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Theoretical Analyses in Romance Linguistics

The inherent variability of the French subjunctive¹

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1. Introduction

The correct characterization of mood usage in Romance has been a subject of debate for centuries among traditional grammarians, and remains a preoccupation of contemporary linguists as well. More specifically, the existence of pairs such as those exemplified in (1) with French, where we observe alternation between subjunctive and indicative with different matrix verbs, raises the issue of whether mood choice in the embedded clause is an automatic consequence of the nature of the governing verb (i.e. whether a given class of verbs subcategorizes for subjunctive mood), in which case mood could be interpreted as nothing more than a redundant morphological marker of subordination.

- (1) a. *Je pense* qu'ils en **font (I)** pas assez pour le vieux monde.
(051/1005)²
"I think that they don't do enough for the old folks."
- b. *J'aimerais* ça qu'ils la **fassent (S)** petite comme ça moi. (019/1065)
"I'd like it if they'd make it small like that."

But the existence of pairs such as those in (2), where the matrix verb is the same, although negated in (2b), and more strikingly, pairs such as those in (3), where the matrix clauses are for all intents and purposes identical, casts doubt on the thesis that mood choice is entirely automatic, and lends credence to the idea that the alternation between subjunctive and indicative expresses a difference in meaning, which can be defined roughly as the

extent to which the speaker wishes to commit himself to the reality, probability or truth value of the complement proposition.

- (2) a. Mais quand tu es jeune, moi je *crois* que c'**est** (I) une- une bonne chose. (034/1125)
 “But when you’re young, I think that it’s a good thing.”
- b. Je *crois* pas que ce **soit** (S) la fin du monde. (060/195)
 “I don’t think that it would be the end of the world.”
- (3) a. *Admettons* mes deux petits **soient** (S) détachés, ils peuvent me donner une amende pour deux fois vingt-huit piastres. (027/1938)
 “Say both my kids are unbuckled, they can give me a ticket for two times twenty-eight bucks.”
- b. *Admettons* qu’elle **peut** (I) pas ou que l’enfant **est** (I) malade, on peut pas l’envoyer. (117/851)
 “Say that she can’t or that the kid is sick, we can’t send him.”

Indeed, this has been the traditional stance, albeit often implicit, of most prescriptive grammarians, whose chapters on mood usage present the material as though it were lexically determined, i.e. through lists of verbs or “meaning” classes (e.g. volitive, emotive, epistemic, etc.) which do and do not require the subjunctive, but explain it in semantic terms. “Rules” tend to be accompanied by copious counterexamples, such as an indicative in a supposedly subjunctive context, which may be explained by the speaker’s wish to mark “the reality of the fact”, or a subjunctive in an indicative context — here the fact would simply be “envisaged in thought”, or a conditional in a subjunctive context, if the fact is “hypothetical or eventual” (e.g. Grevisse 1986). In what follows we briefly review a number of proposals for the interpretation of mood choice, and then present some facts from spoken Canadian French which may help to evaluate these competing theories.

1.2 *The assertive/non-assertive distinction*

One rather large body of work inspired by the early paper of Kiparsky & Kiparsky (1970) on factivity, via Hooper and her associates (e.g. Hooper 1975, Terrell & Hooper 1974, Terrell 1976, García & Terrell 1977, Lantolf 1978), sees mood choice as semantically based. Hooper (1975) proposed a distinction that intersects with the factive/non-factive distinction, and which

can be defined on both syntactic and semantic grounds: the assertive/non-assertive distinction. She pointed out that some of the differences described by the Kiparskys as distinguishing between factive and non-factive predicates are actually only relevant to a further distinction between “strong” and “weak” assertives. Her subdivision of predicates into five intersecting categories of assertion and factivity (roughly as in Table 1), allows her to resolve an apparent counterexample to her earlier proposal (Terrell & Hooper 1974) that mood choice and assertion are directly related. By assuming that semifactives are also assertions, she was able to make the claim, exemplified with Spanish, that complements with characteristics related to assertion are *always* indicative, while those which are non-assertive require the subjunctive. Though other work (e.g. Rivero 1971, Guitart 1980) has shown that things are not so neat, even in Spanish, Hooper’s analysis has the intuitive appeal of capturing formally that pervasive characterization of the subjunctive as expressing notions of doubt, irrealis, etc. If the distinction is meaningful it should apply to French as well. We thus examined our data according to this categorization, as in Table 1. It is obvious, even from the small subset of data depicted in the table, that no tendency in this direction may be discerned, as every one of the classes proposed by Hooper (including her sixth class of volitive verbs, which in Spanish “require” the subjunctive), contains verbs which in French always co-occur with the subjunctive, others which sometimes do, and still others which never do.

1.3 *Generative analyses*

The Romance subjunctive has also been the focus of a good deal of more recent generative literature on the characterization of binding domains. Among the most widely cited phenomena in connection with where binding takes place is the Subjunctive Disjoint Reference effect, or the ungrammaticality of coreferential interpretation of pronominal subjects with the same features for person and number in subjunctive, but not indicative, sentential complexes (e.g. Picallo 1984, Kempchinsky 1985, 1986; Ruwet 1984, Suñer 1986, Jakubowicz 1985). Aside from some instances of apparently “acceptable” coreferentiality between, for example, 1) subjunctive subjects and matrix objects and 2) matrix subjects and more deeply embedded subjunctive subjects (Jakubowicz 1985, Ruwet 1984), our data also reveal, contrary to previous attestations, cases of coreference of the subjunctive sub-

Table 1. Subjunctive usage in Canadian French according to assertion and factivity.

ASSERTIVE			% Subjunctive
non-factive/ strong assertive	<i>avoir hâte</i>	“look forward to”	100%
	<i>espérer</i>	“hope”	21%
	<i>avoir l'espoir</i>	“have hope”	0%
semi-factive/ assertive	<i>se souvenir</i>	“remember”	100%
	<i>se rappeler</i>	“remember”	20%
	<i>avoir connaissance</i> (neg)	“know”	0%
non-factive/ weak assertive	<i>avoir l'air</i>	“seem”	0%
NON-ASSERTIVE			
“true” factive/ non-assertive	<i>trouver bon</i>	“endorse”	100%
	<i>s'étonner</i>	“be surprised”	60%
	<i>reprocher</i>	“reproach”	0%
non-factive/ non-assertive	<i>concevoir</i> (neg)	“conceive”	100%
	<i>croire</i> (neg)	“believe”	13%
	<i>trouver</i> (neg)	“think”	0%
VOLITIVE			
	<i>demander</i>	“ask”	100%
	<i>souhaiter</i>	“wish”	40%
	<i>prier</i>	“pray”	0%

ject and the immediately superordinate subject (as is also the case in Roumanian), as in (4). Coreference in (4b) results from the reinterpretation of the impersonal verb *falloir* “have to” as a personal verb.

