In the Cause of Subjunctive

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0. Introduction

The question most systematically addressed in the work on subjunctive mood concerns the trigger of this morphosyntactic category. The relevant literature usually resorts to different semantic-pragmatic labels in order to establish a taxonomy of interpretations typically determined by the triggering predicate/operator (volitional/optative, dubitative, etc.). However, treating the subjunctive as a uniform morphosyntactic object (pace Kempchinsky 1986, 1990, a.o.) has not helped elucidate the formal properties the theory of grammar should account for. Building on work by Stowell 1993, it is argued in this paper that two formally distinct sorts of subjunctive have to be identified in Romance: INTENSIO-NAL SUBJUNCTIVE (e.g. triggered by an intensional verb like ‘want’) and POLARI-TY SUBJUNCTIVE (e.g. licensed by a matrix negation or a Question operator). While the former has often taken to be the the ‘core’ case (Picallo 1985), the latter has mainly come to the fore in connection with the syntax of Tense and NPI-licensing (Stowell 1993, Uribe-Etxebarria 1994, Brugger and D’Angelo 1994). Here I will elaborate on the properties that tease these two classes apart, and concentrate on the intensional subjunctive: the hypothesis is motivated that its characteristics derive from the causation component occurring in the trigger, either as a function in the lexical semantics of the predicate selecting it or as a consequence of the CAUSE head present in the structure.

1. Subjunctive Types and Tense

A standard observation about the behaviour of subjunctive complement clauses in Romance is that they display tense restrictions imposed by the tense of the selecting predicate. The contrast under (1) from Catalan illustrates this point: PAST subjunctive under a PRESENT matrix verb yields an ungrammatical result, as in (1b), whereas PRESENT under PRESENT is unproblematic, as in (1a).

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(1)  a  Vull que acabi la tesi
want.PRS.1SG that finish.SUB.PRS.3SG the dissertation
'I want her/him to finish the dissertation.'

b  *Vull que acabés la tesi
want.PRS.1SG that finish.SUB.PST.3SG the dissertation

The same observation has been often claimed to hold for the opposite pattern, that is PAST under PAST gives a grammatical result (see (2a)), but PRESENT under PAST would lead to ungrammaticality (see (2b)). Yet, the observation based on this judgement must be questioned, as shown in Quer 1995. Here I will simply assume that the only valid tense restriction for subjunctive complements is the one exemplified in (1), namely *PRESENT [PAST].

(2)  a  Volia que acabés la tesi
want.PST.3SG that finish.SUB.PST.1SG the dissertation
'S/he wanted me to finish the dissertation.'

b  (*)Volia que acabi la tesi
want.PST.3SG that finish.SUB.PRS.1SG the dissertation

On the basis of a contrast like the one under (1) it has been argued that the selecting predicates impose tense restrictions on the subjunctive complement. This type of evidence would indicate that subjunctive clauses lack real tense specification and are in some sense anaphoric to an indicative, referential tense (see e.g. Picallo 1985). This anaphoric dependency would surface in a sort of "tense agreement" requirement.

Nevertheless, it has also been noted in the literature (Suñer and Padilla-Rivera 1985, 1990) that this cannot be true for the whole class of subjunctive complements. The empirical counterevidence usually comes from subjunctive triggered for instance by negation (see (3a-b)) in the complement of predicates that otherwise select for indicative (see (3c-d)):

(3)  a  No recorda que en Miquel treballi de nit
not remember.PRS.3SG that the Miquel work.SUB.PRS.3SG of night
'S/he doesn't remember that Miquel works at night.'

b  No recorda que en Miquel treballés de nit
not remember.PRS.3SG that the Miquel work.SUB.PST.3SG of night
'S/he doesn't remember that Miquel worked at night.'

c  *Recordo que en Miquel treballi de nit
remember.PRS.1SG that the Miquel work.SUB.PRS.3SG of night
'I remember that Miquel works at night.'

d  Recordo que en Miquel treballa de nit
remember.PRS.1SG that the Miquel work.IND.PRS.3SG of night
'I remember that Miquel works at night.'
As (3b) makes clear, a subjunctive PAST tense can appear under a matrix PRESENT in this case. Consequently, the conclusion drawn from the opposition in (1) cannot be extended to all the subjunctive structures.

Relying on these basic facts and following Kempchinsky’s work, Stowell proposes to distinguish basically between two types of subjunctive: (a) an intensional subjunctive (IS), typically embedded under an intensional predicate of the kind exemplified in (1-2); (b) a polarity subjunctive (PS), which is triggered by sentential operators like negation or a Q(uestion) operator, (3) being an instance of negation-triggered subjunctive. In the present paper I will concentrate on the former class, the IS. In the next section I present the rest of the properties that motivate the IS/PS divide.

