

ABOUT THE SUBJUNCTIVE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ENGLISH AND HUNGARIAN

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0. Introduction

Research on mood usually concentrates on the selection of finite verb forms in complement clauses depending on the semantic characteristics of the embedding predicate. The aim of this paper is to compare the subjunctive and the imperative mood focusing on English and Hungarian, taking into consideration their distribution both in matrix and embedded clauses. In English the subjunctive is often neglected, since it seems to be fading away from the language. In Hungarian, the subjunctive comprises two morphologically identical moods: the imperative and the subjunctive proper, this fact motivated the present analysis. As we will see, the aforementioned moods reveal quite a number of similarities.

1. About the subjunctive in general

Traditionally the notion of mood is restricted to a category expressed in verbal morphology. Thus, it is formally a morphosyntactic category of the verb, but it has certain semantic functions that affect the meaning of the whole sentence. (Palmer, 1986:21) It is also widely acknowledged that the indicative is the prototypical mood of matrix clauses with affirmative illocutionary force consistently across various languages.

As opposed to this, the subjunctive is crosslinguistically restricted to matrix clauses with a special illocutionary force, such as *optatives*:

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|-----|----------------------------|-------------------|
| (1) | Long live (SUBJ) the king! | (English) |
| (2) | Éljen a király! | (Hungarian) |
| | Long live (SUBJ) the king! | |
| (3) | Să crești mare. | (Romanian) |
| | May you grow (SUBJ) big. | (Farkas, 1985:76) |
- or *commands* and negative commands, i.e. prohibitions:
- | | | |
|-----|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| (4) | Lo dica pure! | (Italian) |
| | Go ahead and say (SUBJ) it! | (Portner, 1999:3) |
| (5) | ¡No me lo digas (SUBJ)! | (Spanish) |
| | Don't tell (SUBJ) me! | |
| (6) | Să nici nu-l mai vezi. | (Romanian) |
| | Don't even see (SUBJ) him again! | (Farkas, 1985:75) |

Although it may occur in matrix clauses, the main function of the subjunctive in many European languages is that of being ‘subordinate’, i.e. it is the mood typically used in complement clauses, as it is predicted by the etymology of the term *subjunctive* (<Latin *subiungere* (submit)), which is a translation of the Greek term *hypotaktikē* (subordinate).

According to Palmer (1986:127-128), basically three types of *complement clauses* can be differentiated. Crosslinguistically, the subjunctive may be found in each of these:

1. The subjunctive often appears in *adverbial clauses*, for example in counterfactual conditionals (as in English), and purpose clauses (as in Hungarian), just to mention a few. Due to lack of space I will not attempt to analyse this form now.

2. The second type of subordinate clause consists of *relative clauses*, where the triggering of the subjunctive is only optional. Since the subjunctive is never licensed in English or Hungarian relative clauses it will not concern us here.

3. Complement clauses belonging to the third group are introduced by a lexical predicate. The subjunctive is quite often licensed in such environments, and it is interesting to see how mood choice varies across languages, depending on the *matrix predicate*. In general, predicates tending to license the subjunctive in their complement clauses are directives, desideratives, and those expressing necessity and possibility:

- (7) I demand that Anna come (SUBJ) with us. (English)
- (8) Vreau ca Ana să vină cu noi. (Romanian)
I want Ana to come (SUBJ) with us. (Farkas, 1985:76)
- (9) Azt akarom, hogy Anna velünk jöjjön. (Hungarian)
I demand that Anna come (SUBJ) with us.
- (10) It is necessary that he come (SUBJ) with us. (English)
- (11) E necesar să vină cu noi. (Romanian)
It is necessary that he come (SUBJ) with us. (Farkas, 1985:81)
- (12) Szükséges, hogy velünk jöjjön. (Hungarian)
It is necessary that he come (SUBJ) with us.