- (4) a. *J'aimerais que je **comprene**.* (S) (065/1780)
 “I’d like to understand.”
- b. *Mais je fallais j’y **alle** (S) la mener puis aller la chercher.* (067/273)
 “But I had to go take her and go pick her up.”

Several analyses have attempted to derive the Subjunctive Disjoint Reference effect from the assumption that the subjunctive is inherently tenseless, and often agrees in value for [\pm past] with the tense of the higher verb. Though subjunctives have morphological markers for [\pm past], these would depend on the tense marker of the higher clause, in the sense that “[\pm past] in subjunctives is restricted to the marks for [\pm past] in the main predicate” (Picallo 1984:87), thus contrasting with indicative subordinate clauses which are totally autonomous in this respect (cf. also Rivero 1971). As has already been pointed out (e.g. Suñer and Padilla-Rivera 1987, Kempchinsky 1985), there are numerous counterexamples to this observation in Spanish. In French the constraint on tense sequencing in embedded subjunctive clauses cannot be said to hold at all, because unlike the case for Spanish, the imperfect and pluperfect subjunctives, which should agree with matrix verbs in the past depending on whether the action they express is simultaneous, posterior or anterior to the action time in the matrix verb, have disappeared from the spoken language. Thus it is natural that the nonagreeing examples in (5) should be common, although only (5c) and (5d) with an embedded present subjunctive, are in fact the norm, since the complex subjunctives (e.g. *ait fini*, *ait eu fini*) are used only rarely in spoken French. In fact, though we will see below that there is a strong effect of tense concordance in subjunctive contexts in contemporary Canadian French, it does *not* involve embedded subjunctives.

- (5) a. Je *souhaite* (**PRES**) qu’il lui en *ait donné* (**PAST S**) une bonne claque sur la yeule. (071/949)
 “I hope that he gave him a good slap across the face.”
- b. Bien, ça m’*étonne* (**PRES**) qu’il *ait pas été* (**PAST S**) au camp. (084/1710)
 “Well, I’m surprised that he didn’t go to camp.”
- c. Elle *a attendu* (**PASSE COMPOSE**) que ses enfants *seyent* (**PRES S**) assez grands pour aller travailler. (047/1939)
 “She waited until her kids were old enough to go to work.”
- d. Bien moi, s’il *avait fallu* (**PLUP**) qu’ils *fassent* (**PRES S**) ça, je le sais pas qu’est-ce que j’aurais faite. (118/1264)
 “Personally, if they had had to do that, I don’t know what I would have done.”

2. Inherent variability

Rather than multiply counter-examples, the situation in Canadian French can perhaps be summarized most clearly by the following not very original observation: there appear to be three classes of matrix verbs in our corpus: one which *categorically* takes an embedded subjunctive, one which *never* does, and one which takes subjunctive variably, as indicated in (6).

(6) Distribution of embedded subjunctives according to matrix

Categorical (100%) Subjunctive		No (0%) Subjunctive		Variable Subjunctive		
<i>dire</i>	"tell"	<i>prier</i>	"pray"	<i>vouloir</i>	"want"	91%
<i>demander</i>	"ask"	<i>se plaindre</i>	"complain"	<i>avoir peur</i>	"be afraid"	64%
<i>concevoir</i> _(neg)	"conceive"	<i>être surpris</i>	"be surprised"	<i>penser</i> _(neg)	"think"	13%
<i>désirer</i>	"desire"	<i>avoir l'espoir</i>	"hope"	<i>empêcher</i>	"stop"	8%
	•		•		•	
	•		•		•	
	•		•		•	

This is, of course, precisely the characterization that has traditionally been offered by both grammarians and contemporary linguists. The only difference in our formulation is that *all* of the verbs listed in (6) are members of the class traditionally considered obligatory in one configuration or another (i.e. "primary" and "secondary" subjunctives (Jakubowicz 1985)). Moreover since *none* of the verbs which always or never govern the subjunctive occurs more than three or four times in our corpus, and *all* of the verbs of greater frequency show some degree of variability, we shall assume that subjunctive usage is variable, even in the classes which appear from (6) to be categorical.³ What is more, there is good reason to believe that this variation has been stable for centuries, despite a conspiracy of grammarians, teachers, linguists and the data themselves, to make it appear otherwise.

The kind of variation we are referring to, and which can be illustrated by the examples in (7) to (11), has not gone unremarked by any author to our knowledge who has worked with quantities of performance data, whether spoken or written. In (7) and (8) we observe that each of the subjunctive, indicative and conditional may be embedded under the same matrix verb in the same tense.⁴ Examples (9), (10), and (11) illustrate the same speaker repeating roughly (or exactly) the same thing to the same interlocutor and still alternating between embedded subjunctive, indicative and conditional.