2. Intensional vs. Polarity Subjunctive

The main properties which give rise to the bifurcation intensional/polarity subjunctive are the following:

(i) IS, unlike PS, displays the tense restriction *PRESENT [PAST], as discussed in the previous section.

(ii) IS does not alternate with indicative (compare (4) with (1-2)), whereas PS does (compare (5) with (3a,b)):

(4) *Vull que acabà/va acabar/acabava/acabarà la tesi
    want.PRS.1SG that finish.IND.PRS/PST/IMPF/FUT.3SG the dissertation

(5) No recorda que en Miquel treballà/va treballar/treballava/treballarà de nit
    not remember.PRS.3SG that the Miquel work.IND.PRS/PST/IMPF/FUT.3SG of night
    ‘S/he doesn’t remember that Miquel works/worked/will work at night.’

(iii) IS is triggered only in the immediately embedded clause (cf. (6a) V [ SUB [ IND ] ] vs. (6b) * V [ SUB [ SUB [ SUB ] ]], while PS can be licensed in consecutively embedded complements (cf. (7a) V [ SUB [ IND ] ] vs. (7b) V [ SUB [ SUB [ SUB ] ]]), the so-called domino effect. The example (6b) is ruled out because the mostly embedded subjunctive is not licensed by the matrix intensional predicate, as opposed to the example (7b), where matrix negation licenses successive instances of polarity subjunctive.

2 In this paper I will maintain Stowell’s original terminology despite the fact that the term “intensional” will turn out to be inappropriate for the characterisation of the triggering factor, as will become clear in the discussion below.
(6) a Vull [que creguin [que ens agrada]]
    want.1SG that think.SUB.3SG that us please.IND.3SG
    'I want them to think we like it.'
    
    b *Vull [que creguin[que ens agradi/agradés/hagi agradat]]
    want.1SG that think.SUB.3SG that us please.SUB.PRS/PST/PFT.3SG

(7) a No crec [que pensi [que li convé]]
    not believe.1SG that think.SUB.3SG that him be-convenient.IND.3SG
    'I don’t believe s/he thinks it’s convenient for him/her.'
    
    b No crec [que pensi [que li convingui]]
    not believe.1SG that think.SUB.3SG that him be-convenient.SUB.3SG
    'I don’t believe s/he thinks it’s convenient for him/her.'

(iv) Embedded subjunctive clauses of the intensional sort tend to display disjoint
    reference effects between their subjects and the matrix ones (see (8a)), also known
    as obviation effects. This is probably the phenomenon that has received most
    attention in the literature on subjunctive. The subject disjoint reference effect does
    not generally surface with PS (see (8b)).

(8) a *Vull proi [que la convidi proi]
    want.1SG that her invite.SUB.1SG
    
    b No crec proi [que la convidi proi]
    not think.1SG that her invite.SUB.1SG
    'I don’t think I will invite her.'

These are the four formal properties that distinguish the two subjunctive types.

A quick consideration of these properties might suggest that the divide IS/PS
    could correlate with lexically selected vs. operator licensed subjunctive. As argued
    in Quer 1995, though, this generalisation is refuted at least in one direction: the
    properties of PS can also be detected when it occurs under predicates which seem
    to “lexically select” it, like dubtar ‘doubt’ or negar ‘deny’, for instance. Observe
    (9):

(9) a Nega [que en Miquel pugui acabar la tesi]
    deny.PRS.3SG that the Miquel can.SUB.PRS.3SG finish the dissertation
    'S/he denies that Miquel will be able to finish the dissertation.'
    
    b Nega [que en Miquel acabés la tesi]
    deny.PRS.3SG that the Miquel finish.SUB.PST.3SG the dissertation
    'S/he denies that Miquel finished the dissertation.'
    
    c Nega [que en Miquel ha acabat la tesi]
    deny.PRS.3SG that the Miquel finish.IND.PSTPFCT.3SG the dissertation
    'S/he denies that Miquel has finished the dissertation.'
d Nega [que en Miquel pensi [que la seva proposta els pugui convèncer ]] deny.PRS.3SG that the Miquel think.SUB.PRS.3SG that the his proposal them can.SUB.3SG convince
'S/he denies that Miquel thinks that his proposal might convince them.'
e Nega pro, [ que sigui pro, pessimista ] deny.PRS.3SG that be.SUB.PRS.3SG pessimistic
'S/he denies that s/he is pessimistic.'

