



An Analysis of Mandarin Imperative Sentences in the Drama 'The Untamed' Episode 1 by Mo Xiang Tong Xiu

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the types and functions of imperative sentences found in episode 1 of the Chinese drama *The Untamed*, adapted from the novel *Mo Dao Zu Shi* by Mo Xiang Tong Xiu. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the research focuses on identifying imperative forms in the characters' utterances and classifying them into five categories: command, prohibition, request, invitation, and permission. The data were collected through non-participatory observation and documentation, then analyzed using imperative sentence theory in Mandarin. The findings show a total of 94 imperative sentences, with directive imperatives being the most dominant (52 instances), followed by prohibitions (18), invitations (6), requests (6), and indirect imperatives (9). These variations not only reflect the linguistic structure but also reveal the characters' emotions, social relations, and power dynamics. The study highlights how Mandarin imperative sentences in popular media can serve as a valuable resource in understanding communication strategies, pragmatic functions, and sociocultural context in language use.

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INTRODUCTION

Mandarin Chinese is the official language of the People's Republic of China. As a member of the Sino-Tibetan language family, Mandarin is spoken by approximately 955 million people (Widodo, 2022). Its widespread use underscores its significant role across various sectors, including education, politics, media, and business. Due to its importance in these domains, Mandarin is also referred to as Putonghua or Hanyu, which translate to "common language" or "language of the Han" in Chinese. It serves as the official language across a range of formal and informal settings. In recent years, Mandarin has gained remarkable global popularity, particularly among youth and professionals, driven by growing economic and cultural exchanges between China and other nations (Sutami, 2021). This trend illustrates how Mandarin has become an integral part of global interaction and holds vast potential for fostering intercultural cooperation. More than just a communication tool, Mandarin reflects centuries of Chinese heritage and identity. It embodies the historical depth, cultural traditions, and social dynamics that define Chinese society (Amanah et al., 2014).

According to Mailani et al. (2022), language, as a medium of communication, serves five essential functions in human life. First, it functions as a tool for expression, allowing individuals to convey thoughts, intentions, and emotions. Second, it acts as an informational tool, enabling the transmission of knowledge and meaning. Third, it serves as a means of exploration, helping individuals discover and interpret experiences and insights. Fourth, language operates as a persuasive device, influencing the thoughts and behaviors of others. Finally, language serves an entertainment function, capturing attention and providing enjoyment. Collectively, these roles illustrate the indispensable nature of language in facilitating human interaction and communication in daily life. Moreover, language is inherently shaped by the cultural context in which it is used, resulting in distinct characteristics that reflect the identity of its speakers (Nurhidayah, 2020).

Imperative sentences, in particular, play a crucial role in expressing commands, requests, prohibitions, invitations, and permissions (Zhang, as cited in Ansyah, 2021). Their usage extends beyond daily conversations and is frequently found across various forms of media, including films, social media, literary works, and theatrical dramas. For instance, a command may appear as "Clean the room!" (打扫房间! Dǎsǎo fángjiān!), while a request might be expressed as "Please help me!" (请帮我! Qǐng bāng wǒ!). Prohibitions such as "Don't speak loudly!" (不要大声说话! Bùyào dàshēng shuōhuà!), invitations like "Let's play!" (我们玩吧! Wǒmen wán ba!), and permissions such as "You may go to the cinema!" (你可以去电影院! Nǐ kěyǐ qù diànyǐngyuàn!) further demonstrate the flexibility of the imperative form. The variety and communicative functions of these sentences reflect not only the richness of language but also the socio-cultural dynamics of the communities in which they are used. In this way, imperative forms contribute to the depth and expressiveness of interaction across different social and cultural settings (Afela, 2022).