With factive-emotive predicates and non-factive verbs of mental judgement we find somewhat greater variety across languages:

- (13) Ion e trist că Maria e bolnavă. (Romanian)
Ion is sad that Maria is (IND) sick. (Farkas, 2003:2)
- (14) Jean regrette que Marie est/soit mal. (French)
Jean regrets that Marie is (IND)/ (SUBJ) sick. (Farkas, 2003:2)
- (15) Mary believes that John wrote (IND) her. (English)
- (16) Maria crede că Ion i-a scris. (Romanian)
Maria believes that Ion wrote (IND) her. (Farkas, 2003:1)

- (17) Gianni crede che Maria sia partita. (Italian)
Gianni believes that Maria left (SUBJ). (Portner,
1999:5)

2. The imperative and its relation to the subjunctive across various languages

Imperative clauses can be used to issue orders, commands, demands, requests, threats, exhortations, permissions, concessions, warnings and advice, etc., and may take many forms crosslinguistically, such as an indicative, a subjunctive, or that of a morphologically distinct imperative mood.

Comparing the imperative with other moods, several *peculiar properties* can be found.

2.1. The imperative paradigm

If there is a morphologically distinct imperative mood in a given language, it tends to be unmarked or minimally marked even in highly inflected languages. In Latin, for instance, there are only two forms of the imperative, singular and plural, and the singular form is the only form identical with the bare stem:

- (18) Dic!

Speak.sg!

- (19) Dicite!

Speak.pl! (Palmer, 1986:29)

In other languages the imperative forms are often morphologically identical to that of the subjunctive. This is the case in Spanish, where three of the five available forms of the imperative are identical to the present forms of the subjunctive, the only exceptions being the second person imperative forms. In Italian, 'imperative' and subjunctive forms coincide, so Portner (1997:192) suggests that they are synchronically analysable as subjunctives.

The imperative usually exists only in present tense. The reason for this is quite clear: imperative speech acts do not commit the speaker to the truth of their propositional content (vs. assertions), they are instructions for action to be accomplished in the future, and attempt to shape the future actions of the addressee. The distribution of past time adverbs also reflects this 'future' aspect of the imperative (Huntley, 1984:114):

- (20) Do the job next week/*last week!

2.2. Imperative subjects

It is widely assumed that the imperative has only second person forms, sometimes this is even claimed to be a universal property of the imperative mood. For example, Lyons (1977:746-747) argues that imperatives can only be second person, and never third person. However, in Latin and Greek there are certain forms that are referred to as third person imperatives (but in neither of these languages can we find first person imperatives). There are even some languages having specific first and third person imperative forms for exhortation (cf. the English first person imperatives: *let me, let us*).

If we accept that the main function of the imperative is to give an instruction to the hearer, it is not surprising that in most languages we can find only second person imperatives. However, the hearer(s) can be addressed in less direct ways as well:

(21) Someone open the window!

(22) Joe and Mike stay here, the others go out!

As Palmer (1986:111) notes “speakers can also address themselves, treating themselves as hearers, so to speak:

Keep calm! (= I must keep calm)

But this raises no real issue – the speaker is both speaker and hearer and the 2nd person form is appropriate.”

In Hungarian, there is a first person singular form in the imperative paradigm, which is quite unusual, since in most languages this verb form is nonexistent. It is used in sentences expressing a wish or asking for permission.

2.3. Imperatives and negation

Imperative forms are negated in various ways in different languages. In several languages, for example in Latin, the subjunctive is used. An interesting phenomenon occurs in Spanish, where the imperative mood has two different second person verb forms, realised as a ‘true’ imperative or as a subjunctive, depending on the affirmative or negative structure of the sentence.

For instance (Haverkate, 2002:12),

(23) ¡Devuélvele el dinero mañana!

Give (IMP) him back the money tomorrow!

(24) ¡No le devuelvas el dinero mañana!

Don’t give (SUBJ) him back the money tomorrow!

2.4. Imperatives in embedded clauses

Understanding main clause imperatives is not possible without taking into consideration their embedded counterparts. Crosslinguistically, the imperative does not occur in subordinate clauses in most languages (cf. English, Spanish), but a deontic modal is possible:

(25) *I tell you that come tomorrow.

(26) I tell you that you must come tomorrow. (Palmer, 1986:113)

However, in direct speech we can meet the imperative in embedded clauses:

(27) My advice is – come tomorrow.

The above phenomenon can be explained by the fact that indirect speech often requires deictic shift from second person to third person, and if the imperative does not have third person forms in the language considered, then there is no form to be used in embedded clauses.