On the other hand, IS can be traced in contexts where direct lexical selection cannot be easily defended, as in the case of subjunctive Relative Clauses, but we will put the analysis of these cases aside.

In this paper I would like to argue that the category identified as IS has to be reinterpreted as a subtype of subjunctive triggered by the causation component present either in the lexical semantics of the selecting predicates or in the structure as a CAUSE head.

3. Intensional Subjunctive as a Consequence of CAUSE

The discussion about the properties of IS remains usually limited to a certain amount of verbs that can be characterised as volitional or influence predicates, like ‘want’, ‘wish’, ‘order’, etc. (see for instance Kempchinsky 1986). Yet, the class of verbs that can be shown to take subjunctive complements of the intensional type is much wider. Consider for example the predicate fer ‘make’ in Catalan, which, next to the infinitival, can take a finite subjunctive clause: it displays the four properties of IS reviewed in section 2.

(i) Tense restriction *PRESENT[PAST]:

(10) a Fas que marxi abans d'hora make.2SG that leave.SUB.PRS.3SG before of-time
    'You make her/him leave earlier.'
    b *Fas que marxés abans d'hora make.2SG that leave.SUB.PST.3SG before of-time

(ii) No alternation with indicative:

(11) *Fas que marxa/va marxar/marxava/marxarà abans d'hora
    make.2SG that leave.IND.PRS/PST/IMPF/FUT.3SG before of-time

(iii) Subjunctive triggered only in the immediately embedded clause:
(12) a Fas [ que pensi [ que li convé ]]
makesub2sg that think.sub3sg that him/her be-convenient.ind3sg
'You make her/him think that it’s convenient for her/him.'

b *Fas [ que pensi [ que li convingui ]]
makesub2sg that think.sub3sg that him/her be-convenient.sub3sg

(iv) Disjoint reference effect between matrix and embedded subjects:

(13) *Fas pro, que marxis pro, abans d’hora
makesub2sg that leave.prs2sg before of-time

The predicate fer ‘make’ can be regarded as the lexicalisation of the function CAUSE, which here takes a finite clausal complement, yielding a periphrastic or analytic causative structure. The crucial empirical generalisation that has remained unnoticed so far is that the majority of the predicates embedding an IS can be shown to belong to what Jackendoff (1993) calls "the family of causative concepts", that is, predicates whose conceptual structure include CAUSE as one of their basic ingredients. Jackendoff (1990, 1993) develops fine grained conceptual structures for a wide range of verbs that involve the notion of causation in one sense or another. The hypothesis defended in the present paper is that the distribution and properties of IS derive from the causative component of the predicates that select it.

Although it might not be self-evident that many of the predicates in question are causative, Jackendoff’s (1990, 1993) analysis of their conceptual structures shows that their meaning is crucially structured around the notion of causation. Following Talmy (1988), he subsumes causation under a broader system of force-dynamic concepts that involve the interaction of two characters, the agonist and the antagonist. He pushes the notion of causation far beyond the physical domain. See for instance his representation of the conceptual structure of the verb try:³

³ Jackendoff resorts to a Thematic tier and an Action tier; in causative concepts the Thematic tier is realised by a CAUSE function with different parameters like success/failure/undetermined outcome. Further distinctions, like Event vs. State in the Action tier, for instance, help classify a wide range of predicates encoding causation in one way or another and get their meaning structured in highly articulated conceptual structures.
(14) Harry tried to go away

\[
\text{CS}^u ([\textit{HARRY}], \text{GO} ([\textit{HARRY}], [\textit{AWAY}]) ) \\
\text{AFF} ([\textit{HARRY}], )
\]

\[
\text{AFF} ([\textit{HARRY}], )
\]

[Jackendoff 1990: 132]

Among the predicates Jackendoff discusses, those taking a finite clausal complement systematically select an IS in Catalan and Spanish. Let us examine some of his classes.

(a) Clear causatives: \textit{forçar} ‘to force,’ \textit{impedir} ‘to prevent,’ \textit{evitar} ‘to avoid,’ \textit{aconseguir} ‘to manage,’ \textit{intentar} ‘to try.’

(15) Ens van \textit{forçar} que abandonéssim l’edifici
us AUX.3PL force that abandon.SUB.PST.1PL the-building
‘They forced us to abandon the building.’

(16) Vam \textit{evitar}/\textit{aconseguir}/\textit{intentar} que abandonessin l’edifici
AUX.1PL force that abandon/manage/try.SUB.PST.3PL the-building
‘We avoided/managed/tryd that they abandoned the building.’