- (7) a. *Faut* quasiment que tu **sois** (S) psychologique [sic] pour le savoir. (037/1566)
 “You almost have to be psychological to know it.”
- b. *Faut* au moins que je **serais** (C) bien obligée. (067/78)
 “I’d at least have to really be forced”.
- c. Ça veut pas dire *faut* qu’on **est** (I) obligés de payer pour, nous-autres. (067/1166)
 “It doesn’t mean *we* have to be forced to pay for it.”
- (8) a. J’*espère* qu’ils **soient** (S) pas trop ingrats parce que je pense qu’il y en a beaucoup qui sont ingrats aujourd’hui. (015/887)
 “I hope that they’re not too ungrateful, because I think that there’s a lot of ingrates these days.”
- b. Mais j’*espère* que je **serais** (C) capable de passer à travers. (111/1616)
 “But I hope that I’d be able to get through it”.
- c. Mais j’*espère* que l’Église **est** (I) pas contre moi pour ça. (053/1525)
 “But I hope that the Church doesn’t hold that against me.”
- (9) a. Mais j’*aimerais* qu’elle **soit** (S) plus ouverte, mais on dirait qu’en vieillissant sont plus gênés. (040/1021)
 “But I’d like her to be more open, but it seems that as they get older, they get more shy.”
- b. Je trouve qu’en vieillissant tu sais, j’*aimerais* qu’elle **serait** (C) plus proche. (040/1032)
 “I think that as she gets older you know, I’d like her to be closer.”
- (10) a. *Faut* que je lui **dis** (I) c’est vrai. (064/356)
 “I have to tell him it’s true.”
- b. *Faut* je lui **dise** (S) c’est la vérité. (064/369)
 “I have to tell him it’s the truth.”
- (11) *Fallait* qu’elle **répond** (I) “oui, tu peux faire trois pas de géant”. *Fallait* qu’elle **réponde** (S) la phrase complète. (025/2186)
 “She had to say “yes, you may take three giant steps”. She had to say the whole sentence.”

Until quite recently, however, this variation has never received any attention in its own right. Rather the approach, at least as far as French is concerned, has been to subclassify matrix verbs into ever smaller categories in the hopes (vain, apparently) of finding the elusive set in which all members behave alike (i.e. govern only subjunctive or only indicative complements). Thus Connors (1978) proposes a dichotomy between an “automatic” class of matrices, where only embedded subjunctives are permitted, and consequently no mood choice can be involved, nor, of course, any change in meaning, and a non-automatic class, where subjunctive varies with indicative to distinguish assertion from volition, if the predicate is subject to both interpretations (as is the case for e.g. *dire* “say”, “tell”). Similarly, Rothe (1967) (cited in (Boysen 1971)) explains subjunctive usage in modern French in terms of three notions: *opposition*, which covers cases in which subjunctive provokes a change in meaning, *variation*, where the semantic difference between subjunctive and indicative is “less evident”, and *automatique*, where subjunctive is redundant and meaningless, since it is obligatory (as, according to him, after governors like *falloir* and *accepter*). Nordahl (1969) distinguishes three main subjunctive “systems”: the “volitive”, where subjunctive is virtually obligatory, the “subjective”, where subjunctive remains uncontested in affirmative complex sentences of the type *Je m'étonne que X* “I am astonished that X”, but varies with indicative in other sentence configurations, and the “dubitative”, which she subdivides into ten subsystems. In these, subjunctive alternates with indicative variously according to the lexical form of the matrix verb, its tense, the personal or impersonal nature of its subject, the nuance of meaning to be expressed, whether the sentence as a whole is affirmative or not, etc. Even here, and despite (or more likely, *because of*) copious empirical data,⁵ Nordahl is unable to reduce the variability to a “rule”, and is led to conclude that in this (dubitative) system, mood usage must be meaningful. How else to account for the persistent alternation?

We submit that one way to account for it is to entertain the notion of *inherent* variability (e.g. Labov 1971; Sankoff 1982, 1988; G. Sankoff and Labov 1985), i.e. to assume that subjunctive mood is one variant of a linguistic variable, which in the case at hand, may alternate with indicative and conditional in embedded clauses. Under this assumption, we can show that the choice of one or another variant in a given context is *conditioned*, or even promoted, by the existence of certain factors in the environment (such as the proximity of a lexical head which is “supposed” to take sub-

junctive), but is not entirely *determined* by them. As has become obvious from the foregoing examples, this is the only way to account for the performance data in our corpus. We hope to demonstrate that this provides a more highly structured view of the observed variability than what emerges from the rule-and-exception paradigm. Now, a linguistic variable in its most restricted sense involves two or more ways of conveying the same referential meaning. Thus in order to show that indicative or conditional and subjunctive are actually variants of each other, it would be necessary to demonstrate that they are not associated with differences in meaning. This is what the analyses we will present in ensuing sections suggest. We return to this issue below.

3. Data and method

The data on which this study is based were provided by a sample of 120 adult native speakers of French residing in Ottawa-Hull, the national capital region of Canada, as part of a larger study of the French of the region (Poplack 1989). The speakers were selected and interviewed according to standard sociolinguistic procedures, resulting in about 240 hours (or some 3.5 million words) of naturally occurring speech, containing among other things, numerous examples of the spontaneous, unreflecting usage of mood, but no judgements or other direct questions regarding it. Illustrating as it does numerous styles, registers and topics of conversation, we consider this data base to be fully representative of the speech of the region.

In seeking to establish constraints on mood choice, it is necessary to consider not only contexts in which the subjunctive actually surfaced, but also those where it could have, but did not. To obtain the data on which our analyses are based, we first searched our 3.5 million word corpus for tokens of the subjunctive. Since we were unable to ascertain with any real precision from either prescriptive grammars or the linguistic literature exactly which matrices could be said to “require” the subjunctive, and since in French subjunctive usage is basically restricted to embedded complement clauses introduced by the complementizer *que*, we simply noted every token of a verb in the subjunctive following *que*, regardless of its matrix. However, while this method could be expected to, and in fact did, uncover a good portion of the subjunctives used by the speakers in our sample, it does not permit assessment of whether other tense/mood forms also appear in the same environments, nor does it allow us to assess mood usage in

complements from which *que* has been deleted by a common independent process (e.g. Martineau 1985), as illustrated in (12).

- (12) a. Faut Ø je *dis* (**I**) une affaire. (064/502)
 “I have to say one thing.”
- b. Je pense pas Ø je *pourrais* (**C**) être pour l’euthanasie. (115/927)
 “I don’t think I could be for euthanasia.”
- c. Moi je veux pas Ø mon appartement *ait* (**S**) un méchant nom, tu sais? (022/140)
 “I don’t want my apartment to have a bad name, you know?”

