

## THE SUBJUNCTIVE IN REPORTED SPEECH IN GERMAN. A CASE OF REGRAMMATICALIZATION

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**Abstract:** The subjunctive in reported speech in German is commonly assumed to be conditioned by the main clause predicate (or a semantically similar lexical element). However, in the novel *Matto regiert* by Friedrich Glauser only 14,3% of the subjunctive forms are found in single subordinate clauses, whereas 28,9% are found in main clauses. The remaining forms occur in passages of the texts composed of subordinate and independent main clauses. This points to a grammaticalization scenario where lexical rules are becoming less, and general categorial conditioning as a "quotative mood" more important.

**Keywords:** Subjunctive, reported speech, grammaticalization, lexical vs. generalized categorial conditioning, quotative mood.

### 1. TYPES OF REPORTED SPEECH IN MODERN GERMAN

In what follows I shall discuss certain developments in the use of the German subjunctive in so-called indirect or, more generally, reported speech on the basis of grammaticalization theory. I shall not deal with the alternation between subjunctive and indicative, which is probably the most favoured topic in discussions of German clauses rendering reported speech. Nor shall I be concerned with the alternation between the so-called present and preterite subjunctive (including non-distinctive preterite forms), which I simply take to be a default solution to a morphological marking problem. Rather, my primary concern will be the problem whether the subjunctive in reported speech in contemporary German is a lexically governed or a lexically non-governed morphological marking device.

As is well known, the subjunctive is used in indirect speech in subordinate V/Last clauses introduced by a complementizer (Type A) and in V/2 clauses without a complementizer (Type B). In both these cases, the clause marked by the subjunctive is dependent on a governing lexeme. In addition, the subjunctive is also found in V/2 clauses not dependent on a governing lexeme and hence not being subordinate complement clauses in any clear-cut fashion (Type C). I propose to call this last type "narrated speech" (German "berichtete Rede"), see (Pütz, 1989). Cf.:

- (1) Der kantonale Poizeidirektor [...] hatte nämlich mitgeteilt, daß man Pieterleins Spur noch nicht gefunden habe ... (G: 251) (Type A)
- (2) Am liebsten hätte Studer dem Herrn Obersten geantwortet, er könne ihm in die Schuhe blasen. (G: 201) (Type B)
- (3) Nachdem das Summen des Staubsaugers verstummt war, kam Frau Laduner den Wachtmeister holen. Er könne jetzt ruhig in sein Zimmer gehen und etwas abliegen. Niemand werde ihn stören. (G: 182) (Type C)

Texts with a mixture of all three basic types and direct speech (which we may call Type Ø) are of frequent occurrence in modern newspapers and magazines. Consider for instance (4) (where the clauses rendering reported speech are numbered consecutively):

- (4) Er gab zu, seine Behörde und das Landeskriminalamt hätten gewußt (i, Type B), daß vier Kilo Plutonium im Anflug seien (ii, Type A). "Natürlich blieb ein Risiko, das ist völlig richtig" (iii, Type Ø), sagte Emrich.

Bei einem Absturz des Flugzeugs hätte das Gift nach Ansicht von Experten den Großraum München verseuchen können. (iv, Type C, if not auctorial text) Doch habe man keine Alternative gehabt (v, Type B or C), und das Risiko sei vertretbar gewesen (vi, Type B or C), so Emrich: "Mit dem Auto? Ja, dann knallt er gegen den Baum oder in ein anderes Auto rein und hat das Zeug an Bord." (vii, Type Ø) Der Erfolg habe ihnen recht gegeben (viii, Type C), "die 363 Gramm bedrohen niemanden mehr." (ix, Type Ø) (*Der Spiegel*)

It seems natural to assume that (4 iv) is a case of reported speech where the subjunctive is taken over from direct speech as an independent marker of eventuality. (4 v) and (4 vi) may be taken to belong to Type B if *so* is accepted as some sort of governing lexeme – in itself hardly an appealing categorization – and is in addition assumed not to refer exclusively to the following stretch of direct speech in (4 vii).