(b) Verbs of helping and letting: \textit{ajudar} ‘to help,’ \textit{contribuir} ‘to contribute,’ \textit{deixar} ‘to let,’ \textit{permetre} ‘to allow.’

(17) L’escàndol \textit{contribuirà} que sigui reelegit
the-scandal contribute.FUT.3SG that be.SUB.3SG reelected
‘The scandal will help him be reelected.’

(18) Em \textit{va deixar}/\textit{permetre} que l’abracés
me AUX.3SG let/allow that him-hug.SUB.PST.3SG
‘He let me hug him.’

(c) Verbs of logical relations: \textit{excloure} ‘to preclude’.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{4} This class constitutes a problem for the proposal, since some of the predicates analysed by Jackendoff as "verbs of logical relations" do select the indicative. Provisorily I will put this difficulty aside.
(19) *La teva actitud exclou que puguem ser amics*  
the your attitude preclude.PRS.3SG that can.SUB.PRS.1PL be friends  
'Your attitude precludes that we can be friends.'

(d) Experiencer verbs: Object Experiencer verbs like *agradar* 'to please, appeal to,' *molestar* 'to bother,' *espantár/fer por* 'to frighten, scare,' *importar* 'to matter,' *sorprendre* 'to surprise,' and Subject Experiencer verbs like *odiar* 'to hate', *tèmer* 'to fear.'

(20) *M'agrada que em miris*  
me.DAT-apeal.3SG that me.ACC look.SUB.PRS.2SG  
'I like you to look at me.'

(21) *Li molesta que entris sense trucar*  
her/him.DAT bother.3SG that come-in.SUB.PRS.2SG without knock  
'It bothers her/him that you come in without knocking at the door.'

To these classes we should add volitionals (*voler* 'to want,' *preferir* 'to prefer'), directives (*ordenar* 'to order'), modals (*caldre* 'must;' cf. Rigau 1996), and semi-modals (*necessitar* 'to need'), the prototypical selectors of IS. Quite naturally, these predicates can be characterised also as "causative concepts."

(22) *Prefereix que li escriguis*  
prefer.3SG that him/her write.SUB.PRS.2SG  
'S/he prefers that you write her/him.'

(23) *Ens van ordenar que ens despulléssim*  
us AUX.3PL order thar REFL undress.SUB.PST.1PL  
'They ordered us to undress.'

(24) *Cal que el vestim*  
must.3SG that him dress.SUB.PRS.1PL  
'We have to dress him.'

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5 Jackendoff (1990:140) conceives the Experiencer "as the person affected by the State or Event, that is, as a kind of Patient". But Subject Experiencer verbs do no receive a causative analysis in the more syntactically oriented literature (for extensive discussion and references, see Pesestky 1995 and Anagnostopoulou 1996). However, although he does not provide a Thematic tier for these predicates, Jackendoff thinks of them "as giving the subject reaction to the stimulus" and postulates the occurrence of the function REACT in their action tier, which canonically maps the Patient into subject position.
(25) Necessito que m’ajudis
  need.1SG that me-help.SUB.PRS.3SG
  ‘I need you to help me.’

Although I will not commit myself to the specific details of Jackendoff’s analysis,
I will crucially rely on his characterisation of the sets of predicates mentioned
above as involving causation. What we gain with this move is a unified account
of the properties of the IS: each one of the properties characterising IS can be
naturally derived from a causative analysis to a larger or a smaller extent:

(i) Tense restriction *PRESENT [PAST]: the subjunctive complement of the caus­
avative predicate is by necessity posterior to event time of the matrix tense. A PAST
tense embedded under a matrix PRESENT would imply that the "caused" eventu­
ality should be anterior to the "causing" event, a contradictory situation in itself.

(ii) No alternation with indicative: given that the subjunctive is lexically selected
by the causative predicate, no mood alternation is possible. The caused eventuality
has to be expressed as a modalised/irrealis proposition, a function that the
subjunctive can, but the indicative cannot, perform. Since PS typically arises as
the result of licensing rather than as a selectional requirement, it can alternate
with indicative unless the latter is anti-licensed.

(iii) Triggering exclusively in the immediately embedded clause: although it is not
obvious why this should be so, it could be related to the lexically selected
character of IS. Since lexical selection is local, it is not expected to affect
multiply embedded CPs. By contrast, the occurrence of PS should be seen as a
case of "licensing" by an operator, a less local relation in itself.

