Unit 43 - Making commands and exclamations

1 Formation and use of the imperative

1.1 Unlike finite verb forms, the imperative has three persons :
>   2nd person singular : *donne !*
>   1st person plural : *donnons !*
>   2nd person plural : *donnez !*

1.2 Simple (present) imperative

1.2.1 For regular *–er* verbs and *aller*
The 2nd person singular is formed by taking the 2nd person singular of the present tense (e.g. *donnes*) **and removing the final *–s*** :
>   **Donne**-lui un coup de main pour la vaissaille !
>   *Give him / her a hand with the washing-up !*
>   **Va** lui donner un coup de main pour la vaissaille !
>   *Go and give him / her a hand with the washing-up !*

Note, however, that the *–s* returns to this form when it is followed by *y* or *en* :
>   **Vas**-y   *Go on*
>   **Achètes**-en   *Buy some*

The 1st person plural is the same as the 1st person plural of the present tense (e.g. *donnons*) :
>   **Donnons**-lui un coup de main pour la vaissaille !
>   *Let's give him / her a hand with the washing-up !*
>   **Allons** lui donner un coup de main pour la vaissaille !
>   *Let's go and give him / her a hand with the washing-up !*

The 2nd person plural is the same as the 2nd person plural of the present tense (e.g. *donnez*) :
>   **Donnez**-lui un coup de main pour la vaissaille !
>   *Give him / her a hand with the washing-up !*
>   **Allez** lui donner un coup de main pour la vaissaille !
>   *Go and give him / her a hand with the washing-up !*

1.2.2 Other verbs
For most other verbs, all three persons are the same as the equivalent persons in the present tense :
>   **Finis** tes devoirs ! / **Finissez** vos devoirs !
>   *Finish your homework !*
>   **Rends** / **rendez**-lui le livre !
>   *Give him / her back the book*!

There are, however, four irregular formations :
>   **Être** : *sois, soyons, soyez*
>   **Avoir** : *aie, ayons, ayez*
>   **Savoir** : *sache, sachons, sachez*
>   **Vouloir** : *veuille*, (no 1st person plural), *veuillez*

Sois sage !	*Be good !*
N'**ayez** pas peur !	*Don't be afraid !*
Sache que je n'y suis pas mêlé	*Please understand that I'm not involved*
Veuillez vous asseoir	*Please sit down*

1.3 Use of imperative

The imperative is used very much as it is in English :

To give an order : ***Fermez** la porte !*

Make a suggestion : ***Allons**-y !*

Make an invitation : ***Venez** chez nous !*

Express a wish : ***Dors** bien !*

1.4 Compound (past) imperative

The **compound** or **past imperative** is a form of the imperative comprising the imperative of the auxiliary verb *avoir* or *être* plus the past participle of a non-auxiliary verb. It is used (fairly rarely) to express orders which are to be accomplished at a point in the future :

Ayez fini le rapport avant la fin de la semaine

Be sure to have finished the report before the end of the week

2 Using pronouns with imperatives (see also **25**:1.2 and **25**:1.3)

2.1 In the affirmative imperative, pronouns come after the verb and are linked to it by a hyphen. Note that *moi* and *toi* are used instead of *me* and *te* :

Tu veux du chocolat ? **Prends-en** !

Do you want some chocolate ? Take some !

Ce sera bientôt l'anniversaire de ta mère. **Envoie-lui** une carte !

It will soon be your mother's birthday. Send her a card !

Tu as trouvé ses clefs ? **Donne-les-lui** !

Did you find his keys ? Give them to him !

Tu as des photos ? **Montre-les-moi** !

Do you have some photos ? Show them to me !

Y and *en* as ever come after the other personal pronouns, but note that before *en*, *moi* reverts to *m'* and *toi* to *t'* :

Tu a du chocolat - **Donne-m'en** !

Do you have some chocolate ? Give me some !

Ils aiment la glace ? - **Achète-leur-en** !

Do they like ice-cream ? Buy them some !

2.2 In the negative imperative, however, pronouns come before the verb :

Ne **les lui donne** pas !	Ne **me les montre** pas !
Don't give them to him !	*Don't show them to me !*
Ne **m'en donne** pas !	Ne **leur en achète** pas !
Don't give me any !	*Don't buy them any !*

3 Pronominal verbs in the imperative (see also **12**:2.2)

In affirmative imperative sentences, the reflexive pronoun comes immediately after the main verb. Note that the object reflexive pronoun *te* is replaced with the disjunctive pronoun *toi* :

Je me lève   ⇒   Lève-toi ! Levez-vous !

In negative imperative sentences, however, the word order reverts to the regular word order :

    Je ne me lève pas   ⇒   Ne te lève pas !

4   Alternatives to the imperative

4.1   Using the infinitive

Infinitives can be used with the sense of the imperative when the addressee is non-specific, as in the case of instructions on road signs, food packaging, books and so on :

    Ne pas **gêner** la fermeture des portes
    Keep clear of doors when closing
    Pour d'autres exemples, **voir** p. 126
    For more examples, see p. 126

4.2   Using the future

The simple future can be used with the sense of an imperative :

    Demain tu m'**aideras** à descendre les valises
    Tomorrow you will help me take down the suitcases

4.3   Using the subjunctive

We have seen how the imperative is restricted to the first and second persons. In order to make a command in the third person, the subjunctive is used with *que* in a main clause :

    Qu'il **vienne** me le dire !
    Let him come and tell me that !
    Que personne ne **parle** !
    Nobody talk !

Note that this is generally only used with a personal or indefinite pronoun as subject, except for religious contexts :

    Que Dieu vous **bénisse**
    May God bless you

5   Making exclamations

5.1   Relating to sentences

Any sentence can made into an exclamation by adding *comme* or *que* in formal or everyday French, or *Qu'est-ce que* or *Ce que* in more informal French :

    Comme il / **Qu'**il fait beau !
    How nice the weather is !
    Ce qu'il / **Qu'est qu'**il est charmant !
    How charming he is !

In reported speech, these expression are replaced by *combien* :

    Elle nous a dit **combien** il a fait beau / il était charmant
    She told us how nice the weather was/ how charming he was

5.2   Relating to nouns

Exclamations can be made to relate to specific nouns / noun phrases by means of *quel* :

    Quel mauvais temps !
    What bad weather !

5.3 Relating to quantity

Exclamations relating to the quantity of something can be made using *que de* plus noun / noun phrase :

>**Que de** bruit !
>*What a lot of noise !*

5.4 Using the subjunctive

The subjunctive can be used to make exclamations in two types of main clause construction. The first, not introduced by *que*, is used for set expressions :

>**Vive** la France
>*Long live France !*

The second, which is introduced by *que*, is discussed in 4.3 above.

5.5 Using *pourvu que*

Pourvu que + the subjunctive can have the sense of *let's hope* (*that*) :

>**Pourvu qu'**il ne **pleuve** pas !
>*Let's hope it doesn't rain !*