We therefore proceeded to examine every matrix previously found to have governed a subjunctive in order to ascertain whether it permitted variation with indicative and conditional. This yielded a total of 67 matrix verbs which (with the exception of a small number of “hypercorrect” uses not included in ensuing analyses) correspond rather well to those considered to require the subjunctive in prescriptive grammars. Although our data contain many instances of mood variation in adjectival clauses (e.g. *J’avais pris la plus grosse gousse d’ail qu’il y avait* (**I**) *pas*. (023/1856) “I’d taken the biggest clove of garlic there was.”) and adverbial clauses (e.g. *Je le chantais pour le petit tannant pour qu’il dorme* (**S**). (107/1023) “I used to sing it for the little brat so he’d sleep.”), we focus in this paper only on mood usage in noun clauses embedded under subjunctive-selecting verbal matrices.

Our initial data set consisted of approximately 6,000 sentences, each one containing an embedded verb governed by a matrix found to have co-occurred with a subjunctive at least once. A first perusal of these showed that at least half of the embedded verbs were ambiguous, i.e. their morphological form is indistinguishable (except in 1st and 2nd person plural) in the present subjunctive and the present indicative, as in (13):

- (13) a. J’attends tout le temps quelqu’un *parle* (**I,S?**) first. (041/2675)
 “I always wait for someone to speak first.”
- b. Bien, le petit il *parle* (**I**) les deux langues lui. (018/1942)
 “Well, the youngest speaks both languages.”

A large number of these consisted of regularized forms⁶ like *marissent* in (14) or *alle* in (15), which have been viewed by some (e.g. Damourette & Pichon 1936, Laurier 1989) as innovative instances of subjunctive usage, as

they are morphologically distinct from their indicative counterparts (*marient* and *vas* respectively). Our ongoing work on regularization in the verbal paradigm shows, however, that while in the singular such analogical formations are restricted to subjunctive mood (as in (15a)), when pluralized, these forms are used in *both* indicative and subjunctive contexts, i.e. they are ambiguous, as in (14). We focus here only on mood usage as illustrated by the *unambiguous* embedded verbs in the corpus, totalling 2,694 in all.

- (14) a. Quand qu'ils se **marissent (I)**, sont- je sais pas, c'est dur à dire aussi. (049/795)
 "When they get married, they're- I don't know, it's hard to say."
 b. So, là là, on attend jusqu'à l'été prochain pour qu'ils se **marissent (S)**. (002/857)
 "So now, we're waiting until next summer for them to get married."
- (15) a. Elle veut j'y **alle (S)** travailler pour six piastres par jour. (041/294)
 "She wants me to go work for six bucks a day."
 b. Bien vraiment, je **vas (I)** pas tellement à Hull pour te dire moi. (070/2450)
 "Well really, I don't go to Hull enough myself to be able to tell you."

4. The analysis

It will by now be obvious that a number of factors, sometimes competing, must enter into play whenever a speaker is required to make a mood choice. Although there seems to be no simple correlation between mood and the semantic notions of doubt, uncertainty, etc., we cannot discount the possibility that the meaning of the subjunctive, if there is one, can be captured in some other way. We thus examined mood usage according to a number of other factors which could contribute to a non-factual reading of the utterance, such as the degree of assertion with which the speaker imbues the embedded complement, as expressed by the affirmative, negative, interrogative or conditional nature of the matrix clause; the presence in it of other indicators of non-factual modality, whether expressed lexically

(e.g. *peut-être, possiblement*), through tense choice or in some other way, and the so-called “semantic” class of the matrix verb (e.g. volitive, emotive, etc.). Other factors of a purely syntactic or morphological nature we considered include the possibility of tense concordance between matrix and embedded verbs, the overtiness of the complementizer *que*, the presence of intervening material between matrix and embedded verbs, and the morphological form and frequency in the corpus of the embedded verb, as well as the lexical association of a given matrix with a given mood. Each sentence in the data set was coded according to each of these factors and then analyzed using the multiple logistic regression procedure implemented in GoldVarb, a variable rule program (Rand & Sankoff 1988). This kind of analysis enables us to determine which of these environmental factors have a statistically significant effect on choice of subjunctive mood when all of them are considered together, as well as to estimate the relative magnitude, or importance, of each.

What is the relation between the results of such an analysis and the identity or non-identity of meaning conveyed by competing forms? There are two logical possibilities in this connection. The first is that any difference in meaning is entirely embodied in the difference in form. The second, as is more typical in linguistic analyses, is that features of the environment will co-occur with these forms in such a way as to indicate whether they are used for similar or different referential purposes. Variable rule analysis can aid in characterizing precisely the nature of these co-occurrence patterns.

4.1 *The lexical head falloir*

A first examination of the data suggests, counterexamples to the contrary, that the subjunctive is selected in so-called subjunctive-taking contexts a healthy 77% of the time, which although leaving 593 exceptions to explain, would still indicate that subjunctive usage remains vigorous in the French data we have studied. However, closer perusal of the matrices suggests that these actually represent two classes: one consisting of the impersonal matrix verb *falloir* “have to”, by far the most frequently used in the data (representing on its own nearly two thirds of our 2, 694 matrices), and all other verbs. Now, if *falloir* for some reason does not behave like the other verbs, or at least like the other verbs of its “semantic” class (i.e. volitives), it is obvious that by its sheer frequency, it will skew the results of any quantitative study. We thus examine the behavior of *falloir* independently. We first

note that *falloir* takes subjunctive extremely frequently, being followed by this mood 89% of the time. Given the overwhelming association of this matrix with subjunctive mood, we may next ask which features of the environment act to lessen the strength of this association, to result in the 11% of cases in which the subjunctive did not surface. A variable rule analysis of the factors contributing to the choice of subjunctive mood in embedded noun clauses governed by *falloir* displayed in Table 2 indicates that three factors contribute strongly to the probability that subjunctive will *not* be chosen in this context.

The most important of these is the tense of the matrix verb. We observe from the table that when the matrix verb is in the conditional, the chances that subjunctive will be chosen in the embedded clause are distinctly lower than with other tenses, with a contribution of only .10. We remarked earlier that the prescriptive rules for tense concordance between matrix and embedded subjunctive verbs in Standard French involve only matrices in the past tense, and this only in the literary language. Since the

Table 2: Factors contributing to the choice of subjunctive mood in embedded noun clauses governed by *falloir*.

(The factor weights vary between 0 and 1, and figures above .5 may be interpreted as favoring the choice of the subjunctive, while figures below .5 disfavor it.)