(iv) Disjoint Reference Effect of the subject: this restriction affects the matrix and
embedded subjects when the complement is finite (the subject PRO of an infiniti­
val, often the alternative realisation of the complement, can be controled by the
matrix subject). Several attempts to derive this effect from an extension of the
binding domain to the matrix clause (Picallo 1985, Kempchinsky 1986) fail to
cover the most conspicuous counterexamples. Though not an answer, the right
generalisation to be put forth is that the subject of the matrix causative predicate
cannot be in control of the caused eventuality, which looks more like a semantic
restriction than a syntactic one (see Ruwet 1984, Farkas 1988, 1992). The choice
of the infinitival over the subjunctive when matrix and embedded subjects are
coreferential must be attributed to some sort of Blocking Rule, as in Farkas 1992.
Be that as it may, these sketchy remarks will have to be made precise in future
work.
4. Double Mood Selection

A recurrent problem in the theories on subjunctive mood is posed by verbs of saying and communicative acts (dir ‘to say,’ demanar ‘to ask,’ insistir ‘to insist,’ escriure ‘to write,’ recordar ‘to remind’): they are able to take CP complements both in indicative and in subjunctive. Mood variation implies slight changes in the meaning of the predicate. For instance, the verb dir ‘to say’ with an indicative complement is used to report a statement, as in (26a), but when it takes a subjunctive CP it reports a command, as in (26b):

(26) a Diu que t'enyora
    say.3SG that you-miss.IND.3SG
    ‘S/he says that s/he misses you.’

       b Diu que lí escrigus
    say.3SG that her/him write.SUB.PRS.2SG
    ‘S/he tells you to write her/him.’

Interestingly, the subjunctive variant possesses the four properties that identify IS:

(27) a Insisteix que el deixi/*deixés
    insist.PRS.3SG that him leave.SUB.PRS/*PST.1SG
    ‘He insists that I leave him.’

       b Insisteix que té raó
    insist.PRS.3SG that have.IND.3SG right
    ‘S/he insists that s/he is right.’

       c Insisteix que creguem que té/*tingui raó
    insist.PRS.3SG that believe.SUB.PRS.1PL that
    have.IND/*SUB.PRS.3SG right
    ‘S/he insists that we believe s/he is right.’

       d *Insisteix pro_i que guanyi pro_i
    insist.PRS.3SG that win.SUB.PRS.3SG

This constitutes an obvious problem for theories like Kempchinsky’s 1986 that claim that the appearance of volitional subjunctive (‘intensional subjunctive’ in our terms) is a matter of lexical selection (in her analysis, lexical selection of an embedded imperative operator): such a position would force us unavoidably into a duplication of the lexical entries of those predicates with double mood selection. This seems to be an undesirable result.

I would like to claim that verbs of saying and communicative acts with a subjunctive CP actually take a Small Cause (SC) complement. The SC is headed by CAUSE, as represented schematically in (28):
The complement of CAUSE is again a Small Clause structure YP, and the subjunctive CP appears in it. Since most of these verbs are potentially triadic predicates, we can tentatively postulate that the optionally overt Dative argument is sitting in the Specifier of YP, the complement of CAUSE. But what is YP? YP encodes the state of affairs brought about (or rather meant to be brought about) by the matrix "causer" in which an eventuality is predicated of a subject, either an explicit dative DP or an implicit PRO. Y could be understood as an abstract preposition of central coincidence in Hale and Keyser's 1993 terms. It seems very plausible to me, though, that the structure involved in these constructions is more complex than suggested here, but for the purposes of the present discussion I will put those complexities aside.

An account along these lines has the advantage of dealing easily with the meaning variations of the predicates: semantic compositionality will tackle the combination of CAUSE plus the verb of saying, which yields the directive interpretation linked to the appearance of IS.

5. Conclusions

In this paper a formal distinction between two sorts of subjunctive (Intensity and Polarity Subjunctive) has been motivated on the basis of four formal properties. On an empirical level, it has been shown that the class of predicates selecting IS is actually wider than normally assumed in the literature and it must to include several groups of predicates involving causation in their lexical semantics. On a

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theoretical level, it has been argued that it is precisely the causative component present in those predicates what triggers this type of subjunctive component. The analysis allows us to derive the properties of IS from causation in a natural fashion. In addition to this, the hypothesis has been extended to a paradigm of mood alternations with verbs of saying and communicative acts by postulating a CAUSE head for the cases where those predicates take an IS in their complements. In this way, the triggering of IS is reduced to a single source: CAUSE, occurring either in the semantics of the selecting predicate or in the structure.

References

Kempchinsky, P. (1986) Romance Subjunctive Clauses and Logical Form, PhD dissertation, UCLA.