The puzzle of subjunctive tenses

Abstract

Building on previous findings on tense construals and on constraints on modal-temporal configurations, this paper presents a semantic analysis of subjunctive tenses in Spanish which departs from the defective-tense hypothesis. The subjunctive tense system is analysed in a parallel way to the indicative system, and the peculiarities of the imperfect subjunctive are shown to mirror those of the imperfect indicative. Key to the analysis is the notion of ‘fake past’, a tense anchored to an interval $T_x$ distinct from the time of utterance, which can be either temporally or modally bound. The semantic contribution of subjunctive tenses is examined first in root contexts and subsequently in argument clauses. The possibility of temporal disharmony and its limits are interpreted on the basis of Sequence of Tense principles and of temporal restrictions on modal bases.

1. Introduction

Research on mood has been largely dominated by the issues of subjunctive licensing and subjunctive meaning. By contrast, the temporal configurations associated with subjunctive forms have attracted comparatively little interest. This is hardly surprising for languages in which the stock of subjunctive forms is radically impoverished, as is the case in contemporary French. As shown in examples (1a-b), contemporary non-literary French contrasts a non-anterior (simple) and an anterior (compound) form for the subjunctive, and the distribution of these forms is entirely independent from the tense of the matrix predicate in
embedding contexts. As shown in examples (2a-c), the whole burden of rescuing deviant temporal-modal configurations, such as ‘desires about the past’, falls on the (conditional) morphology of the matrix predicate, and has no reflection in the subjunctive forms.

(1)  
   a. *Il est possible qu’elle parte/ soit partie.*  
       ‘It is possible that she leaves/left’  
   b. *Il était possible qu’elle parte/ soit partie.*  
       ‘It was possible that she (should) leave/had left’

(2)  
   a. *Il veut qu’elle parte/* soit partie.  
       ‘He wants her to leave/*have left’  
   b. *Il a voulu qu’elle parte / *soit partie.*  
       ‘He felt the need/decided for her to leave/*to have left’  
   c. *Il aurait voulu qu’elle parte/ soit partie.*  
       ‘He’d have preferred for her to leave/ to have left’

Italian and the Ibero-Romance languages have a richer stock of subjunctive forms. One of the reasons for the lack of interest in their temporal contribution is arguably the fact that the subjunctive is a dependent mood appearing mainly in Sequence-of-Tense contexts. The success of the defective-tense hypothesis advanced by Picallo (1984/1990) certainly bears some responsibility for this lack of interest. Although it has been widely acknowledged that Picallo’s correlations only hold for a restricted type of subjunctive contexts, the idea of tense-defectivity has proven particularly resistant, and shows up in different guises in recent work (see for instance Giorgi & Pianesi 2000, Giorgi 2006).

This paper attempts to formulate the basic descriptive generalizations concerning the distribution and interpretation of subjunctive tenses in Spanish, both in root and argument clauses. I will argue that specific temporal constraints

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1 In order to simplify the exposition, I will systematically ignore throughout the paper the possibility of future perfect interpretations for perfect forms. These interpretations only arise (a) in the presence of adverbial expressions denoting future intervals or (b) in the presence of future temporal clauses. As one of the reviewers remarks, *Il veut qu’elle soit partie quand il rentrera* ‘He wants her to have left by the time he arrives’ is a perfectly acceptable French sentence in a future perfect interpretation. In such cases, the anchor for the perfect is the (future) time of the temporal modifier. On the general issue of future perfect interpretations, see Demirdache & Uribe-Etxebarria (2008).
on subjunctive clauses are not uniform, but depend crucially on the type of context licensing or selecting the subjunctive. This is to be expected against the background of the insight formulated by Quer (2006: 661) in a recent overview article about subjunctives:

(3) “subjunctive does not constitute a syntactically uniform object, either cross-linguistically or even within the same language. [...] some allegedly subjunctive-related phenomena show up in a subset of the subjunctive clauses in a language, but not in all of them”.

If the subjunctive itself is not a uniform object, we have no reason to expect any uniformity in the constraints on temporal dependencies for subjunctive clauses: it is not the fact of the clause being in the subjunctive mood, but the semantic properties of the context that will largely determine these constraints. I will try to show that the distribution and interpretation of subjunctive tenses follows from the interaction of their temporal contribution with some general principles governing Sequence-of-Tense, on the one hand, and admissible temporal-modal configurations, on the other. This interaction constitutes powerful probe for a better understanding of the semantics of subjunctive contexts, which are not a uniform semantic class.

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, I will compare the tense-aspect system of indicative and subjunctive forms in Spanish. In the analysis I propose, both systems turn out to be more similar than usually assumed. In particular, the peculiarities of the past (imperfect) subjunctive roughly mirror those of the imperfect indicative. I will first illustrate the way the hypothesized system works in root contexts. In such contexts, temporal dependencies cannot be part of the explanation, because there is simply no overt higher tense. In Section 3, I will take up the issue of subjunctive tenses in argument clauses, concentrating on the possibility or impossibility of violations of temporal harmony between the tense of the matrix and the tense of the subjunctive clause. The explanations proposed for the emerging patterns of temporal constraints lead to a refinement of
previous classifications of subjunctive contexts, both in the case of future-oriented matrix verbs (i.e. volitionals, directives and causatives) and in the case of configurations giving rise to Double-Access-effects.

2. The tense-aspect system of Spanish

2.1. The indicative paradigm

The analysis I propose for Spanish tense and aspect is based on the neo-Reichenbachian model developed by Demirdache & Uribe-Etxeberria (2007). In this model, Tense is a relation between the time of which a temporal property (occurrence of an event, state) is said to hold and a higher anchor. In matrix contexts, the latter is normally the time of speech (Utt-T). The former – the time of assertion (Ast-T) – corresponds both to the Reichenbachian Reference Time and to Carlota Smith's 'interval of visibility'. Possible relations are anteriority (anchor after anchored), inclusion or coincidence, and posteriority (anchor before anchored). These possibilities are replicated for Aspect, which expresses a relation between the time of the event (Ev-T) and Ast-T. A central feature of the analysis I’m developing is the assumption that some specific tenses do not have Utt-T as anchor, but an interval I will label Tx. The introduction of this interval is designed to capture the anaphoric and modal properties of tense forms exhibiting imperfect morphology, in particular the fact that some uses of the so-called imperfective past do not express anteriority, but a special coincidence relation with their anchor. The analysis of Spanish indicative tenses is summarized in Table 1. Tenses are illustrated with the 1st Pers. Sing. of the verb cantar ‘sing’, aspects with aspectualized infinitival forms.