## 2. GRAMMATICALIZATION, DEGRAMMATICALIZATION, REGRAMMATICALIZATION

Grammaticalization is commonly understood as (a) the process of transferring a lexical element to a class of grammatical elements; or (b) of transferring a grammatical element to another grammatical function, see (Lehmann, 1995: 7, 9). Typically, much of the discussion of grammaticalization phenomena centers on the development of free lexical forms into bound forms, see (Hopper and Traugott, 1993: 103-120, 130-150). Auxiliarization is, however, an obvious instance of grammaticalization as recategorization of free forms; cf. (Hopper and

Traugott, 1993: 25). The complementary concept of degrammaticalization means, or may be taken to mean, depriving a grammatical element of its grammatical function, thereby transferring it to lexical use, see (Ramat, 1992). Compared with grammaticalization, degrammaticalization appears to be a very marginal process indeed. The further concept of regrammaticalization is conceptually more vague and might, so to speak etymologically, be taken to mean either of two things: (a) the return of a degrammaticalized element to grammatical function; or (b) the further development of a grammatical element from one function or set of functions into another, preferably more abstract or general function. The first sense (a) is not corroborated by empirical evidence known to me. The second sense (b), which is fairly close to Greenberg's understanding of the term (Greenberg, 1991: 301), essentially corresponds to the second meaning (b) of grammaticalization as formulated above. Given the somewhat unfortunate ambiguity of the term grammaticalization in the two senses (a) and (b), and the empirical vacuity of sense (a) of the term regrammaticalization, I propose to use regrammaticalization as an unambiguous term for functional shifts of elements which are already by definition grammatical. In what follows, I aim to show that regrammaticalization in this sense provides an appropriate framework for understanding what appears to be an on-going shift in the use of the subjunctive in reported speech in German.

### 3. THE DATA

In grammars of modern German the subjunctive in reported speech is commonly considered to occur mainly as indirect speech in a complement clause crucially dependent on some lexeme ("Anführungsverb/-lexem", cf. Types A and B in section 1); for a highly typical example of this classical view see (Duden 1959: 544). When reading modern German, one is, however, struck by the extent to which the subjunctive is used in syntactically independent main clauses, cf. (3) and (4). In this section I shall present the result of an investigation of one modern German text, the crime novel *Matto regiert* by the Swiss author Friedrich Glauser. The passages displaying the subjunctive in reported speech in this text are found in three main types of syntagmatic environment (which may of course be further subdivided into a variety of subtypes):

Type I: Indirect speech (comprising Types A and B in section 1):

- (5) Ob Frau Doktor so gut sein wolle und noch eins singen, fragte Studer. (G: 99)
- (6) Er solle sitzen bleiben, fauchte ihn Laduner an. (G: 52)

Type II: Combinations of indirect and narrated speech (comprising Types A, B and C in section 1):

- (7) Er erzählte — und kleine Speichelbläschen bildeten sich in seinen Mundwinkeln —, daß er ein großer Kriegsverwundeter sei ("un grand blessé de guerre"). Eine Handgranate — Dr. Laduner habe das wohl erzählt? —, ja, also eine Handgranate sei vor ihm geplatzt und habe ihm nicht nur das Gesicht, nein, auch die Hände und den Körper aufgerissen. (G: 67)
- (8) — Das sei ja gleichgültig, meinte Studer. Übrigens wisse er auch, daß an dem Krach der tote Gilgen schuld gewesen sei ... (G: 226)

Type III: Narrated speech (comprising Type C in section 1):

- (9) Da kam die Antwort, wieder gegen den Boden gesprochen, auf allen vieren: Das werde er nie mehr können. (G: 205)
- (10) "Machet kes Gstürm!" sagte die Jungfer Kolla energisch. Sie werde dem Dr. Laduner anläuten, und dann sei die Sache erledigt. Bei ihr bekomme der Wachtmeister doch einen anständigen Tropfen ... (G: 77f.)
- (11) "Kindsmord!" flüsterte Gilgen. Und Studer solle den Dr. Laduner fragen, der werde ihm Auskunft geben ... (G: 75)
- (12) Gilgen schüttelte den Kopf wie ein ganz Gescheiter. Nein, die Geisteskrankheit hänge nicht mit der Verwundung zusammen.
- Was es denn sei?
- "Eine Schützovrenie ..." (G: 74)

The frequency of occurrence of these three main types of passages rendering reported speech in the text in question is given in Table 1:

Table 1 Frequency of types of passages rendering reported speech and the distribution of subjunctive forms

	number of passages with reported speech: 279		number of subjunctive forms: 816	
Type I	113	40,5%	115	14,1%
Type II	85	30,5%	345	42,4%
Type III	81	29,0%	356	43,5%

Altogether 40,5% of the passages characterized as reported speech by the subjunctive represent the canonical type of indirect speech (Type I), comprising one subordinate complement clause. This means that a majority of 59,5% of the examples belong to the other less canonical Types II and III. Moreover, only 14,1% of the subjunctive forms are found in Type I. From this it follows that in the text at hand the vast majority of subjunctive forms — a total of 85,9% — are found outside the grammatical environment described as typical in virtually all grammars of German. It seems safe to conclude that, rather than being lexically governed, the subjunctive in reported speech in modern German is triggered by a variety of factors located in or inferrable from the textual surroundings. These factors range from the presence of a speech act verb or its nominalization (9) to direct speech of various kinds (10), (11), or the mention of a gesture which may accompany speech (12), or simply an indication of circumstances which are commonly assumed to lead to verbal communication (3).



