

Not just Gradability – Explaining the Subjunctive in factive contexts

Analysis of mood in formal semantics (Farkas 1992, Giannakidou 1999, Godard 2012, Giannakidou & Mari 2016, a.o.) pursued the idea that Subjunctive occurs in those sentences whose interpretation requires the consideration of *p*-worlds (i.e. worlds where *p* is true) together with non-*p* worlds, thus observing a similarity between conditions for the Subjunctive and conditions for the use of modal expressions. This idea explains a large amount of data concerning the distribution of mood in several languages, but the occurrence of Subjunctive in sentences describing facts is a matter devoted to debate. The following contexts where Subjunctive is obligatory in European Portuguese (EP) though the sentence with this mood describes a fact will be considered: argument clauses of factive predicates (1), complement clauses of predicates expressing necessary or sufficient condition (2), concessive clauses (3):

- (1) a. lamento que {*estás_{-IND} / estejas_{-SUBJ}} doente
‘I regret that you’re ill’
b. é normal que eles {*estão_{-IND} / estejam_{-SUBJ}} tristes
‘It’s normal that they are sad’
c. surpreende-me que {*está_{-IND} / esteja_{-SUBJ}} a chover
‘I’m surprised that it’s raining’
- (2) a. foi preciso que {*veio_{-IND}/viesses_{-SUBJ}} maio para que {*choveu_{-IND}/chovesse_{-SUBJ}}
‘It didn’t rain until may’
b. bastou que {*choveu_{-IND} / chovesse_{-SUBJ}} um pouco para o trânsito ficar caótico
‘it only took a little rain for the traffic to become chaotic’
- (3) temos um carro, embora {*tem_{-IND} / tenha_{-SUBJ}} pouca gasolina
‘We have a car, although it’s low on gas.’

Of these, (1) is the most studied case in the literature, the selection of subjunctive having been explained by a comparative semantics analysis (Villalta 2008, Godard 2012, Giannakidou & Mari 2016, a.o.). However, the assumption that all predicates that select the Subjunctive impose an ordering relation (leading to comparison of alternatives), contrary to the ones that select the Indicative is questionable: (i) it is unclear that subjunctive rulers as, e.g., *contrariar* (‘to upset’) impose some ordering relation, but, e.g., the Indicative ruler *confessar* (‘to confess’), which indicates preference for not saying *p*, does not; (ii) the predicates in (4) impose an ordering relation of *normalcy*, thus selecting the Subjunctive, but the assertion of (5), with Indicative, is grounded on the same kind of reasoning, based on normalcy:

- (4) é {normal / provável} que {*vai_{-IND} / vá_{-SUBJ}} haver greve
‘it’s likely that there will be a strike’
- (5) é {óbvio / claro / evidente} que {vai_{-IND} / *vá_{-SUBJ}} haver greve
‘it’s {obvious / clear / evident} that there will be a strike’

Data from EP also leads to question the proposal that gradability is the trigger of Subjunctive in (1), as proposed by Villalta 2008, Giannakidou & Mari 2021, a.o., given that (unlike in Spanish, according to Villalta) *estar seguro / confiante* (‘to be sure / confident’) have the same properties of gradability as predicates that select the Subjunctive (6), and that other gradable predicates (e.g., *acreditar* ‘to believe’) accept both the Indicative and the Subjunctive (7):

- (6) estou mais seguro / confiante de que ele {ganha_{-IND} / *ganhe_{-SUBJ}} que de que perde
‘I’m more sure / confident that he will win than that he won’t’

- (7) a Maria acredita que ele {está_{IND} / esteja_{SUBJ}} doente
 ‘Mary believes that he is / might be ill’

The proposal will be made that factive predicates that select the Subjunctive include different subclasses, the meaning of all of them leading to the consideration of $\neg p$ worlds, but for different reasons. Predicates which describe a mental state, such as *lamentar* (‘to regret’) – argument grid $x V$ that p –, involve a bouletic ordering, and adjectival predicates (e.g., *be normal / fair*), which classify a situation, involve the ordering relation denoted by the adjective (e.g., *normal / strange* introduce a stereotypical ordering, *fair* introduces a deontic ordering, ...). These are the cases where Subjunctive selection is explainable by comparative semantics. As for predicates which describe an event – argument grid $that p V x$ –, such as, e.g., *to surprise*, the verb expresses a causal relation between the denotation of their arguments (e.g., *it irritates me that the dog is barking* means that the barking of the dog causes irritation on the speaker), causality, I claim, being the key factor for Subjunctive. Since A causes B means that if A were not the case, all the rest being the same, B would not be the case (Lewis 1973, Salmon 1998, a.o.), the meaning of these predicates also leads to consider $\neg p$ worlds and, therefore, to the selection of Subjunctive. Likewise, counterfactual reasoning also explains the selection of Subjunctive in (2). To say that *p was necessary for q* means that *p* and *q* hold in *w*, and every $\neg p$ world similar to *w* is a $\neg q$ world (i.e., if *p* were not the case, then *q* would not be true); *p was sufficient for q* means that if *p* were not the case, *q* might not be true. This explanation is more robust than competitive analyses. Godard 2012 proposes that the predicates in (2) select the Subjunctive for pragmatic reasons, linked to the expectation that there may be an agent who believes that $\neg p$ is possible. Such hypothesis would predict that adversative conjunctions were also Subjunctive rulers, contrary to what is observed:

- (8) temos um carro, mas {está_{IND} / *esteja_{SUBJ}} avariado
 ‘we have a car, but it is broken’

By contrast, concessive conjunctions are Subjunctive rulers (3), though their meaning is close to the one of adversative conjunctions, both expressing denial of expectations that follow from the joined proposition. The claim will be made that concessive and adversative clauses have, respectively, the following Context Change Potentials:

Given a context *c*, propositions *p* and *q*, such that *p* implicates *r* and *q* implicates $\neg r$,

(7) $c + (p \text{ mas } q) = c'$, such that $c' \in [[p]]$ & $c' \in [[q]]$ & $c' \in [[\neg r]]$

(8) $c + (p \text{ embora } q) = c'$, such that $c' \in [[p]]$ & $c' \in [[q]]$ & $(c' \cap [[\neg r]]) \neq \emptyset$

That is, *p mas q* (‘*p* but *q*’) removes from the context set every *r*-world, whereas *p embora q* (‘*p* although *q*’) removes some, not necessarily all, *r*-worlds. Thus, the assertion of *p embora q* creates a context that contains at least one world where the implicature of *q* does not hold, while the assertion of *p mas q* creates a context that contains only worlds where the implicature of *q* holds. Thus, the picture emerges that in EP the Subjunctive occurs in those contexts that lead to the consideration of words where the proposition is false or where an inference that follows from it does not hold.

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