@@ Insert Table 1 here

Since some aspects of this analysis differ from most current analyses, it is necessary at this point to briefly elaborate on them. Firstly, as I have argued
elsewhere, aspect is not expressed by simple tenses in Spanish, with the notable exception of the 'simple perfect', a perfective past tense requiring for Ast-T to include Ev-T (Laca 2005). No other simple tenses specify the relation between Ast-T and Ev-T; they are aspectually neutral or underspecified (Smith 1991, Rossdeutscher, Reyle & Kamp 2007, Schaden 2007: Chap.3). However, the relationship between Ev-T and Ast-T is not totally unconstrained in aspectually neutral forms. Possible mappings of a temporal property onto the time of which this property is said to hold are constrained (a) by the temporal structure of the described eventuality, according to a very general pattern which essentially bans progressive-like interpretations of non-homogeneous predicates, which do not hold of subintervals (Demirdache & Uribe-Etxeberria 2007); (b) by polarisation effects due to the existence of aspectually marked competing forms (Laca 2005). The relationship between Ev-T and Ast-T is explicitly expressed in Spanish by a set of aspectual periphrases exhibiting a characteristic behaviour (Laca 2005). Among them, only 'compound tenses', i.e. periphrastic combinations formed with haber + PP, which carry the main bulk of the expression of secondary anteriority relations, will be considered in this paper.

Secondly, anaphoric or 'bound' tenses are assumed in this analysis not to be anchored to Utt-T, but to an interval Tx that is identified by a past interval provided by an embedding attitude predicate. This notion of anaphoric tense is very restrictive: in the sense adopted here, an anaphoric tense can only appear in past reported speech or reported attitude contexts. The introduction of Tx is designed to provide a uniform interpretation for forms exhibiting imperfect morphology (the imperfect itself when functioning as zero tense or ‘present of the past’, as well as the pluperfect and the conditional). One of the immediate advantages of the Tx-based analysis of anaphoric tenses is that it allows for a straightforward solution to the well known problem posed by perfect conditional configurations (corresponding to would have + PP) without assuming a third layer of temporal relations next to Tense and Aspect.
The introduction of $Tx$ as the anchor for anaphoric tenses proves also useful in accounting for the fact that such forms consistently develop *irrealis* uses. *Irrealis* is a cover term for the counterfactual interpretations that arise with an anterior or a simultaneous temporal orientation, and for the unlikelihood or future-less-vivid interpretations that arise with a prospective temporal orientation. Such uses are illustrated for the imperfect in (4a-b):

(4) a. *De haber podido, hoy estaba en la playa.* [SIMULTANEOUS, of have can.**PP** today be.**IMPF.1.SG** in the beach **COUNTERFACTUAL**] ‘Given the chance, I would be at the beach today’

b. *De enterarse, seguro que se enojaba.* [PROSPECTIVE, FUTURE- of learn sure that **REFL** get-mad **IMPF.3.SG** LESS-VIVID] ‘If s/he would learn about it, s/he would certainly get mad’

*Irrealis* uses have been extensively treated by Iatridou (2000), who proposes an analysis of this type of ‘past’ tenses in terms of an Exclusion Feature on the world/time of speech. Anchoring to $Tx$ provides a means of capturing the Exclusion Feature. In anaphoric uses, $Tx$ is identified by a past interval introduced by the matrix verb; in *irrealis* uses, it constitutes a 'temporal counterpart' of Utt-$T$ in worlds other than the world of evaluation. Central for our purposes in this paper is what appears to be a clear correlation between tenses having 'bound' (anaphoric) interpretations and tenses having *irrealis* interpretations. This correlation is crucial for understanding the imperfect subjunctive, whose range of interpretations will be shown to be strikingly parallel to that of the imperfect indicative. In the following, both 'bound' and *irrealis* interpretations will be referred to as 'fake pasts'. They are characterized by expressing one anteriority relation less than their 'real pasts' counterparts. Thus, a ‘real past’ imperfect expresses one anteriority relation, and a ‘real past’ pluperfect expresses two. By contrast, a ‘fake past’ pluperfect expresses only one anteriority relation, and a ‘fake past’ imperfect none at all.

A possibly unwelcome feature of the present analysis is that the imperfect comes out as ambiguous between two configurations, a *bona fide* past tense and a
bound, anaphoric 'present of the past'. This assumption is justified by the ambiguity of imperfects embedded under past tenses. As illustrated in (5a-b), an imperfect embedded under a past tense can have a simultaneous (5a) or an anterior interpretation (5b) with regard to the time of the matrix verb. The first is a 'bound' imperfect, a present of the past, expressing coincidence between Ast-T and Tx, which is itself identified by the time of the matrix. The second is a 'free' imperfect, a past tense expressing anteriority of Ast-T with regard to a higher anchor—which, as is always the case in reported speech and reported thought contexts, is provided by the time of the matrix.

(5)  

a. Les dije que (en ese momento) Juan estaba en su oficina.  
them tell.SP.1SG that at that moment J. be.IMPF. in his office  
‘I told them that Juan was in his office at that moment’  
a’. Tx Ast-T, Tx = Tmatrix

b. Le dije que (un momento antes) Juan estaba en su oficina.  
them tell.SP.1SG that a moment before J. be.IMPF. in his office  
‘I told them that Juan was in his office some time before’  
b’. Tmatrix > Ast-T

As expressed in Table 1, the imperfect is ambiguous between two temporal configurations, a past configuration expressing anteriority and a 'fake past' configuration expressing a particular coincidence relation with regard to a temporal counterpart of Utt-T, dubbed here Tx. This temporal counterpart corresponds, in temporally bound uses, to the time of a past act of thinking or speaking. In modal, irrealis uses, this counterpart does not belong, unlike Utt-T, to the actual world history (w0). The 'fake past' configuration is nothing but a 'bindable' version of the present tense. As we will see in the following section, these peculiarities are shared by the imperfect subjunctive.