Overall tendency: .934

Tense of the matrix verb		Distance between matrix and embedded verb		Morphological form/ Frequency of embedded verb	
Imperfect	.65	None	.53	Suppletive/frequent	.65
Passé composé	.54	Word	.47	Regular/rare	.29
Present	.52	Parenthetical	.17		
Future	.51				
Conditional	.10				

Factors not selected: Structure (negative, interrogative, etc.) of matrix clause, other indications of non-factual modality, presence of *que*.

past-tense forms of the subjunctive have disappeared from the spoken language, the present (and composite) tenses (e.g. *ait écrit*, *ait eu écrit*) may occur freely with any matrix tense, depending on the relationship between the time of the embedded and matrix actions or states. And in fact, we see from Table 2 that subjunctive usage is favored after matrices in the present, imperfect, *passé composé* and future, with contributions of over .5. After the conditional, however, another sort of tense concordance is operative. The very low probability of subjunctive usage here is due to the fact that this is the only context in which another form offers serious competition with it: nearly half the embedded forms are in the conditional, explaining the frequency of examples like (16).

- (16) a. J'ai dit, "*faudrait (C)* je *ferais (C)* un ménage dans ces papiers-là". (119/2955)
 "I said, "I should get those papers organized"."
- b. *Faudrait (C)* qu'il *serait (C)* mis en prison pour lui montrer qu'est-ce qu'il a faite de tort, ces affaires-là. (032/1476)
 "He should be put in prison to show him what he's done wrong, things like that."

Moreover, when we examine the embedded conditionals in the data separately, we find that virtually all of them (93%) occur following a matrix conditional, whereas the other embedded verb forms are more evenly distributed among all the matrix tenses. This "conditional concordance effect" may well be a remnant from the Classical period, when such tense concordance was frequent (Grevisse 1986, § 869c). In any event, it is widespread enough in both metropolitan (Sand 1981) and Canadian (Davies 1979, Laurier 1989) French to merit an explicit warning from Grevisse.

Thus, though it may seem coincidental indeed to those who endorse a semantic explanation for mood choice that the conditional, with its connotations of futurity and irrealis, appears so often in subjunctive contexts, the findings we have reported here cast doubt on the thesis (e.g. Harris 1978) that the conditional is pre-empting the putative non-assertive, or attenuative functions of the subjunctive. If this were so, it should occur in contexts other than following a matrix conditional, but we have seen that this is not the case. We return to this issue below.

Table 2 shows that another factor allowing for indicative or conditional usage after *falloir* is the distance between matrix and embedded clause, as represented by multiple embeddings, false starts or other types of intervening parenthetical material, as in (17).

- (17) a. Je comprends, parce qu'après ça *faut toute tu classes* (**AMBIG**) ça, tu *mets (I)* toute ça ensemble? (042/43)
 "I understand, because after you have to classify it all, put it all together?"
- b. Puis même les batailles temps en temps ça fait du bien, il *faut au moins tu te c- - tu fais (I)* pas mal à l'autre personne. (025/1114)
 "And even fights once in a while do some good, as long as you don't c- - you don't hurt the other person".

Ruwet (1984) and Jakubowicz (1985) have noted that the presence of such material may reduce the constraint of the Subjunctive Disjoint Reference effect. We see here that it also reduces the constraining effect of the lexical head *falloir* on the mood of the embedded clause, since indicatives are more frequent here than in constructions like (18a), although of course they occur in this context as well, even with the same speaker, as can be seen from (18b).

- (18) a. *Faut tu connaittes (S)* quelqu'un qui connaisse quelqu'un. (053/2108)
 "You have to know somebody who knows somebody."
- b. *Faut tu connait (I)* quelqu'un. (053/953)
 "You have to know somebody."

The final factor which can be shown to lessen the strong association between *falloir* and the subjunctive mood involves the morphological form of the subjunctive, which, as it turns out, is highly correlated with its frequency of use. A small class of French verbs (e.g. *avoir, être, aller, faire*, etc., — there are 10 in these data) have morphologically suppletive subjunctive forms (*viz: ait, soit, aille, fasse*), while the others are "regular" in that the base for the subjunctive form is taken from the indicative paradigm. With very few exceptions, these suppletive forms turn out to be the most frequently used in subjunctive contexts, accounting by themselves for more than 2/3 of the 1669 tokens of verbs embedded under *falloir*. Table 2 shows that embedded verbs are more likely to appear in the subjunctive if their morphological form is suppletive than if it is regular, with a contribution of .65. Lemle and Naro (1977) have already found that other processes, such as lack of number concord in Brazilian Portuguese, are rarest among what they call salient (morphologically irregular) verbs, i.e. in contexts in which the absence of concord would be most noticeable. This,

coupled with the sheer frequency of occurrence of such verbs, suggests, and other observations to be discussed below bear this out, the existence of “routines” involving *falloir* and this small subset of suppletive verbs, as exemplified in (19). Thus it is only when the form of the verb is regular (i.e. *devienne*, *achète*) and correspondingly, relatively rare in occurrence, that choice of mood other than the subjunctive becomes at all frequent here.

- (19) a. Même pour une job aujourd’hui, **faut** tu **sois** (S) bilingue. (015/1902)
 “Even for a job these days, you have to be bilingual.”
- b. Bien certain, **faut** qu’ils **aient** (S) une place eux-autres aussi pour vivre. (018/620)
 “Well of course, they should have a place to live too.”
- c. **Faut** j’**aile** (S) voir pour de l’ouvrage. (087/1135)
 “I have to go look for a job.”
- d. Bien ça, **fallait** tu **fasses** (S) ton huit heures par jour. (043/924)
 “Well there you had to do your eight hours a day.”

We have detailed the overwhelming nature of the association between matrix *falloir* and choice of subjunctive mood. Our analysis has shown that only three factors operate to lessen this association: the tendency towards tense concordance with a matrix verb in the conditional, the presence of parenthetical material separating the matrix verb from the embedded clause, and the choice of an infrequently occurring embedded verb with regular morphology. None of the other factors examined were selected as significant to the choice of subjunctive mood by the multiple regression procedure. We next examine whether the same sorts of constraints apply to the other verbs in our data set.

