

### On the semantics of subjunctive ‘tenses’ in Romance languages

This paper focuses on the semantics of the subjunctive verb forms in Romance languages, with a particular focus on Portuguese. In all Romance languages, the subjunctive mood has two simple forms - dubbed *present* and *past imperfect* - and two compound ones - *perfect* and *pluperfect*. In addition, Portuguese has two other forms, dubbed *futuro simples do conjuntivo* (‘subjunctive simple future’) and *future composto do conjuntivo* (‘subjunctive compound future’). The analysis will be based on the simple forms, assuming with Kamp & Reyle 1993 that (perfective) compound forms can be described as basically identical to the simple ones. Both for Portuguese and other Romance languages, the subjunctive forms are usually characterized in terms of temporal subordination, the following two ideas being widespread: (i) the difference between the subjunctive forms is of temporal nature, *present* and *past imperfect* having, respectively, past and non-past reference; (ii) the subjunctive forms are anaphoric, being bound by the tense of the predicate in the main clause (cf. Picallo 1984, among others). The second claim has been challenged by several authors (cf., e.g., Kempchinsky 1990, Vogel 1997, Laca 2007), but the first claim has broad acceptance. Several authors propose that subjunctive forms make a temporal contribution of their own, the *present subjunctive* taking utterance time ( $t_0$ ) as its temporal reference point, *past imperfect subjunctive* having past reference (cf., e.g., Vogel 1997). However, such claim is challenged when relative and other subordinate clauses are scrutinized. Relevant evidence comes from data like the first sentences in the pairs (1)-(3), where the main feature to be noticed is that the only available reference point (in Reichenbach’s terms, or the “temporal perspective point” in DRT) for all the “past” subjunctive forms is the utterance time, exactly the same that the “present” forms can take (cf. the second member in each pair):

- (1) a. com esta tempestade, uma pessoa que **estivesse**<sub>PAST-SUBJ</sub> na rua estaria<sub>COND</sub> aflita  
‘with such a storm, anyone who were outside would be in trouble’  
b. com esta tempestade, uma pessoa que **esteja**<sub>PRES-SUBJ</sub> na rua está<sub>PRES-IND</sub> aflita  
‘with such a storm, anyone who is out outside is in trouble’
- (2) a. com este frio, caso **saísse**<sub>PAST-SUBJ</sub>, apanharia<sub>COND</sub> uma gripe  
‘with this cold weather, if you were to go out, you would get a flu’  
b. com este frio, caso **saías**<sub>PRES-SUBJ</sub>, apanhas uma gripe  
‘with this cold weather, if you are to go out, you will get a flu’
- (3) a. com este frio, ainda que **fosses**<sub>PAST-SUBJ</sub> passear, não ficaria<sub>COND</sub> melhor  
‘with this cold, you would not feel better, even if you went for a walk’  
b. com este frio, mesmo que **saías**<sub>PRES-SUBJ</sub> para passear, não ficará<sub>FUT</sub> melhor  
‘with this cold, you will not feel better, even if go for a walk’

This data shows, on one side, that the past imperfect subjunctive need not be associated with the past, and, on the other side, that this verb form does not have to be bound by another tense. Two kinds of explanation have been provided in the literature for the non-past uses of the *past imperfect subjunctive*. The first one, explored by Laca 2007, keeps to the claim that the difference between the subjunctive forms is of temporal nature, the *present subjunctive* taking  $t_0$  as its temporal perspective point, while the *past imperfect subjunctive* has past reference. Laca proposes that in cases like (1)-(3) the *imperfect subjunctive* is a past tense used to signal counterfactuality or non-realistic modal bases, on the line with the observation of Iatridou 2000. A different approach is proposed in Marques 2008, where the claim is made that the difference in meaning between the past and present subjunctive forms is not temporal in nature. Instead, the *present subjunctive* is a deictic form leading to the consideration of the set of possible situations (in the sense of Kratzer 1989 / Portner 1997) that are doxastically accessible at the context of utterance, while the *imperfect subjunctive* points to other possible situations (either enforcing an enlargement of the context set, in the sense of Stalnaker 1975,

or leading to the consideration of possible situations doxastically available from a different point - e.g., a point in the past).

If only *present* and *past imperfect subjunctive* forms are taken into consideration, it may be hard to find arguments in favor of one or another approach. However, Portuguese provides evidence in favor of the second mentioned approach. This language has another subjunctive form - the *futuro do conjuntivo* -, which provides no temporal information different from the other forms. This form occurs in some temporal clauses, such as those introduced by *quando* ('when'), *enquanto* ('while') or *assim que* ('as soon as'), conditional clauses introduced by *se* ('if') and relative clauses with universal quantifiers. In these contexts, *present subjunctive* is ruled out (cf. (4)-(6)), though this form is allowed in other temporal, conditional and relative clauses, as shown by (1)-(3), above, and (7):

- (4) quando **estiveres**<sub>FUT-SUBJ</sub> / \***estejas**<sub>PRES-SUBJ</sub> em casa, telefona-me  
when [you] are at home, phone me
- (5) se **estiveres**<sub>FUT-SUBJ</sub> / \***estejas**<sub>PRES-SUBJ</sub> em casa, telefona-me  
if [you] are at home, phone me
- (6) com esta tempestade, as pessoas que **estiverem**<sub>FUT-SUBJ</sub> / ??**estejam**<sub>PRES-SUBJ</sub> na rua estão aflitas  
'with such a storm, those who are outside are in trouble'
- (7) é melhor entrares antes que **chova**<sub>PRES-SUBJ</sub> / \***chover**<sub>FUT-SUBJ</sub>  
'you should come in before it rains'

The temporal information conveyed by the examples (1)-(7) can be stated as follows: (i) the subjunctive forms may take  $t_0$  as its temporal perspective point; (ii) with the exception of temporal clauses, the state of affairs described by the subjunctive clause is located as overlapping with  $t_0$  or following it, depending on whether the predicate is stative or non-stative; (iii) in temporal clauses, even with stative predicates, the posteriority reading arises. The facts described in (i)-(iii) are observed with any of the subjunctive forms, thus showing that the temporal information is independent of the subjunctive form. Consequently, the hypothesis that the difference between subjunctive forms is of temporal nature can be discarded. An alternative analysis of the data will be proposed, along the following lines: (a) subjunctive is a modal operator, signaling the consideration of at least one possible world/situation where the proposition is false; (b) both the *present subjunctive* as the *future subjunctive* signal that the possible situations to consider are doxastically accessible from the context of utterance (i.e., they refer to alive possibilities at speech time), while the *past imperfect subjunctive* points to other possible situations; (c) the *future subjunctive* is used in a proposition  $p$  when the information is given that  $p$  is part of a larger situation; (d) temporal connectors select an historical modal base, in the sense of Werner 2006. The posteriority reading in temporal clauses follows from (a)-(d), once a branching futures ontology is assumed. In fact, in order to respect (a), one has to consider other possibilities apart from what is observed at the context of utterance. On the other hand, given that temporal connectors select an historical modal base, only the possible situations temporally related to the point of evaluation are available. Since at any past or present situation  $s$  the proposition  $p$  is either true or false in  $s$ , the only way to satisfy both demands is to resort to future situations.

## References

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