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2 The interpretive effects with modal verbs studied in Laca (2008) provide further motivation for this assumption, since the epistemic/counterfactual ambiguity of modals in the imperfect in some non-root configurations is clearly correlated to the hypothesized ambiguity between a present of the past (giving rise to epistemic readings) and a bona fide past tense (resulting in counterfactual readings).
2.2. The subjunctive paradigm

Table 2 shows the temporal contribution I would like to propose for subjunctive forms in Spanish. As indicated by the blanks in the Table, there are two main differences with the indicative: (a) the subjunctive lacks forms specifically indicating posteriority (anchor before anchored), and (b) the subjunctive lacks an aspectually marked simple tense corresponding to the 'simple perfect' (perfective past). The first difference indicates that the subjunctive is organized as a PAST versus NON-PAST temporal system, the second one will be shown to have relevant consequences on the contrast between the imperfect and the (compound) perfect subjunctive.

@@ Insert Table 2 here

2.3. Subjunctive tenses in root contexts

The analysis summarized in Table 2 will be first illustrated by the interpretation of subjunctive forms in contexts in which these forms cannot but be temporally free, since the selecting or licensing context carries no tense specification. This is the case of subjunctive forms in root contexts that are either (a) selected by a desiderative adverb (ojalá “hopefully”), (b) licensed by an adverb of epistemic uncertainty (quizás, tal vez, acaso “maybe, perhaps”), or (c) licensed by a nominal evaluative-factive expression (as, for instance, qué pena que “pity that”). The interpretation of subjunctive tenses differs in these contexts in ways that are predictable from the interaction between the hypothesized temporal contribution of the form and the semantic properties of the context.

Present subjunctives exhibit a pattern of interpretation that is characteristic for aspectually unspecified NON-PAST tenses. In the absence of temporal adverbials, stative predicates are interpreted as simultaneous to Utt-T (6a), and telic predicates are forward-shifted with regard to Utt-T (6b). As for
atelic eventives, they may have both a forward-shifted or a simultaneous, progressive-like interpretation, which is however dispreferred (6c):³

(6) a. Ojalá /Quizás esté en casa.
   ‘Hopefully/Perhaps s/he is at home’

   b. Ojalá /Quizás cierren la ventana.
   ‘Hopefully/Perhaps they will close the window’

   c. Ojalá /Quizás miren la televisión.
   ‘Hopefully/Perhaps they will watch TV’ /
   ‘Hopefully/Perhaps they are watching TV’

This pattern of temporal-structure driven temporal location, which clearly distinguishes states from telic eventives, is extremely general. It is replicated in indicative present sentences, in the antecedent of conditionals and in infinitives embedded under modals or belief-verbs (see Iatridou 2000, Copley 2008a, Laca 2008). Actually, this pattern is but a manifestation of the Present Eventive Constraint, one that is typical for languages lacking a fully grammaticalized progressive.⁴ The special coincidence relation with an anchor noted O cannot be one of simultaneity in the case of non-homogeneous predicates, since these cannot hold of points in time and do not hold of their own subintervals. For a NON-PAST tense, forward-shifting of Ast-T, the time of which the description holds, is the only available option for telic eventives. In the case of states, by contrast, which do hold of points in time and of their own subintervals, simultaneity is the default interpretation. As for atelic eventives, which do not hold of points in time, but do hold of their own subintervals, simultaneity with the anchor gives rise to a progressive-like interpretation. A progressive-like interpretation for non-specified aspect is only possible in languages lacking a fully grammaticalized progressive form. In Spanish, the progressive is less grammaticalized than in English, so that

³ These regularities hold for episodic readings of eventives. In generic or habitual readings, all predicates behave like states, i.e. they give rise to simultaneity as the default interpretation.
⁴ For different views on the Present Eventive Constraint, see Condoravdi (2001), Copley (2008a).
by contrast with English, such interpretations are possible. At the same time, it is more grammaticalized than, say, in French, so that such interpretations are rather marginal (for a more detailed discussion of the polarization effects of progressives on aspectually non-specified forms, see Laca 2005). Non-progressive interpretations of atelic eventives follow the same mechanism as the interpretation of telic eventives.

Desiderative adverbs and adverbs of epistemic uncertainty constitute modal environments. As such, they are subject to a diversity constraint on modal bases (Condoravdi 2001, Werner 2003, Laca 2008): the modal base providing the background for interpretation should contain both worlds of which the expressed proposition holds and worlds of which it does not hold. In the case of forward-shifted interpretations, such as (6b), this requirement is automatically fulfilled by the undeterministic nature of contingent future propositions: since contingent future propositions are not settled at the time of evaluation, the modal base contains both $p$ and $\neg p$ worlds. In the case of simultaneous interpretations, such as (6a), which involve settled facts, the requirement is fulfilled by the epistemic uncertainty of the speaker as to the truth-value of $p$. Not only the epistemic adverb, but also the desiderative adverb in (6a) conveys uncertainty of the speaker as to the whereabouts of the subject.

By contrast with these modal environments, evaluative-factive contexts presuppose the truth of the expressed proposition: evaluatives apply to settled and known facts. As a consequence, simultaneous interpretations (7a) are not associated with epistemic uncertainty. More importantly, the obligatorily forward-shifted interpretations of telic eventives (7b) acquire the scheduled or planned overtones that are typical for futurate uses of the present indicative in assertive contexts (Kaufmann, Condoravdi and Harizanov 2006, Copley 2008b).