4.2 Other lexical heads

The first noteworthy finding is that unlike *falloir*, verbs governed by other matrices are about as likely to surface in the subjunctive as not (with an overall occurrence rate of no more than 54%). Table 3 displays a variable rule analysis of the factors contributing to the choice of subjunctive mood under matrix verbs other than *falloir*. We first note that *none* of the factors which could be considered to contribute a reading of non-factual modality

Table 3: Factors contributing to the choice of subjunctive mood in embedded noun clauses governed by verbs *other than falloir*.

Overall tendency: .526

Semantic Class	Tense of the matrix verb	Presence of <i>que</i>	Morphological form/ Frequency of embedded verb
Volitive .77	Imperfect .65	Present .52	Suppletive/ Frequent .56
Emotive .66	Present .51	Absent .39	Regular/ Rare .36
Opinion .09	<i>Passé Composé</i> .42		
	Periphrastic Future .38		
	Conditional .25		

Factors not selected: Structure (negative, interrogative, etc.) of matrix clause, other indications of non-factual modality.

was selected as significant by the stepwise regression procedure, with the exception of what we have labelled “semantic class”. But while it is true that traditional grammars tend to organize their observations about the subjunctive as applying to classes of verbs characterized by a semantic component of say, volition, doubt, etc., as does for that matter much of the linguistic literature, the exact membership of these classes is by no means clear, and indeed, often varies from one reference source to the next. Almost all of the matrix verbs used by the speakers in our sample fall naturally within one of the three classes traditionally labelled volitive, emotive and opinion. But these labels also capture another, equally important, fact about the verbs contained within them; namely, that the first two are generally considered by prescriptivists to require the subjunctive in all contexts (“primary subjunctives”), while the latter requires it only when non-affirmative (“secondary subjunctives”), and of course, such tokens are the only instances of these verbs included in the analysis. The hierarchy of actual

subjunctive usage in these contexts corresponds exactly to what is known of the trajectory of this phenomenon throughout the history of French. Volitive verbs, traditionally the stronghold of subjunctive, continue to favor this mood the most, with a probability of .77. Emotive verbs, which have vacillated between indicative and subjunctive during the course of the development of the language, also continue to promote subjunctive usage in Modern Canadian French, albeit to a lesser extent, and strikingly enough, negated verbs of opinion, with a history of both vacillation and the added condition of now requiring the subjunctive only when the matrix clause is non-affirmative, favor subjunctive far less than other verb classes: they contribute a probability of only .09 that subjunctive will be chosen. Tense of the matrix verb and morphological form of the embedded verb also play a role in mood selection, in exactly the same direction as we observed for the verb *falloir*. Finally, in the case of these verbs, the presence or absence of the complementizer *que* also affects the choice of mood. As might be expected, given its historically close association with the subjunctive even in independent clauses, when *que* is overt, a subjunctive in the embedded clause is favored.

It is thus apparent, despite massive differences in their actual *propensity* to take the subjunctive, that the same constraints operate in all eligible matrix verbs to condition its occurrence. On the basis of our analyses, we may predict that the optimum environment for a subjunctive is after a volitive, and to a lesser extent, emotive matrix, so long as it is *not* in the conditional, and providing that the morphological form of the embedded verb is salient or suppletive. For *falloir*, with which subjunctive mood is overwhelmingly associated, distance between matrix and embedded clauses plays an important role in breaking the link between that verb and the subjunctive. As for the other verbs, in most cases no such lexical association exists (*vouloir* and *aimer* are actually the only two verbs of moderate frequency which take the subjunctive more than 2/3 of the time; no other minimally recurrent verb in the data set co-occurs with the subjunctive more than 1/3 of the time). In these cases, the presence of the complementizer promotes subjunctive usage. Example (20) illustrates the “ideal” subjunctive context.

- (20) a. Ah oui, une bonne hockey game, ***faut qu'il y ait*** des bonnes batailles. (037/1817)
 “Ah yes, a good hockey game has to have good fights.”

- b. Il *veut qu'on soit* tous sauvés. (060/863)
 "He wants us all to be saved."

4.3 Tense concordance

Thus far, we have been discussing the effect of various environmental factors on the choice of subjunctive mood with different types of matrices, but we have not yet approached the question of what speakers are doing when they do *not* use the subjunctive. We detailed earlier the inhibiting effect of a conditional matrix on choice of the subjunctive with both *falloir* and other matrix verbs, and ascribed this to a conditional concordance effect. This effect was shown to account partially for the small number of cases in which *falloir* does not govern the subjunctive. If we now examine the entire set of sentences in which subjunctive was *not* chosen in the embedded clause, we see a similar concordance effect for the other tenses as well. This is most apparent in verbs other than *falloir*, which as we have seen, are far more variable in their behavior.

Table 4 reveals that the majority of verbs embedded under every matrix tense of moderate frequency shows tense concordance. Thus the largest proportion of embedded verbs that do not govern the subjunctive

Table 4: Tense concordance when subjunctive is not used.

	MATRIX				
	Conditional	Present Indicative	Periphrastic Future	Imperfect	Passé Composé
EMBEDDED					
Conditional	78%	9%	—	4%	—
Present Indicative	16%	46%	12%	7%	7%
Periphrastic Future	—	—	100%	—	—
Imperfect	13%	13%	4%	54%	2%
Passé Composé	10%	15%	—	35%	35%

consists of verbs that agree in tense with the tense of the matrix, as illustrated by the examples in (21). We take this as further evidence in favor of the non-semantic nature of mood usage.

- (21) a. Conditional/conditional
J'aimerais (C) ça que le bon Dieu viendrait (C) me chercher.
 (040/2559)
 "I'd like it if the good Lord would come to get me".
- b. Past conditional/past conditional
J'aurais aimé (PAST C) mieux qu'ils m'auraient donné (PAST C) deux... (048/784)
 "I would have liked it better if they would have given me two..."
- c. Present/present
Je crois (PRES) pas que l'âge a (PRES) tant à faire que ça.
 (003/189)
 "I don't think that age has that much to do with it."
- d. Periphrastic future/periphrastic future
Ça va arriver (PF) une fois de temps en temps qu'on va se dire (PF) quelque chose en anglais. (004/3432)
 "It'll happen once in a while that we'll say something to each other in English."
- e. Imperfect/imperfect
J'attendais (IMP) que c'était (IMP) tard. (064/1914)
 "I waited until it got late."
- f. *Passé composé/passé composé*
J'ai pas entendu (PC) qu'ils ont faite (PC) trop de trouble dans le boutte. (053/93)
 "I haven't heard that they've made too much trouble in the area."

