

USES OF THE SUBJUNCTIVE AND OPTATIVE, OR.. MAY AND MIGHT ARE FOR WIMPS

When you have identified a form as a subjunctive or an optative, your first step in deciding what the use of that mood 'means' is to decide whether you are dealing with an 'independent' use (as found in main clauses) or a 'dependent' use (as found in subordinate clauses). While SUBJ and OPT are both used more frequently in subordinate clauses, here I will start with uses you will find in main clauses.

USE OF THE SUBJUNCTIVE IN MAIN CLAUSES

Three main uses:

- **HORTATORY:** Let us ..
- **PROHIBITIVE:** Do NOT..
- **DELIBERATIVE:** Shall I..? What are we to do?
- Much rarer: emphatic denials, doubtful assertions. Mastronarde p. 237, s. 3c; Smyth 1801, 1804.
- When a negation is used, it is always **μή** or a compound with **μή**; **μηδείς** 'nobody', **μηδέν** 'nothing', **μήποτε** 'never', **μηκέτι**, 'no longer', etc.

It is helpful to realize that particular persons are associated with these individual uses:

First plural: hortatory "Let's" or deliberative "Shall we?";

Second sg, pl: prohibitive "Don't" [or third: e.g., "Let nobody.." "Let him/her not.."];

First sg, pl: deliberative "Shall I?", "What are we to do?".

USE OF THE OPTATIVE IN MAIN CLAUSES

Two main uses:

- **OPTATIVE OF WISH (CUPITIVE):** "I wish X .." "Would that X.." "May X"
 - Negative: **μή** or a compound with **μή** - Like main clause subjunctives, this use of the optative is not saying something about the world, but trying to change the world.
 - Sometimes the particles **εἴθε** or **εἰ γάρ** are used at the start of the wish clause.
- **POTENTIAL OPTATIVE:** Always with particle **ἄν** "X could/would happen"
 - Negative: **οὐ** or a compound with **οὐ** - The potential optative is not trying to change the world, but saying something about events likely or unlikely to happen in it. It takes the same negative as the indicative mood.

Note: Useless wishes: Often, wishes are used for things that can obviously not become true, for example, when you write a postcard from Hawaii saying "Wish you were here" or when you suppress a sigh and say "I wish I were born in the age of Perikles". For such wishes, which are impossible to realize, Greek does *not* use the optative, but a **secondary indicative** instead. These too are accompanied by **εἴθε** or **εἰ γάρ**.

USE OF THE SUBJUNCTIVE IN DEPENDENT CLAUSES

SUBJUNCTIVE WITHOUT AN

- **PURPOSE CLAUSES:**

- ἵνα, ὅπως, ὥς + SUBJ "In order to"
- (ἵνα, ὅπως, ὥς) μή + SUBJ "In order that ..not"

- **FEAR CLAUSES:**

After expressions of fearing, danger, and the like:

- **μή** + SUBJ = (Fear) **that** something will happen

Note: Greek syntax requires it, but μή does not get translated!

Note: other anxieties: Polite expressions such as "I'm afraid that I've forgotten to bring my books today" take μή + INDICATIVE. To express that you are afraid to do something ("I'm afraid to tell her what I really think"), Greek, like English, uses the infinitive.

- **DELIBERATIVE INDIRECT QUESTIONS:**

The deliberative subjunctive occurs in subordinate clauses as well, after verbs or other expressions in the main clause like: ask, wonder, uncertainty: I wonder, I don't know, etc. "what I am to do" "how I am to answer this question". Indirect yes/no questions will be introduced by εἰ 'if'/'whether':

οὐκ οἶδα εἰ τοῦτο ποιήσω - I don't know if I should do this.

ἐρωτᾷ εἰ στρατεύηται ἐπ' αὐτούς- He asks if he should campaign against them.

Note to Latinists: The subjunctive is *not* used when the question involved is simply factual, e.g.: I wonder "what happened", "who's there", "who will win". In these cases, Greek uses the indicative.

SUBJUNCTIVE WITH AN

The SUBJ is used with **ἄν** in a variety of dependent clauses that accompany main clauses that are either *generalizing* about the present (If/Whenever it rains, things get wet) or refer to events in the *future* (When/if he goes to the store, he'll pick up that order).

The negative in **ἄν** + SUBJ clauses is always μή.

These dependent clauses are usually easy to recognize thanks to **ἄν**, which will come close to the beginning of the clause, following the conjunction (often even fusing into one word with it) or relative pronoun:

Present general and future more vivid (compare use of opt in past general and future less vivid)

Subordinate clause	Main clause	Meaning
ἐάν (ἤν, ἄν) + SUBJ	Present indicative; to form a so-called PRESENT GENERAL	If (now and in the future) X, (then always) Y
ὅταν, ἐπειδάν + SUBJ		Whenever (..) X, (..) Y
ὅστις ἄν + SUBJ		Whoever (..) X, (..) Y
ἐάν (ἤν, ἄν) + SUBJ	Future indicative (or an imperative); to form a so-called FUTURE MORE VIVID	If X happens, then Y will
ὅταν, ἐπειδάν + SUBJ		When X happens, then Y will
ὅστις ἄν + SUBJ		Who does X, will do Y

Use of the 'future more vivid' conditional implies that the speaker considers/purports to consider fulfilment of the condition likely (compare below, 'future less vivid').

USE OF THE OPTATIVE IN DEPENDENT CLAUSES

OPTATIVE WITH AN

OPTATIVE + ἄν rarely occurs in dependent clauses; it is always, as in main clauses, a *potential* optative.