In recent years, the Chinese entertainment industry—particularly television dramas—has experienced rapid global popularity. One drama that has captured international attention is *The Untamed*, an adaptation of the novel *Mo Dao Zu Shi* by Mo Xiang Tong Xiu. This drama is widely recognized not only for its intricate plot and visually compelling production but also for the emotionally charged interactions among its characters, many of which are conveyed through powerful and meaningful imperative sentences (Helmanto, 2021). Through the use of imperatives in the characters' dialogues, the drama communicates more than mere commands or instructions; it reveals power dynamics, emotional tension, and deep character development. For instance, the expression "你去死吧 (nǐ qù sǐ ba)"—literally "Go die!"—functions not only as a harsh directive but also as a reflection of inner conflict and profound emotional intensity between characters. Despite the significant presence of imperative expressions in popular dramas like *The Untamed*, there is still a lack of scholarly research that specifically examines the types and functions of imperative sentences within such narratives. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the forms and communicative functions of imperative sentences in *The Untamed*, as well as their contribution to the dynamics of character interaction. It is hoped that this research will enrich the field of applied linguistics in Mandarin Chinese and offer new insights into language analysis within the context of Chinese popular culture.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at analyzing the forms and functions of imperative sentences in the Chinese drama *The Untamed*, which is adapted from the novel *Mo Dao Zu Shi* by Mo Xiang Tong Xiu. A qualitative approach is chosen because this research focuses on the analysis of language within its social and narrative context. According to Ardiansyah, Risnita, and Jailani (2023), qualitative research emphasizes a deep understanding of phenomena by exploring meanings, experiences, and perspectives of individuals or groups within specific cultural settings. The primary data in this research consists of imperative sentences found in character dialogues within the drama *The Untamed*. The data sources are categorized into two types: primary data, which includes excerpts from drama episodes containing imperative expressions, and secondary data, which consists of articles, academic journals, reviews, and other documents discussing the drama and linguistic theories related to imperative sentences. Data collection was carried out through non-participant observation and documentation techniques.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of imperative sentences in Episode 1 of the drama *The Untamed*, a total of 94 imperative utterances were identified across various forms of speech. These sentences were then classified into five categories: directive commands, prohibitions, requests, invitations, and indirect

imperatives. The distribution of imperative sentence types is presented in the table below.

Table 2. Distribution of Imperative Sentence Types in The Untamed Episode 1

No	Type of Imperative Sentence	Frequency
1	Directive Command	52
2	Prohibition	17
3	Request	5
4	Invitation	9
5	Indirect Imperative	11
Total		94

Analysis of Command Imperatives

Command imperatives (命令 *Mínglìng*) in Mandarin Chinese are sentence forms used to instruct or order the interlocutor to perform an action according to the speaker's intent. In this structure, the subject is often omitted, and the verb is placed at the beginning of the sentence, allowing the command to be delivered in a direct and firm manner. Examples of such imperatives in Mandarin include: 走! (*Zǒu!*) meaning "Go!" or 坐下! (*Zuò xià!*) meaning "Sit down!" (Septiani, 2022).

Data 1:

“快点” (*kuài diǎn*)

Translation: “Quick!” or “Hurry up!”

Timestamp: 10:16

The phrase 快点 (*kuài diǎn*) is a type of direct imperative used to prompt or instruct. It serves the function of urging someone to act more quickly. This sentence is intended to accelerate the listener's actions and conveys a sense of immediacy.

Data 2:

“赶紧给我滚回去” (*gǎn jǐn gěi wǒ gǔn huí qù*)

Translation: “Quickly, get back inside!”

Timestamp: 13:06

This imperative, 赶紧给我滚回去 (*Gǎnjǐn gěi wǒ gǔn huíqù*), expresses a forceful command that implies expulsion. The term 赶紧 (*gǎnjǐn*) emphasizes urgency, meaning “quickly” or “immediately,” while 滚 (*gǔn*) literally means “to roll” but, in context, functions as a harsh way of saying “get out.” This sentence is not merely a command to return to the storage room, but also conveys the speaker's

authority and disdain. Spoken by a member of the Mo family, it reflects power dynamics and emotional rejection toward Wei Wuxian, using language meant to belittle.