(7)  
\[ \begin{align*} 
\text{a. } & \text{¡Qué pena que esté en casa!} \\
& \text{such pity that be.SBJ.3.SG in house} \\
& \text{‘Such a pity that s/he is at home’} \\
\text{b. } & \text{¡Qué pena que cierren la ventana!} \\
& \text{such pity that close.SBJ.3.PL the window} \\
\end{align*} \]
‘Such a pity that they should close the window’

An (episodic) eventive present subjunctive is felt to be inadequate in such contexts if the described event is not amenable to scheduling (8a), in exactly the same way an eventive present indicative is (8b):

(8)  a. ¡Qué suerte que encuentres un trabajo!
    what luck find.PR.SBJ.2SG a job
    #'Such a luck that you find a job!'  
    b. # Encuentras un trabajo.
    find.PR.IND.2SG a job
    # 'You find a job'

The interpretation of imperfect subjunctives differs significantly in the three types of context. In my analysis, imperfect subjunctives, like imperfect indicatives, are ambiguous between a 'real past' and a 'fake past' configuration. The latter can only correspond to an irrealis in the absence of a higher past tense that could bind Tx.

In desiderative contexts, the imperfect subjunctive is predominantly interpreted as a 'fake past' irrealis. The same pattern of temporal-structure driven temporal interpretation illustrated in (6a-c) above obtains. Temporal location is parallel, but simultaneity gives now rise to counterfactual readings (9a), and forward-shifting gives rise to future-less-vivid readings (9b):

(9)  a. Ojalá estuviera en casa.
    hopefully be.IMPF-SBJ.3.SG in house
    ‘I wish s/he were at home’
    b. Ojalá cerraran la ventana
    hopefully close. IMPF-SBJ.3.PL the window
    ‘I wish they would close the window’

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5 The possibility for an imperfect subjunctive to express anteriority, i.e. to function as a 'real past' and not as an irrealis fake past' in such contexts, is not totally excluded. It is, however, difficult to attest and most speakers I have been able to consult report difficulties in obtaining anteriority readings for examples (9a-b).
The interpretation of the imperfect subjunctive is crucially different when the subjunctive is licensed by an adverb of epistemic uncertainty. On account of the semantic-pragmatic incompatibility between the contribution of the adverb, on the one hand, and the implications of irrealis interpretations, on the other, an imperfect subjunctive cannot be interpreted as an irrealis 'fake past' in such contexts. Adverbs of epistemic uncertainty indicate that the proposition expressed by the sentence is compatible with the beliefs of the speaker (the speaker believes that the world of evaluation is possibly a $p$-world). In irrealis interpretations, anchoring to $\text{Tx}$, a 'temporal counterpart' of $\text{Utt-T}$ in worlds different from the world of evaluation, has the effect of excluding the world of evaluation from the domain and gives rise to the implicature that the speaker does not believe the world of evaluation to be a $p$-world. As convincingly shown by Iatridou (2000), irrealis 'fake pasts' are incompatible with the belief that the proposition expressed in the clause containing the 'fake past' form is (possibly) true. Thus, the same semantic-pragmatic incompatibility that accounts for the deviant nature of (10) also excludes irrealis 'fake past' interpretations of the imperfect subjunctive in such contexts.

(10)  # If John came to the party, and I think he will, we would have a great time.

Due to the pragmatic impossibility of irrealis interpretations and to the lack of a higher past tense, only the anteriority, 'real past' configuration is available for an imperfect subjunctive licensed by an adverb of epistemic uncertainty. Interestingly enough, the imperfect subjunctive is mainly used with states in such contexts. With eventive predicates, anteriority with regard to $\text{Utt-T}$ is expressed mainly by the perfect subjunctive. The pattern illustrated in (11a) clearly replicates the imperfect/ (simple or compound) perfect alternation in the indicative version (11b):
As is to be expected, *irrealis* interpretations are also excluded in evaluative-factive contexts, since these presuppose the truth of the evaluated proposition. In such contexts, however, the imperfect subjunctive is used as a 'real past' for statives and eventives alike, and seems to alternate freely with the perfect subjunctive in the latter case:

(11) a. *Tal vez me conociera [STATE]*.
    perhaps me know.IMPF.SBJ.3.SG
    *tal vez me haya visto [EVENT] en el club.*
    perhaps me have. PR.SBJ.3.SG seen in the club

b. *Tal vez me conocía [STATE]*,
    perhaps me know.IMPF.IND.3.SG
    *tal vez me vio/ ha visto [EVENT] en el club.*
    perhaps me see.SP.3.SG/have. PR.IND.3.SG seen in the club

‘Perhaps s/he knew me, perhaps s/he saw/ has seen me at the club’

To summarize, the interpretation of subjunctive tenses in root contexts confirms the analysis proposed in Table 2, while showing at the same time the central role of the context.

(i) A *PAST versus NON-PAST* tense system will easily give rise to forward-shifted readings for the *NON-PAST* forms. Both the present subjunctive and the *irrealis* 'fake past' imperfect subjunctive are *NON-PAST*, and their temporal interpretation is driven by temporal structure in ways that follow a particular version of the Present Eventive Constraint. Forward-shifted interpretations only show the scheduling effects associated with futurates in evaluative-factive contexts, on account of the settledness requirement of such contexts.

(ii) The ambiguity of the imperfect subjunctive between a 'real past', expressing anteriority to *Utt-T*, and a 'fake past', expressing coincidence with *Tx*, manifests itself in root contexts as a contrast between 'past' and *irrealis*. For semantic-
pragmatic reasons, contexts of epistemic uncertainty and evaluative-factive contexts disallow the latter interpretation. Desiderative contexts, on the other hand, overwhelmingly prefer the irrealis interpretation, giving rise to simultaneous (counterfactual) and forward-shifted (future-less-vivid) readings according to the same temporal pattern found in the present subjunctive.