5. Discussion

It is clear that there are verbs that can and cannot take the subjunctive, since it is by no means the case that the subjunctive appears in just any embedded clause introduced by (overt or deleted) *que*. As far as the verbs that *can* take it are concerned, and these have been the focus of this study,

in our Canadian French materials, they all show variation. Yet we have seen that some matrix verbs show *strong* associations with the subjunctive (*falloir, vouloir*), and others only very weak ones (negated *croire, penser*). How can we account for this? After juggling a number of types of classification proposed in the literature, the only clear distinction that emerges is that negated verbs of opinion tend not to co-occur with the subjunctive, while volitives and emotives show the opposite tendency. Any effort to explain this result in another way, e.g. by a factive-non-factive, or assertive-non-assertive distinction, shows that these are largely relabellings of the “semantic class” distinction (in the sense that factives are basically emotives; non-factive non-assertives, negated verbs of opinion, etc.).

Now, we mentioned earlier that the criteria for inclusion in one of these so-called “semantic” classes are fuzzy at best, which is why their actual constituency differs from one reference to another. We have not been able to discover any principled means of re-defining these classes which would *also* result in a grouping whereby those matrices which are in fact strongly associated with subjunctive usage would co-occur. This is because there is tremendous variability within the classes themselves. The rates of subjunctive usage presented in the foregoing tables represent the *average* for matrix verbs in that class. Examination of the rates for each *individual* verb reveals once again, that these vary from overwhelming presence to complete absence of the subjunctive. This leads us to endorse the position that it is in fact the lexical properties of the matrix verb that trigger the presence of an embedded subjunctive. Unfortunately, the appropriate characterization of those properties remains elusive, since for many verbs strongly associated with the subjunctive, we find another basically synonymous one (semantically *and* syntactically), which is not. This is why *préférer* “prefer” governs subjunctive 100% of the time, but *aimer mieux* “prefer”, only 2% of the time.

Aside from the effect of the matrix verb, we have seen that there are other cross-cutting effects on mood choice. The most important of these is the tense concordance effect, which is itself strictly syntactic, and in no way linked to the putative semantic role of the subjunctive. It is of particular interest that it is in the *conditional*, with its connotations of futurity and irrealis, that the disfavoring effect of concord shows up most strongly. It is well known that the conditional is used so widely in a modal function that many consider it a mood in its own right. It is also the case that in modern Standard French the once “meaningful” uses of the subjunctive in main

clauses and in apodoses of conditional sentences have now been replaced by the conditional (e.g. Harris 1974, 1978). However, any proposal that the semantic value of the subjunctive persists, but has merely become grammaticalized by the conditional, would fail to explain why it is that choice of conditional is almost entirely restricted to verbs embedded under another conditional.

Other factors we have discovered to affect mood choice include the salience of the morphological form of the subjunctive, the presence of parenthetical material separating *falloir* from its lower clause, and the overt-ness of the complementizer *que* for other verbs. We may interpret these as performance effects, in the sense that they are closely related to factors such as "appearance" of a context as one which would require subjunctive, accessibility to the appropriate morphological form of rarely occurring verbs, etc.

There are at least two possible interpretations for the facts we have presented here. One is the traditional interpretation that variability in mood choice reflects variability in what the speaker wishes to convey. Under this interpretation, the speaker who uttered, e.g. the first sentence in (11) would have been highly committed to the truth value of the complement proposition, have made a strong assertion with regard to it, etc. His repetition of this utterance a few seconds later (the second sentence in (11)) would now mark doubt, uncertainty and failure to assert the same proposition. While such a state of affairs is by no means impossible, we reject this interpretation for a number of reasons. First, speaker intent is simply inaccessible to the analyst when it is accompanied by no other surface correlates or independent motivation. In the case at hand, we have attempted to isolate a number of objective contextual factors which could capture the degree of assertion or doubt of the speaker. The analyses presented above have shown that none of these were significant in predicting mood choice in Canadian French, even in a statistical sense. Beyond this, one could always interrogate speakers directly as to their intent. Even if this were feasible, there is no guarantee that the speaker is not ascribing a meaning, upon reflection, that was neither her original intent during spontaneous discourse, nor perceived as such by the hearer (cf. Sankoff 1988).

An additional problem with a semantic interpretation for mood choice stems from the finding that "subjunctive-selecting" matrices actually co occur with that mood according to a hierarchy ranging from almost always to almost never. This fact would force the undesirable conclusion that with

certain matrices (e.g. *trouver bon*) all speakers fail to assert their complements, while with others (e.g. negated *croire*), all speakers (almost always) do the contrary, despite the fact that the matrices themselves may both be classed as non-assertive. Third, we have demonstrated that the selection of mood (and tense) in embedded verbs governed by subjunctive-requiring matrices is largely motivated by the purely syntactic factor of agreement with the tense of the matrix verb, as well as by other factors of a morphosyntactic nature. If mood in and of itself carries referential meaning, its selection in a given context should not be affected by morphological and syntactic features of that context. The findings presented here, however, indicate that it is. These facts, taken together, militate in favor of a (morpho)syntactic interpretation of mood usage. The variable we alluded to above may in this connection be defined as a *morphosyntactic* variable in which choices made from different tense/mood paradigms alternate in verbs embedded under a restricted set of historically determined matrices.

5.1 *Historical precursors of mood variability*

We do not wish to imply that subjunctive mood has *lost* its meaning in embedded noun clauses in Canadian French. The available evidence, and this is the subject of ongoing research, suggests that it never had one, at least since the time of Classical Latin. Why then have grammarians, even those who explicitly endorse a syntactic interpretation, persisted for centuries in ascribing variation in mood choice in subjunctive contexts to intended differences in meaning, and thereby concluded that the subjunctive, in this function, remains productive? A number of synchronic and diachronic facts may help explain this.