Data 3:

“死守 等人来” (sǐ shǒu děng rén lái)

"Hold your ground until reinforcements arrive"

Timestamp : 30:02

This sentence is categorized as an imperative command (直接祈使句 / zhíjiē qíshǐjù). The structure is characterized by the absence of a subject and the use of base verbs such as “死守” (to hold one's position at all costs) and “等” (to wait), which are typical features of direct imperative constructions in Mandarin. The presence of two consecutive verbs emphasizes the sequential and urgent nature of the required actions, clearly directed at the listener. Functionally, this utterance conveys a militaristic or high-stakes command, reflecting one of the pragmatic variations of imperative sentences as outlined in Zhang's framework. The speaker employs this command to ensure that Lan Jingyi follows the instruction strictly and does not abandon his post until support arrives, thereby maintaining situational stability.

Imperative commands in the first episode of *The Untamed* exhibit distinctive features such as the use of base verbs without subjects, assertive particles, and direct syntactic forms that deliver instructions firmly. These commands appear in various contexts, from urgent scenarios and interpersonal conflicts to authoritative everyday interactions. Pragmatically, imperative commands serve not only to issue instructions but also to reveal power relations, assert dominance, and reflect the psychological state of the speaker. Thus, this sentence type plays a crucial role in shaping the narrative dynamics and interpersonal communication among characters in the drama, offering deeper insight into the contextual use of imperatives in Mandarin discourse.

Prohibitive Imperative Sentences

Prohibitive imperative sentences (禁止 jìnzhǐ) in Mandarin Chinese are used to prohibit or prevent the listener from performing an action that the speaker deems undesirable. These sentences typically feature negative markers such as 别 (bié), 不要 (bú yào), 不必 (bú bì), or 不用 (bú yòng) placed before the predicate or verb. The primary function is to dissuade or stop the addressee from taking certain actions. For example, the sentence 别说话! (Bié shuōhuà!) means “Don't speak!” and 不要动! (Bú yào dòng!) translates as “Don't move!”

Data 4:

“别拉着我”

(bié lā zhe wǒ)

"Don't pull me"

Timestamp : 16:44

This sentence qualifies as a prohibitive imperative (禁止性祈使句) because of the use of “别” (bié, “don’t”), which serves as an explicit negation to prevent the action. Its communicative function is preventive (制止), as Mo Xuanyu is attempting to stop Mo Ziyuan from pulling his hand.

Data 5:

“别乱动” (bié luàn dòng)

“Don't move around recklessly”

Timestamp: 21:21

This utterance is another example of a prohibitive imperative (禁止式), used to regulate the listener's behavior by discouraging actions deemed inappropriate, dangerous, or disruptive.

Data 6:

“不要跑去西院” (bù yào pǎo qù xī yuàn)

“Don't run to the west yard!”

Timestamp: 28:22

Grammatically, this is a negative imperative (否定祈使句), utilizing the structure 不要 (bù yào, “don't”) followed by the verb phrase 跑去 (pǎo qù, “run to”) and the locative noun 西院 (xī yuàn, “west yard”). Although the sentence is repeated by Mo Xuanyu and not originally initiated by him, its syntactic structure retains the core features of negative imperatives in Mandarin. The omission of an explicit subject—a typical trait of imperative forms—shifts focus directly to the prohibited action. This utterance functions as both a warning and a preventive directive, reflecting the speaker's intention to protect others from entering a potentially dangerous, supernaturally threatened space. The repetition also serves to reinforce responsibility and clarify the seriousness of the warning within the narrative.

In *The Untamed*, prohibitive imperative sentences are marked by negation words such as 别 (bié) and 不要 (bù yào), which serve to clearly halt or restrict specific actions. These sentences are often used in emotionally or contextually tense situations, especially where physical danger or confrontation is implied. Structurally concise and direct, these imperatives usually omit the subject, placing emphasis on the forbidden action. Beyond mere prohibition, they reflect the characters' vigilance and the social dynamics between them, functioning as both narrative tools for control and signals of caution in the development of the plot.

Requestive Imperative Sentences

Requestive imperative sentences (请求 qǐngqiú) in Mandarin Chinese refer to expressions used to politely ask or appeal to the addressee to carry out an action in accordance with the speaker's intention. Unlike direct commands, these expressions are non-coercive in nature. Typically, requestive imperatives are marked by polite terms such as 请 (qǐng, please), 来吧 (lái ba, come on), 希望 (xīwàng, hope), or 应该 (yīnggāi, ought to). In practice, requestive imperatives can take the form of courteous appeals or neutral requests, where the speaker expresses hope that the addressee will comply, but without exerting overt pressure (Rahardi, 2005).