(iii) In root contexts, the imperfect subjunctive can be interpreted as simultaneous (9a), posterior (9b) or anterior (12a-b) to Utt-T. This ambiguity is compounded in past embedding contexts by the fact that, in such cases, the 'fake past' configuration expressing coincidence with Tx may also be interpreted anaphorically, as a 'bound' imperfect. This complexity has led Giorgi & Pianesi (2000) to characterize the Italian imperfect subjunctive as a ‘tenseless’ form, i.e. “a morphological tense whose contribution to the meaning of the sentence does not correspond to an asserted relation between the event and the relevant anchor [the time of the matrix event in the case of embedded sentences, Utt-T in the case of matrix sentences, BL]". In the analysis I propose, this plurality of interpretations is not interpreted as ‘tenselessness’, but as the result of (a) the ambiguity of the imperfect subjunctive between 'real past' and 'fake past' uses, and (b) the possibility for 'fake past' imperfect subjunctives of exhibiting forward-shifted readings. Actually, the imperfect indicative exhibits the same plurality of interpretations, thus suggesting that the imperfect subjunctive comes by its temporal peculiarities by virtue of the fact that it is an imperfect, not that it is subjunctive.

3. Subjunctive tenses in argument clauses

3.1. Temporal (dis-)harmony and its interpretation
According to the defective tense hypothesis, the tense of the subjunctive is always anaphoric on the tense of the matrix clause. This analysis predicts that no crossed combinations arise, i.e. that only the patterns in (13) are possible:

\[
(13) \quad \begin{align*}
& a. \quad - \text{PAST}_{\text{matrix}} - \text{PAST}_{\text{subj}} \\
& b. \quad + \text{PAST}_{\text{matrix}} + \text{PAST}_{\text{subj}}
\end{align*}
\]

This hypothesis has been challenged by several authors on the grounds that violations of temporal harmony are indeed possible (Suñer & Padilla Rivera 1987/1990, Suñer 1990). The most permissive alternative hypothesis is the one advanced by Quer (1998), according to whom the only relevant tense restriction is the one in (14), which furthermore only applies in the case of intensional subjunctives, i.e. subjunctives selected by volitionals, directives, and causatives:

\[
(14) \quad ^* - \text{PAST}_{\text{matrix}} + \text{PAST}_{\text{subj}} \text{ [for selected, intensional subjunctives]}
\]

Quer (1998) advances a semantic explanation for the tense restriction in (14): volitionals, directives, and causatives need to operate on a set of future or non-anterior alternatives, and the temporal configuration in (14) violates this requirement. Although Quer's hypothesis is on the right track, I will try to show that it is at the same time too strong and too weak. More importantly, a detailed examination of tense restrictions provides important clues for a better understanding of the semantics of future-oriented contexts and of double-access effects.

Subjunctives in argument clauses constitute Sequence-of-Tense contexts. I will argue that in Spanish, Sequence-of-Tense in subjunctive contexts differs only minimally from the situation in indicative contexts. The principles governing Sequence-of-Tense are the following:

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6 Such contexts are further characterized by (a) categorically excluding the indicative, (b) only allowing local triggering of the subjunctive, which does not extend to deeper embedded CPs, and (c) giving rise to subject obviation effects. For details, see Quer (1998).

7 A caveat as to dialectal variation is necessary at this point. Some American Spanish dialects exhibit a clear weakening of the deictic status of the present subjunctive, which manifests itself in
(i) the tense of an embedded argument clause is always interpreted with the time of the matrix clause as higher anchor;

(ii) some tenses require, furthermore, for the tense of the embedded clause to be interpreted with regard to Utt-T, thus giving rise to Double Access Readings - henceforth DAR (cf. Enç 1987, Giorgi & Pianesi 1987, Suñer 1990, Carrasco Gutiérrez 1999);

(iii) only tenses that have a 'bindable', anaphoric counterpart, give rise to DAR. As shown in Tables (1) and (2) and recapitulated below for convenience, these are the present and the future, i.e. the deictic tenses that have a counterpart in tenses organized around Tx.

(15) a. PRESENT (IND./SUBJ.): Utt-T o Ast-T
    IMPERFECT (IND./SUBJ.): Tx o Ast-T

b. FUTURE (IND.): Utt-T < Ast-T
    CONDITIONAL (IND.): Tx < Ast-T

In the analysis proposed above for the temporal contribution of subjunctive tenses, the present and perfect subjunctive are deictic, i.e. they express respectively simultaneity/ posteriority and anteriority with regard to Utt-T. The imperfect and pluperfect subjunctive are ambiguous between 'real past' and 'fake past' configurations. The former express simple or double anteriority with regard to Utt-T, whereas the latter are either irrealis or 'bound' (anaphoric). By comparison with 'real pasts', 'fake pasts' have one anteriority relation less, as a result of the fact that they express coincidence of Ast-T with Tx.

Against this background, configurations violating temporal harmony between the matrix and the subjunctive clause receive a clear interpretation. An imperfect the absence of DAR effects. Such a process –parallel to the one resulting in the loss of the French imperfect subjunctive in Sequence-of-Tense contexts- is well under way in Bolivian, Peruvian and Paraguayan Spanish (see Sessarego 2008a, 2008b). For other American varieties, present subjunctives under matrix past tenses are frequent in intensional, future-oriented contexts (volitionals, causatives and directives), but, as will be discussed below, they are not clearly associated with a loss of DAR-effects.
(or pluperfect) subjunctive embedded under a non-past matrix tense will be interpreted as a 'real past' or an 'irrealis', thus exhibiting the two possible interpretations we have discussed for root contexts in the previous section. A present (or perfect) subjunctive embedded under a matrix past will give rise to DAR:

\[(16)\]  
a. \(-\text{PAST}_{\text{matrix}} + \text{PAST}_{\text{subj}} \rightarrow \text{‘REAL PAST’ OR ‘IRREALIS’ EFFECTS}\)
b. \(+\text{PAST}_{\text{matrix}} - \text{PAST}_{\text{subj}} \rightarrow \text{DOUBLE ACCESS READINGS}\)

In the line of reasoning we are following, the inacceptability of configuration (16a) should follow from the incompatibility of the context with an anteriority or an irrealis interpretation, that of (16b) from the fact that the context does not license DAR-effects. We explore these two configurations in the following subsections.