3. The subjunctive and the imperative mood in English

3.1. The subjunctive

The English subjunctive is a mere shadow of the subjunctive of other languages, it has three main functions (Quirk *et al*, 1985:76-77):

1. The *mandative subjunctive* seems to be related to the imperative, since they take the same form: the base in all persons. It appears subjectless in matrix clauses, where it is known as the imperative.

(28) Go home!

It also occurs embedded under certain matrix predicates expressing recommendation, resolution, demand such as *recommend*, *propose*, *suggest*, *insist*, *demand*, *require*, *urge*, *order*, *decree*, *dictate*, *command*, *direct*, *permit*, *request*, *ask*, *desire* etc. (Quirk *et al*, 1985:833-834) As an example consider the following sentence:

(29) I demanded that John go home.

2. The *formulaic subjunctive* also consists of the base, however it is used in certain set expressions:

(30) God save the Queen!

(31) So be it then!

3. The *counterfactual subjunctive* will not concern us here.

3.2 The English imperative

In English the imperative comprises the base form of the verb, without endings for number or tense, thus, it has the same form as the

mandative subjunctive. It is restricted with respect to tense, aspect, voice, and modality. There is no tense distinction or perfect aspect. First person imperatives can be formed by preposing the verb *let* followed by a subject:

(32) Let me have a look!

The same applies to third person subjects:

(33) Let him speak now. (Quirk *et al*, 1985:402-406)

3.3 Their relation

Imperatives, primarily associated with issuing an order, are strikingly similar to the complements of directives, where the embedded verb form is taken to be a subjunctive:

(34) (You) give me the book!

(35) I demand that you give me the book.

As Huntley (1984:108-109) notes that-clauses as complements of directives have a distinctive subjunctive form, compare:

(36) Bill asserted/said/stated that Mary will invite Joe.

Joe is allowed to drive.

*Mary invite Joe.

*Joe be allowed to drive.

(37) Bill demanded/ordered that *Mary will invite Joe.

*Joe is allowed to drive.

Mary invite Joe.

Joe be allowed to drive.

Note that the same verb form occurs in matrix imperatives and in their embedded counterparts. Subjectless imperatives do not appear as such in that-clauses.

However, the occurrence of these forms is not restricted to complements of directives, the subjunctive can express a more extensive sense of obligation than that associated with directives. As Portner (1999:4) argues,

(38) Rain soon!

expresses an order to a personified sky, but

(39) It is necessary that it rain soon.

conveys a human need. This difference might be related to the fact that the implied subject in root imperatives is always second person, indicating that the addressee is ordered to accomplish something, while the embedded subjunctive can take any subject. The meaning conveyed after directive predicates is 'ought to do', while after *necessary* it may be expressed as 'ought to be'.

Now the following question arises: is the English imperative a mood proper or just a form of the subjunctive? Comparing them we find that neither root imperatives, nor embedded forms allow the occurrence of modal verbs, but there is a difference with respect to word order in negative structures:

(40) I demand that you not give me the book.

(41) Don't (you) give me the book!

If we consider their semantics, another question arises: while the literal meaning of assertions is added to the common ground of the conversation, we cannot claim the same to be true of commands (Portner, 1997:167-168):

(42) I demand that you give me the book.

(43) (You) give me the book!

How are the above examples related to each other? Does (43) mean (42)? If yes, what is the relation between the meaning of the imperative and the meaning of the embedded subjunctive? And how can it be explained that commands have a different effect from assertions upon the discourse in which they occur?

4. The subjunctive in Hungarian

As it was mentioned before, the subjunctive comprises two morphologically identical moods in Hungarian: the *imperative* and the *subjunctive proper*, the two being differentiated only by the position of the preverb (cf. É. Kiss *et al*, 1998:141-142) For this reason in what follows I will not treat them separately. The Hungarian subjunctive has a full present tense paradigm.

As Tompa (1962:34-36) observes the subjunctive is used in matrix imperative clauses to express a direct or an indirect command, request, advice, permission, or exhortation. The command expressed by the imperative speech act is direct if the hearer is the doer, (first or second persons, and third person (formal addressing)), it is indirect when the hearer is not identical with the doer (only third person forms). Imperatives may have a first person subject, such sentences usually express a wish or asking for permission.

The subjunctive in matrix clauses may also have an optative meaning:

(44) Legyen már tavasz!