Most Latin grammarians distinguished three meaningful types of subjunctive: the jussive, the optative, and the potential. Harris (1974:171) has suggested that in Latin two distinctive uses of the subjunctive could be identified: one where it was already an empty marker of subordination, and one where it was meaningful. The “meaningless” type was required either by the “semantic” class of the main verb, or by its actual lexical form, or by the structure of the sentence, mirroring quite closely the subsequent prescriptive treatment given this mood in grammars of French to this day. Significantly, the meaningless type, corresponding to the Latin jussive and optative, always occurred in dependent clauses. Here choice of subjunctive could *not* be distinctive since no meaningful opposition with indicative was

possible, given that choice of subjunctive was determined by the nature of the matrix. The “meaningful” subjunctive occurred only in main clauses, and here it has long been replaced by the conditional, at least partially in other Romance languages, and completely in French. But while the “meaningful” Latin potential subjunctive has now become grammaticalized by the conditional in main clauses, the history of the meaningless subjunctive in dependent clauses has been extremely stable: to this day most of the *same* semantic classes *and* matrix verbs requiring the subjunctive in Latin persist in requiring this mood in French. Why its use has continued to be interpreted as meaningful remains a mystery, but is probably not unrelated to Haugen’s (1966) suggestion that French, as one of the most immediate heirs of Latin, took over most of its concepts of correctness from that language. Indeed, French is probably the most highly codified and standardized of European languages, and codification and variation in form are not compatible.

Synchronic observations of linguistic behavior may also explain this state of affairs. The few empirical studies of mood choice in spoken French available (Davies 1979, Sand 1981, Auger 1988, Laurier 1989), despite inevitable differences in approach adopted, dialect studied, and conclusions drawn, show remarkable agreement on the following points:

a. Contexts in which subjunctive usage is even an option are extremely rare in the spoken language, not exceeding five or ten per half hour of speech.

b. In these few contexts in which choice of subjunctive is possible, anywhere from one third to one half of its surface manifestations are morphologically ambiguous; it is thus impossible even to *ascertain* which mood was selected in a large number of cases.

c. Of all the matrices that purportedly govern the subjunctive, a minimum of 40% (in our data two thirds) is inevitably made up by the matrix *falloir*. In all of the aforementioned empirical studies as well as our own, this verb co-occurs with subjunctive mood between 80% and 100% of the time. Its existence in any data set, as we have already pointed out, has the effect of artificially inflating the overall rate of subjunctive selection in general, and making it appear as if the subjunctive is being used more productively than is actually the case — recall that we have shown here that verbal matrices other than *falloir* are about as likely to govern subjunctive as not. (The same may be said of matrices *vouloir* and *pour que* (though the latter is not a focus of the present study), both of which are very fre-

quent, and both of which are strongly associated with subjunctive mood.)

It is thus apparent from any examination of French performance data that there exist in fact relatively few contexts in which the vigour of the subjunctive can be assessed at all. Rather the existence of a small subset of matrices strongly associated with a small subset of frequently occurring suppletive subjunctives, coupled with a large number of matrices governing embedded verbs whose mood is ambiguous, have conspired to make it appear as though subjunctive usage in subjunctive contexts were far more productive than it actually is.

The developments we have reported here are not entirely unexpected when we consider the trajectory of the subjunctive from the time of Classical Latin through Old French and beyond. Numerous sources (e.g. Jensen 1974, Bailard 1978, 1980) detail the path by which various matrices have vacillated back and forth as to mood. What we know about linguistic change tells us that movements of verbs from one class into another could not have taken place without a period of prior variability. It is not surprising that this state of flux should continue to obtain in the language today. Perhaps more surprising is that, in a striking turnabout from earlier presentations, the latest edition of at least one prescriptive grammar has explicitly recognized this. In conclusion it will be instructive to review what Grevisse (1986) has to say on this matter:

“The subjunctive is used when the speaker is not committed to the reality of the proposition, and particularly in the following cases: a) after impersonal verbs denoting necessity (*il faut*), possibility (*il est probable*), doubt (*il est douteux*), negation (*il est exclu*) or emotion (*il est heureux*), even when [the latter are] fully asserted. One is doubtless taking into account that the action could have *not* taken place. Added to these are impersonal verbs expressing certainty or likelihood when negated, questioned or in a conditional proposition. *The indicative, however, is not impossible.* b) When the subject or object phrase is sentence-initial. *The indicative, however, is far from rare.* c) After personal verbs expressing negation (*nier*) or doubt (*douter*). [Followed by examples of “unwonted” indicatives.] If these are negated, questioned or in a conditional proposition, the indicative becomes possible again (*without being obligatory*), especially if one wishes to emphasize the reality of the fact. To verbs of negation and doubt are added verbs of opinion (*croire, espérer*), declaration (*dire*), perception (*entendre, voir*), when negated, questioned or in a conditional proposition. *However, even in this case, the indicative is possible,* if one wishes to emphasize the reality of the fact. d) After personal verbs expressing will (*ordre, prière, désir, souhait, défense, empêchement*) and after emotive verbs (*joie, tristesse, crainte, regret, admiration, étonnement*), even when

[the latter] express reality of the fact. Doubtless one is taking into account that it could have *not* happened. [Followed by one example each of matrix *vouloir* and *craindre* governing an indicative] (Grevisse, M. 1986. *Le bon usage*. 12th edition. Paris: Duculot: 1628-1633, translation and emphasis ours.)

It thus appears that even such a prescriptivist bastion as *Le bon usage* is finally moving toward a more faithful reflection of *l'usage*.

Notes

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2. Codes refer to speaker number and line number of his utterance in the Ottawa-Hull French Corpus described below. All examples are verbatim reproductions of the speaker's actual utterance.
3. Since every subjunctive governor of moderate frequency in our data shows variability in selection of embedded mood, we assume that had the rarely occurring apparently categorical governors themselves been employed more frequently, parallel variability would show up here as well.
4. The term *indicative* in this paper refers to *present* indicative, as distinct from *conditional*. We take no stance on whether the conditional is most appropriately analyzed as a tense or a mood.
5. Nordahl examined approximately 24,000 subjunctive contexts in literary texts and newspapers.
6. These morphologically regularized forms have also been widely attested in other studies of spoken French.

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