3.2. Intensional subjunctives and future orientation

As stated above, Quer (1998) proposes a semantic explanation for the inacceptability of configuration (16a) in intensional contexts. This explanation, which is based on the future-oriented nature of the selecting context, encounters two potential problems requiring a refinement of the original hypothesis. The first problem involves cases in which the matrix sentence is in the conditional, as exemplified in (17a-d):

\[(17)\]  
a. Querría que te fueras.  
want.CND.1./3.SG that you go.IMPF.SBJ.3SG  
‘I/s/he’d like you to leave’
b. Yo preferiría que te fueras.  
I prefer.CND.3.SG that you go.IMPF.SBJ.3SG  
‘I’d rather you left’
c. De buena gana le pediría que se fuera.  
of good wish him ask CND.1./3.SG that REFL go.IMPF.SBJ.3SG  
‘I/s/he’d like to ask him to leave’
d. De intentarlo, seguro que lograría que se fuera.  
of try-it sure that manage CND.1./3.SG that REFL go.IMPF.SBJ.3SG
‘If I/s/he tried, I/s/he would certainly manage to make him/her leave’

A matrix conditional is clearly compatible with embedded past subjunctives. In the descriptive tradition, the conditional is included among the matrix 'past tenses' – probably as a reflection of its temporal uses as ‘future of the past’. However, as predicted by the analysis in Table 1, the matrix conditionals in (17a-d) cannot shift Ast-T to a moment preceding Utt-T, since Tx is not bound by a higher past tense. In fact, in contexts like (17a-d), the time of the matrix verb is simultaneous or prospective with regard to Utt-T, the conditional being exploited as an *irrealis* in the modal dimension. Including the conditional among the 'past tenses' on the grounds that it licenses a past subjunctive in the embedded clause amounts to a circular way of capturing tense restrictions. This is not to say that the acceptability of (17a-d) invalidates Quer’s explanation. The past subjunctive in the embedded clause does not express anteriority, either, but is itself functioning as an *irrealis* 'fake past': it has a prospective orientation with regard to the time of the matrix, as predicted by Table 2 and by the principle of temporal-structure driven interpretation (a ‘fake past’ expresses coincidence of Ast-T with Tx, and coincidence receives a forward-shifted interpretation in the case of eventives). In fact, the temporal-modal interpretation of the embedded past subjunctives in (17a-d) is strictly parallel to the future-less-vivid-interpretations in desiderative root contexts.

More problematic for the explanation suggested by Quer is an important asymmetry between so-called volitionals, on the one hand, and directives and causatives, on the other, with regard to compound tenses in the embedded clause. Matrix conditionals reveal that, as shown in (18a-b), volitionals like *want/prefer* admit a pluperfect subjunctive in the embedded clause, whereas directives like *ask* and causatives like *manage* don’t (19a-b):

(18) a. *Querría que te hubieras ido.*
    want.CND.1./3.SG that you have.IMPF.SBJ.2SG gone
    ‘I wish you had left’
b. Yo preferiría que te hubieras ido.
   I prefer that you have gone
   ‘I’d rather you had left’

(19)  a. *De buena gana le pediría que se hubiera ido.
      of good wish him ask that refl have gone
      ‘I would like to ask him to have left’
   b. *seguro que lograría que se hubiera ido.
      sure that manage refl have gone
      ‘I/s/he would certainly manage to make him/her have left’

A pluperfect subjunctive in an irrealis 'fake past' interpretation still conveys one anteriority relation with regard to the time of the matrix, as stated in Table 2. What the contrast between (18a-b) and (19a-b) shows is that the requirement of future orientation can be circumvented by counterfactuality in the case of volitionals, but not in the case of directives and causatives. This observation clearly indicates that the basis for future orientation is different in the two cases.

Moreover, some volitionals, but no directives or causatives, are apt to embed a perfect subjunctive, as illustrated in (20a-b), which contrast with (21a-b):  

\[
\begin{align*}
(20)  & \quad \text{a. Deseo que hayáis pasado un buen momento.} \\
       & \quad \text{hope that have passed a good moment} \\
       & \quad ‘I hope you (have) had a good time’ \\
\text{b. Espero que se haya enterado del asunto.} \\
       & \quad \text{hope that refl have learned of the matter.} \\
       & \quad ‘I hope s/he (has) learned about this’
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
(21)  & \quad \text{a. *Te pido que hayas devuelto los libros.} \\
       & \quad \text{you ask that have returned the books} \\
       & \quad ‘I ask you to have given back the books’ \\
\text{b. *Siempre logro que hayas devuelto los libros.} \\
       & \quad \text{always manage that have returned the books} \\
       & \quad ‘I always manage to make you have given back the books’
\end{align*}
\]

Although the perfect subjunctive is not a 'past' form, it clearly contributes an anteriority relation, and thus locates the event described in the embedded clause

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8 As stated in footnote 1, the possibility of future perfect interpretations is being systematically ignored in order to simplify the exposition.
before the time of the matrix. Thus, the idea that volitionals only operate on a set of future alternatives is clearly disconfirmed by such temporal configurations.

I would like to suggest that future-orientation in the case of causatives and directives amounts to a [- PRECEDENCE] feature, as proposed by Suñer & Padilla Rivera (1987/1990). This feature is certainly not arbitrary, and it should be motivated by an analysis of the semantics of causation and of the imperative sentences that directives report. By contrast, future orientation in the case of so-called volitionals is derived from the fact that such attitude verbs are subject to the diversity constraint alluded to in section 2.3. above: they require modal bases containing both worlds in which the embedded proposition is true and worlds in which it is not. Metaphysical alternatives are always available in the future, because contingent future propositions are not settled at the time with regard to which they are future. Past propositions, by contrast, report settled facts, and have therefore no metaphysical alternatives. There are only two ways of obtaining diverse modal bases, i.e. modal bases containing both $p$ and $\neg p$ worlds, when speaking about settled facts. The first one is epistemic uncertainty: if the bearer of the attitude knows that a matter has been settled, but does not know which way it has been settled, the corresponding epistemic modal base contains both $p$ and $\neg p$ worlds. This is the interpretation that applies to examples (20a-b) above. The second way is to widen the domain to include non-realized alternatives, giving rise to counterfactuality. This is the interpretation that applies to (18a-b) above, in which counterfactuality is necessarily signaled by the conditional on the matrix verb.9

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9 As accurately pointed out by one of the reviewers, the temporal configurations discussed above do not account for the ungrammaticality of examples with a present indicative in the matrix and an imperfect subjunctive in the embedded clause. This holds not only of volitionals (i), as remarked by the reviewer, but also of directives/ causatives (ii): a ‘fake past’ irrealis imperfect subjunctive expressing coincidence with $T_n$ could fulfill the requirement of future orientation in both cases, so that the ungrammatical status of (i) and (ii) is not predicted by the analysis as it stands.