Data 7:

“请大家别千万见笑啊” (qǐng dà jiā bié qiān wàn jiàn xiào a)

"I kindly ask everyone not to laugh"

Timestamp: 17:02

The sentence “Qǐng dàjiā qiānwàn bié jiànxiào a” translates as “I kindly ask everyone not to laugh.” According to Zhang’s typology of imperatives, this utterance is categorized as a requestive imperative (请求式), due to the presence of the polite marker 请 (qǐng), which signals deference and courtesy. The primary function of this imperative is to maintain decorum and social order, as Madam Mo attempts to control the audience’s reaction and prevent further public embarrassment to her family.

Data 8:

“莫夫人正事要紧” (mò fū rén zhèng shì yào jǐn)

“Madam Mo, let us get to the main point.”

Timestamp : 19:37

This sentence does not include explicit imperative markers such as 请 (qǐng – please) or 要 (yào – must). Instead, it takes the form of a declarative statement that implicitly encourages the listener to act. This form of indirect imperative is more subtle and often employed in formal contexts or when addressing a person of higher status. Its function is to guide the addressee's behavior—in this case, prompting Madam Mo to end digressive talk and focus on the core issue.

Data 9:

“麻烦各位把左手都抬起来” (máfan gèwèi bǎ zuǒshǒu dōu tái qǐlái)

“May i trouble everyone to raise your left hand.”

Timestamp : 32:53

The utterance “麻烦各位把左手都抬起来” falls under the category of polite requestive imperatives (礼貌请求型祈使句). The use of the word 麻烦 (máfan), which literally means “to trouble,” functions as a politeness strategy in spoken interaction. Rather than giving a direct command, this phrasing

softens the request and enhances interpersonal harmony. Such expressions are particularly common in formal settings or when the speaker aims to preserve a respectful and non-imposing tone. The directive function of this sentence lies in its aim to influence the listener's behavior (raising their left hand), yet the delivery emphasizes courtesy and mutual respect. This indirect approach allows the speaker to maintain cooperation and positive social rapport, distinguishing it from imperatives that are more forceful in tone.

The requestive imperatives found in *The Untamed* exhibit distinct linguistic features, including the use of politeness markers like 请 (qǐng) and 麻烦 (máfan), as well as indirect phrasing strategies. Unlike direct commands or prohibitions, these expressions prioritize politeness and often avoid exerting pressure on the interlocutor. The analysis reveals that such constructions are frequently employed in formal interactions, particularly between characters of differing social status or in situations requiring the maintenance of harmonious relationships.

Inviting Imperative Sentences

Inviting imperative sentences (邀请 yāoqǐng) in Mandarin Chinese are utterances intended to prompt the interlocutor to carry out an action together with the speaker. These expressions are generally delivered in a gentle tone and often marked by politeness particles such as 吧 (ba) or lexical cues like “let's,” “come on,” and similar inviting phrases (Rahardi, 2005).

Data 10:

“走” (zǒu)

"Let's go"

Timestamp : 10:18

The word 走 (zǒu), in this context, serves as an invitation (邀请 yāoqǐng). While its literal meaning is “to walk” or “to leave,” here it functions pragmatically as an encouraging prompt, roughly equivalent to “let's move” or “let's get going.” It is used to urge others to take immediate action, often in time-sensitive situations. The directive nature of this utterance lies in its brevity and effectiveness, especially under urgent circumstances.

Data 11:

“这边请” (zhè biān qǐng)

"This way, please"

Timestamp : 14:55

The sentence 这边请 is categorized as an invitational imperative. Though it structurally conveys an instruction, its tone and context suggest deference and respect. Rather than being a direct command, the sentence serves as a courteous guide for the addressee, in this case, a guest. It reflects the speaker's intention to maintain hospitality and ensure that the guest feels comfortable and honored, especially

following an earlier reprimand by a superior.

