
   Walk-2SG to the house go
   ‘Go home!’
   d. ¡Sac-á la mano ve!
   Take.out-2SG the hand go
   ‘Pull out your hand!’
   e. ¡No jod-ás ve!
   Neg joke-2SG go
   ‘Stop kidding!’

(8) **English**
   a. YOUR soldiers build the bridge, General Lee!
   b. Your guards be the diversion while we sneak in!
   c. Maitre d’, someone sit these guests!
   d. Counselors, everyone be packed up and ready to go in half and hour!

(9) **Capanawa**
   a. -mapet- ‘ascend’
   b. -mapet-ma ‘bring [it] up’ (i.e., make ascend)
   cf. Dixon 2000: 60
   c. -mapet-ma-ma ‘make/allow someone to bring [it] up’

(10) **Old/Mid. English**
    gain he! ‘let him gain!’ (cf. Visser 1966: 802)

(11) **Spanish**
    a. ¡Que vaya Juan!
    that go.3sg.SUBJ Juan
    ‘Let Juan go!’
    b. ¡Que no salga de la casa Juan!
    that Neg leave.3sg.SUBJ of the street Juan
    ‘Don’t let Juan go out of the house!’

(12) **Hindi**
    a. Makan bana
    house was.made
    ‘The house got built.’
    b. Maaazduro ne makan banvaya
    labourers ERG house was.made + CAUS1
    ‘The labourers build the house.’
    c. Thekedar ne (mazduro se) makan banvaya
    contractor ERG labourers INST house was.made + CAUS2
    ‘The contractor got the house built (by the labourers).’