(i) *Quieren que sus hijos cantaran ópera.
want.PR.IND.3.PL that their children sing.IMPF.SBJ opera

(ii) *Mandan que sus hijos cantarán ópera.
order.PR.IND.3.PL that their children sing.IMPF.SBJ opera
The distribution and interpretation of subjunctive tenses with so-called volitionals roughly parallel the situation described in section 2.3 for root subjunctives selected by a desiderative adverb (ojalá ‘hopefully’). We find here the same requirements of epistemic uncertainty or counterfactuality associated to settledness, and the same preference of the imperfect subjunctive for irrealis 'fake past' uses over 'real past' uses. However, the verbs intuitively lumped together under the label ‘volitionals’ do not constitute a semantically homogeneous class, as shown by closer inspection of tense restrictions. It is to be hoped that in-depth exploration of these restrictions will provide important insights into the extremely complex semantics of verbs introducing desire reports (cf. Heim 1992, von Fintel 1999).

To recapitulate the main results of this section, our exploration has shown that future orientation in directives and causatives, on the one hand, and in volitionals, on the other hand, has different sources. Quer’s generalization as to the temporal constraint affecting selected, intensional subjunctives, only holds without qualification for directives and causatives.

3.3. Subjunctive contexts and DAR-effects

As predicted by our analysis of subjunctive tenses, the unacceptability of the pattern (16b) above stems from an incompatibility of the context with DAR-effects, i.e. with a temporal interpretation in which the tense of the embedded clause is evaluated with regard to two anchors, the time of the matrix and Utt-T. Usually, DAR-effects are described as requiring simultaneity to both anchors, but this is simply a side-effect of the tendency to illustrate DAR-effects with present tense states in the embedded clause (cf. Giorgi & Pianesi 2000). If the tense of the embedded clause is a future, or its predicate an eventive predicate, the time of

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This incompatibility is grounded in the same principles that require a conditional form for matrix verbs embedding counterfactual argument clauses (cf. (18a-b) above): irrealis readings in embedded clauses have to be licensed by irrealis marking in the matrix. Due to space limitations, this phenomenon of ‘modal harmony’ cannot be discussed in this paper.
the event in the embedded clause actually follows both anchors, as shown by the indicative examples (22a-b):

(22)  

a. *Mario dijo que estará en la fiesta.*
   M. say.SP that be.FUT in the party
   ‘Mario said he will be at the party’

b. *Mario dijo que viene a la fiesta.*
   M. say.SP that come.PR to the party
   ‘Mario said he’s coming to the party’

In their pioneer study of the temporal constraints on subjunctive clauses, Suñer & Padilla Rivera (1987/1990) maintain that the pattern (16b) is possible in a subset of operator-licensed (polarity) subjunctives (verbs of denial, as for instance *negar* “deny”), with emotive-factives (as for instance *lamentar* “regret”), and with directives. By contrast, it is excluded in another subset of operator-licensed subjunctives (verbs of belief or knowledge, as for instance *dudar* “doubt”, *ignorar* “be unaware of”) and with volitionals. It is also uniformly excluded in the case of nominal or adjectival predicates taking a subjunctive argument clause (*ser difícil/ probable/ aconsejable/ fantástico/ una pena*, etc. “be difficult/ likely/ advisable/ great/ a pity”).

This distribution seems to confirm a generalization put forward by Giorgi & Pianesi (2000): matrix verbs reporting speech acts (verbs of communicative behaviour) are compatible with DAR, whereas matrix predicates reporting mental attitudes are not. In fact, directives and verbs of denial report speech acts, and emotive-factives with object argument clauses may well be used to report speech acts, as exemplified by (23):

(23)  In a resolution adopted today, the board regretted that an acceptable solution has not been found.

Two further observations support this generalization:

(a) emotive-factive contexts show a clear split between object argument clauses, which are acceptable in DAR-contexts, and subject argument clauses, which are
not. The interpretation as speech act reports is only possible in the former, not in the latter contexts:

(24)  a. Se alegró de que todo marche de acuerdo con el plan.
  REFL rejoice.SP.3SG of that all go.PR.SBJ of accord with the plan
  ‘S/he rejoiced that everything is proceeding in accordance with the plan’

b. Le alegró que todo marche de acuerdo con el plan.
  him rejoice.SP.3SG that all go.PR.SBJ of accord with the plan
  ‘S/he was glad that everything is proceeding in accordance with the plan’

Factive-evaluative nominal predicates, which take subject argument clauses and cannot be interpreted as speech act reports, confirm this pattern:

(25)  *Era una vergüenza que algunos abogados se presten a esas maniobras.
  IMPF a shame that some lawyers REFL lend.PR.SBJ. to these practices
  ‘It was a shame that some lawyers consent to these practices’

(b) a verb like dudar “doubt” has actually two uses, the first one as a mental attitude (“have doubts about”), the second one as a speech act verb (“call into question, express doubts about”). As a verb of mental attitude, it is a state verb appearing normally in the imperfect, as a speech act verb, it is an eventive verb appearing normally in the simple perfect (perfective past). In the latter case dudar is clearly compatible with DAR –pace Suñer & Padilla Rivera (1987/1990), but not in the former:

  M. doubt.SP of that the theater can.PR.SBJ finish-REFL in 1997
  ‘M. expressed doubts about the possibility that the theater be completed in 1997’

  IMPF of that the theater can.PR.SBJ finish-REFL in 1997
  ‘M. didn’t believe that the theater can be completed in 1997’

However, the contrast between reported speech and reported mental attitudes is not the only relevant factor. Causatives, which are not taken into account by Suñer & Padilla Rivera (1987/1990), pattern like directives, as shown
in (27a-b). And volitionals, contrarily to their assumptions, are actually compatible with DAR, as shown in (28). Since neither causatives nor volitionals report speech acts, it is to be concluded that DAR configurations may be licensed outside reported-speech contexts:

(27) a. Luego sucedió algo que hizo que el cuadro sea lo que es. 
   ‘Afterwards, something happened that turned the painting into what it is’

b. a. Me recomendaron que la lleve a un psiquiatra. 
   ‘I was advised to take her to a psychiatrist’

(28) ¿Quería Greenpeace que se hable del Banco Mundial...? 
   ‘Did Greenpeace want for the World Bank to become a central topic...?’

As discussed in the previous section, directives, causatives and volitionals share future-orientation, even though their future orientation has different sources. As a consequence, DAR-effects in such contexts result in temporal configurations that differ from the better studied, double-simultaneity DAR-effects in the context of verbs used to report assertive speech acts. In future-oriented contexts, DAR-effects result in temporal configurations in which the time of the embedded clause follows the time of the matrix. Recall now that the present subjunctive follows the very general pattern according to which stative predicates are simultaneous with Utt-T and eventive predicates, particularly telic ones, follow Utt-T. This configuration does not require that the described situation hold at two different intervals. In the case of stative predicates, the temporal configuration is straightforward. As schematically represented in (29), the described state follows the time of the matrix and is simultaneous with Utt-T:

(29)  \[ \text{made} \text{---T}_{\text{matrix}}---\text{Utt}---\text{T}---\text{Ev-T} \text{---clause} \]

   ‘the painting is what it is’
Telic eventive predicates are predicted to follow both the time of the matrix and \textbf{Utt-T}, as schematized in (30). In fact (27b) implies that the recommended course of action has not been taken yet:

\begin{equation}
\text{T}_{\text{matrix}} \rightarrow \text{T}_{\text{Utt}} \rightarrow \text{Ev-T}_{\text{SBJ-\text{clause}}}
\end{equation}

\text{‘advised’}\\
\text{‘I take her to see a psychiatrist’}

A very relevant complication arises with telic predicates that do not conform to this prediction, inasmuch as the event in the present subjunctive clearly precedes \textbf{Utt-T} (the article from which example (31) is taken appeared after the Torino summit):

\begin{equation}
\text{España consiguió que en la cumbre europea de Turín}\\
\text{Spain get.SP that in the summit European of Torino}\\
\text{los países miembros de la UE se comprometan a eliminar}\\
\text{the countries member of the EU REFLECT to eliminate}\\
\text{el terrorismo como delito político.}\\
\text{the terrorism as crime political}\\
\text{‘Spain obtained from EU member states at the Torino summit the commitment to eliminate terrorism as a political crime’ (\textit{El Mundo} 31/03/1996)}
\end{equation}

REAL ACADEMIA ESPAÑOLA: Banco de datos (CREA) [en línea]. Corpus de referencia del español actual. <http://www.rae.es> [30/12/2008]

Examples of this type are not confined to the varieties alluded to in footnote 7. They are characterized by the fact that they violate DAR in as far as the described telic event is concerned, but they fulfill DAR for the result state of the telic event. It seems quite likely that these contexts are the source for the weakening of the deictic nature of the present subjunctive, whose final outcome would be a French-like present subjunctive –i.e. a present subjunctive not giving rise to DAR.

To summarize, our results concerning subjunctives in DAR-configurations partially confirm Giorgi & Pianesi’s hypothesis, according to which DAR is licensed by reported speech contexts. Emotive-factives and belief verbs allow for violations of temporal harmony and license DAR-effects only when they are interpreted as speech-act verbs. But DAR-patterns also arise in the context of
future-oriented matrix verbs, even when they do not report speech acts. In such cases, the situation described in the embedded clause should be simultaneous or prospective with regard to Utt-T. A weakening of the DAR-pattern emerges with telic eventive predicates when this requirement is not fulfilled by the event itself, but by its result state.

4. **Concluding remarks**

In this paper, I have sketched an analysis of the temporal contribution of subjunctive forms that departs from the defective-tense hypothesis and emphasizes the parallels between subjunctive and indicative tenses. I have tried to show that the distribution and interpretation of subjunctive forms appears less puzzling if one takes into account the semantic properties of the selecting or licensing contexts, together with some general principles governing temporal-modal configurations, on the one hand, and Sequence of Tense, on the other. Some descriptive generalizations advanced in the literature have been refined, but the work reported here is still exploratory. I hope to have succeeded in showing that, far from being temporally 'void' or entirely determined in their distribution, subjunctive tenses constitute a powerful probe for a deeper understanding of the semantics of the licensing contexts.

**References**


Sessarego, Sandro. 2008a. "Spanish Concordantia Temporum: an old issue, new solutions". Ms. The Ohio State University


Table 1: Tense and grammatical aspect in Spanish

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<td>cantaba (IMPERFECT) Tx ∩ Ast-T, ASP ∅</td>
<td>cantaría (CONDITIONAL) Tx &lt; Ast-T, ASP ∅</td>
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<td>(PERFECT) Ast-T &gt; Ev-T acabar de cantar (end + of + V_Inf) (IMMED. ANTERIORITY) Ast-T &gt; Ev-T</td>
<td>estar cantando (LOC-be + V_Ger) (PROGRESSIVE) Ast-T ⊆ Ev-T</td>
<td>ir a cantar (go + to + V_Inf) (PROSPECTIVE) Ast-T &lt; Ev-T</td>
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Table 2: Subjunctive tenses in Spanish

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