May it be (SUBJ) spring!

Imperative speech acts may also be expressed with embedded clauses containing a subjunctive verb form, where the matrix predicate has a

directive meaning. The subjunctive also appears embedded under desiservatives, volitives, rational evaluation predicates, permissives and purposives. For example:

(45) Követeltem, hogy adja ide a könyvet.

I demanded that he give (SUBJ) me the book.

The embedded clauses show a number of similarities to root imperatives: they usually express a command, wish or permission, and they tend to be posterior, thus, they do not describe a present state of affairs, but express only possibilities, desired or demanded alternatives to the present state of affairs.

5. A semantic explanation

As we have seen above there exists a strong parallelism between root imperative clauses and embedded subjunctives in both languages. For example, in English, imperative meaning is closely related to that of the mandative subjunctive.

We can notice that the kinds of subjunctives examined here (optative, mandative and the imperative) share a sense of ‘desirability’. This general sense can be further specified: while an optative subjunctive has the sense of ‘this ought to be’, a mandative (paralleling the imperative) has a meaning like ‘x ought to do this.’ (Portner, 1992:160-163) In Hungarian the subjunctive occurs in similar environments and seems to have the same core meaning (though it is licensed in other environments, too, for example in purpose clauses, but these would reveal similar characteristics).

The semantic characterization of the subjunctive mood also helps us to understand its syntactic distribution, for example the fact that the subjunctive appears across various languages embedded under directives (*order*), and desideratives (*want, wish*). It would be a welcome result to be able to predict the mood of the embedded clause on the basis of semantic (and perhaps some other) factors.

Mood difference can also signal meaning difference. If we consider a predicate that allows two moods in its subordinate clause, it is obvious that there are no syntactic or other grammatical factors that could explain change of mood in the subordinate clause. Thus, it seems to be right to suppose that there is semantic motivation behind mood choice and mood variation in the complement clause. If each predicate governed only one mood, we could argue that mood choice in subordinate clauses is governed lexically, i.e. certain lexical features of the verb that are listed in the lexicon define which mood is grammatical. However, as we will see soon, some predicates allow their subordinate clause to be in more than one grammatical mood, and

lexical features alone cannot explain this fact. As Farkas (1992b:70) notes the meaning of the verb may change with a change of mood in the embedded clause. For example, it is well known that predicates expressing communicative acts shift their meaning while licensing a different mood in their embedded clause.

- (46) Mondtam Péternek, hogy elmegyek a bálba.
I told to Peter that I would go (IND) to the ball.
(47) Mondtam Péternek, hogy menjen el a bálba.
I told Peter to go (SUBJ) to the ball.

In the first case *mond* is a declarative, it reports an earlier assertion, while in the second case *mond* is a directive, it reports an order.

We can meet the same phenomenon in various languages. For example, in English, depending on the epistemic or deontic uses of ‘insist’, different mood is licensed in the subordinate clause. (Huntley, 1984:118) Consider the following:

- (48) I insist that John is having dinner.
(49) I insist that John have dinner.

Thus, mood variation in complement clauses can be explained on the basis of the semantic behaviour of the matrix predicate: some predicates may belong to more than one semantically motivated classes, and may take different complements.

As we have seen, negation may affect the verb form used in matrix imperatives, this is the case in Spanish for example. Negation of the main verb may also influence mood choice in its complement clause, which provides further evidence in favour of a semantic analysis. Consider the following examples:

- (50) Lehetséges, hogy időben hazaér/*hazaérjen.
It is possible that he will arrive (IND)/(SUBJ) on time.
(51) Nem lehetséges, hogy időben hazaér/hazaérjen.
It is not possible that he will arrive (IND)/(SUBJ) on time.

6. Summary

The present analysis dealing with the distribution of the subjunctive and the imperative in English and Hungarian aimed to reach a better understanding of the semantics of the moods in question. We have seen that there seems to be a semantic parallelism between root imperatives and embedded subjunctives in both languages, the main function of the subjunctive being that of expressing possibilities, demanded or desired alternatives to the present state of affairs. It has been shown that semantic factors influence the distribution of moods, thus, the semantic

characterisation of the subjunctive mood helps us to understand its syntactic distribution, which, in turn, could be utilised for example in second language teaching.

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