Data 12:

“有话好说” (yǒu huà hǎo shuō)

"If there's something to say, let's talk it out nicely."

Timestamp: 18:47

The phrase 有话好说 is an example of an invitational or suggestive imperative that encourages polite and reasoned dialogue. This expression serves a calming function, intended to ease tension and prompt those involved in a disagreement to speak in a more composed and respectful manner. Its primary function is not only directive but also conciliatory, fostering constructive communication and preventing conflict escalation.

In *The Untamed*, inviting imperatives illustrate how speakers guide actions through inclusive and non-imposing approaches. Unlike direct commands, which may exert pressure, these utterances are constructed to persuade and encourage cooperation. Commonly marked by the particle 吧 (ba) or polite expressions, such imperatives do not merely serve a social communicative function; they also contribute to a more harmonious interaction between characters, highlighting relational dynamics and shared understanding.

Indirect Imperative Sentences

Indirect imperative sentences in Mandarin Chinese, known as 间接祈使句 (jiànjiē qíshǐjù), are expressions that convey commands, requests, or suggestions in an implicit manner. Rather than issuing direct imperatives, speakers utilize declarative or interrogative sentence structures to guide the listener's behavior. Unlike direct imperatives, whose meanings are explicit and easily recognizable, indirect imperatives depend heavily on contextual interpretation, requiring the listener to infer the intended directive.

Data 13:

“阵旗应该从那边摆到这边来” (zhènqí yīnggāi cóng nàbiān bǎi dào zhèbiān lái)

"The formation flags should be moved from there to here."

Timestamp: 22:59

This sentence exemplifies an indirect imperative through the use of the modal verb 应该 (yīnggāi, should), which expresses a suggestion or obligation rather than a direct order. According to Zhang, such constructions convey directives in a softened form—framing the action as a logical or expected course rather than a command. The utterance guides the listener toward a desired action without overtly imposing authority, aligning with the principle of indirect speech in hierarchical or formal interactions.

Data 14:

“还是做好我们自己的事吧” (hái shì zuò hǎo wǒmen zìjǐ de shì ba)

“We’d better just focus on our own affairs.”

Timestamp: 22:53

This sentence serves as a suggestive form of indirect imperative. It avoids direct command by combining the choice structure 还是 (hái shì, it’s better to...) with the polite particle 吧 (ba), which collectively soften the directive. As noted by Zhang, such forms are used to reduce confrontation and maintain politeness while still influencing the listener’s behavior. Here, the speaker subtly recommends that the addressee focus on their own responsibilities in order to preserve a harmonious atmosphere.

Data 15:

“算了 好好拿回来便是” (suàn le hǎo hǎo ná huí lái biàn shì)

“Forget it. Just bring it back nicely.”

Timestamp: 21:41

This expression represents a permissive variant of the indirect imperative. Zhang emphasizes that not all imperative forms are forceful; some may appear lenient, functioning as permission, advice, or encouragement. The sentence offers a resolution to a potentially tense situation, proposing a specific action (bring it back properly) in a manner that is non-confrontational and acceptable to all parties. The use of 算了 (forget it) at the beginning acts as a discourse marker that further softens the tone.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the first episode of the drama *The Untamed*, a total of 94 imperative sentences were identified and classified into five categories: commands, prohibitions, requests, invitations, and indirect imperatives. Command sentences emerged as the most dominant type, indicating a tendency toward direct and assertive communication strategies that reflect power relations among the characters. Prohibitive sentences were also prominent, serving as a form of control over undesirable actions. Meanwhile, requests and invitations were generally used in situations requiring politeness or cooperation, while indirect imperatives appeared in contexts involving more subtle and implicit communication. Overall, the use of imperative sentences in this drama functions not only as a means of delivering instructions but also as a representation of the social, emotional, and relational dynamics among characters. These findings suggest that the analysis of imperative sentences in Mandarin audiovisual works can offer significant contributions to pragmatic studies and language teaching, particularly in understanding communicative contexts and linguistic strategies within Chinese culture.

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