OPTATIVE WITHOUT AN

- Dependent clause **OPTATIVE** accompanied by **imperfect indicatives** in main clause: These are *generalizing* sentences that refer to the past (so-called **PAST-GENERAL**): 'If/Whenever X happened-opt, Y happened-impf.', 'Whoever did such and such-opt, would be loved by all-impf'
- Dependent clause **OPTATIVE** accompanied by **OPTATIVE + ἄν** in the main clause: **Conditional sentences** following the pattern **εἰ + OPTATIVE, OPTATIVE + ἄν** are used for conditions whose fulfilment the speaker considers *possible*, but not more than that. These conditionals are called **FUTURE LESS VIVID**; the usual English translation 'recipe' is "should...would" (also found in relatives, rarely in temporal clauses):
"Should X happen (which I don't consider very likely), then Y would happen."

Past general and future less vivid (compare use of subj in present general and future more vivid)

Subordinate clause	Main clause	Meaning
εἰ + OPT	Imperfect indicative; to form a so-called PAST GENERAL	If (in the past) X, (then always) Y
ὅτε, ἐπεὶ + OPT		Whenever (in the past) X, (then always) Y
ὅστις + OPT.		Whoever (in the past) X, (always) Y
εἰ + OPT	OPTATIVE + ἄν (potential), to form a so-called FUTURE LESS VIVID	Should X happen, then Y would
ὅτε, ἐπεὶ + OPT		When X should happen, then Y would
ὅστις + OPT.		Who should do X, would do Y

- **OPTATIVE "OF SECONDARY SEQUENCE":**

When the main verb in a sentence is in a past tense (a *secondary* tense), or refers to the past (the historic present), the verb in many different types of dependent clause can appear **in the optative mood instead of the indicative or subjunctive**. The optative thus can 'replace' moods that would have been used, had the main clause verb been in the present tense. In translating, obey the rules for *English* sequence of tenses, and *do not add modal auxiliaries just because you see an optative!!!*

Pres. opt. replaces *pres.ind/subj*; *aor.opt* replaces *aor.ind/subj*; *fut.opt* replaces *fut.ind*.

The optative can replace:

- the indicative of
 - indirect speech (say that X is the case-ind., said that X *was* the case-opt)
 - indirect questions (ask what is the matter-ind, asked what *was* the matter-opt)
 - causal clauses (blame him because he X-ind, blamed him because he X-opt)
- the subjunctive of
 - fear clauses (afraid that X will happen-subj, that X would happen-opt)
 - purpose clauses (do that in order that X-subj, did that in order that X-opt)
 - indirect questions with deliberative SUBJ (ask what to do-subj, asked .. -opt)
 - fut. more vivid in indirect speech (said that, if they did X-opt, they'd..)

Conditional Sentences in Greek

Greek has various types of conditional sentences ('conditionals'). Different combinations of moods lead to different presentations of a conditional relationship in time and likelihood.

The first important distinction is that between once-off conditionals ('if X happens, then Y'), and conditionals that suggest general, repeatable/repeated circumstances ('if anytime X, then always Y'). The latter are called General Conditionals.

Within the group of once-off conditionals, Greek distinguishes many shades of plausibility of the condition.

- Simple/**Neutral** Conditional: the narrator/**speaker does not commit** to likelihood or unlikelihood of fulfillment of the condition (rare!). 'If X is indeed true, then Y.'
- **Contrary-to-Fact** or Unreal Conditional: the narrator/speaker knows that the condition is/was **not true**. 'If pigs had wings, they could fly.'
- (so-called) **Future More Vivid**: the narrator/speaker considers fulfilment of the condition quite **plausible** (frequent). 'If I find out, I'll let you know.'
- (so-called) **Future Less Vivid**: the narrator/speaker considers fulfilment of the condition **possible** but not more than that. 'Should X happen, then Y would.'

Within the group of general conditionals, Greek distinguishes two types:

- **Present General**: General conditional with reference to the present. 'If it rains, the streets get wet.'
- **Past General**: General conditional with reference to the past. English main clause translation will often use 'would' to stress the habitual, repetitive nature. 'If the oracle responded, they would always follow/they always followed its advice.'

[jargon alert]

- The subordinate conditional clause (the if-clause) is called *protasis*.
- The main clause of a conditional sentence (the then-clause) is called *apodosis*.

Overview of tenses and moods in conditionals

Type of conditional	Protasis (if-clause)	Apodosis (then-clause)
Neutral	εἰ + any indicative	any indicative
Contrary-to-fact	εἰ + indicative II	indicative II + ἄν
Future More Vivid ⇒ plausible	ἐάν + subj. (= ἄν/ῆν + subj.)	future indicative (/imperative/ other fut. reference)
Future Less Vivid ⇒ just possible	εἰ + opt.	optative + ἄν
Present general	ἐάν + subj. (= ἄν/ῆν + subj.)	present indicative
Past general	εἰ + opt.	imperfect indicative (sometimes with ἄν)

NOTE:

- Only the *combination* of moods in protasis **and** apodosis can identify the type of conditional !!
- The conditional protasis is always negated with μή --only neutral conditions sometimes have οὐ.
- These same constructions can also be used for temporal clauses (esp. the present and past general: whenever X happens, Y happens), and relative clauses. See 'uses of subj and opt' sheet.
- Circumstantial participles sometimes function as 'protasis' of a conditional: E.g. Having done your best, you will not fail ⇒ If you do your best, ..