#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

The data presented in section 3 have to be seen in the broader context of the following changes in the use of the German subjunctive in reported speech.

1. The Old and Middle High German principle of *Consecutio temporum* requiring corresponding tense forms in main and subordinate clauses has long since been discarded, see (Behaghel 1928: 675-679, 683-685; Fourquet 1969: 53f., 61-63).

2. Since Early New High German times the subjunctive is increasingly found with main clause verbs with which the indicative was required in Middle High German, see (Dal 1966: 143). With regard to modern German, it is often argued that the indicative is excluded after certain (factive) verbs, see (Eisenberg 1989: 130). This assumption in fact implies a reversal of the lexical dependence assumed in the older grammatical tradition insofar as it is the indicative, not the subjunctive, which is considered to be lexically conditioned by the main clause predicate, the subjunctive thus being a general marker of indirect speech subject to lexical restrictions.

3. The morphosyntactic valency of a governing lexical verb may be saturated prior to the addition of the dependent clause conveying reported speech. This may result in violation of the valency requirements of the governing predicate as in e.g. (13):

(13) [...] er rief bei der Flughafenankunft in Rhodos an, wann ein Herr Ritter abgeflogen sei.  
(H. Konsalik; quoted by Kommedal 1995: 75)

The ultimate extension of this is, of course, pure narrated speech.

4. Subordinate clauses rendering reported speech typically, and significantly more often than other complement clauses, have V/2 order as in main clauses. In the material presented here, of a total of 113 clauses of Type I in Table I, 70, i.e. 62,5%, have V/2 order, and 43, i.e. 37,5%, have V/Last order. The proportion of V/2 clauses in the entire material including Types II and III also is of course far higher.

5. The subjunctive in narrated speech is also attested in cases where there is a dialogic interplay of different speakers, as in (12) (to my knowledge a possibility so far not noted in grammars of German).

The facts stated in 1-5 warrant the main conclusion that since Middle High German times the *originally lexically dependent subjunctive in indirect speech* has developed into a more general category of reported speech which in addition to traditional indirect speech in subordinate clauses includes narrated speech in non-governed main clauses as well.

In connection with this process one does observe a number of traits characteristic of grammaticalization processes: The extension from indirect speech to narrated speech means (a) a widening of syntactic distribution, cf. (Heine *et al.*, 1991: 15), which is accompanied by obligatoriness of the subjunctive in the latter context, cf. (Hagège, 1993: 196). (c) The result of this is presumably an over-all increase in frequency of occurrence, cf. (Hagège, 1993: 196, 198; Hopper and Traugott, 1993: 103). (d) There is also a concomitant change of semantic function (resemanticization), cf. (Hagège, 1993: 196, 223-229; Heine, *et al.*, 1991: 15 *et passim*; Hopper and Traugott, 1993: 103-120), from lexically conditioned interpretation of

complement clauses to general reportive meaning. This whole process appears to be one of "semantically motivated extension", see (Greenberg, 1991: 301).

As we are here dealing with subjunctive marking by means of fusional morphemes, the acquisition of these grammaticalization properties by the category of reported speech is self-evidently not a case of grammaticalization considered as transition from lexical item to grammatical morpheme, cf. (Hagège, 1993: 195f.; Heine, *et al.*, 1991: 15-17; Hopper and Traugott, 1993: 103-120). Within the framework of grammaticalization theory, the development of the subjunctive in indirect speech into a broader category of reported speech lends itself to a theoretical interpretation as a case of regrammaticalization as defined in section 2. Furthermore, current usage may be considered an instance of the "Layering Principle", according to which different uses of the same linguistic element are often observed to coexist within some "broad functional domain" as the result of grammaticalization processes, see (Hopper 1991: 22). This is exactly what appears to be the case with the subjunctive in indirect and narrated speech in modern German.

The new and more general category of reported speech is more similar to the other uses of the present and preterite subjunctive in main clauses and forms part of a larger system of subjunctive marking where the overall tendency is towards non-governed use in syntagmatically independent clauses; consider the summary of contemporary German subjunctive usage in (14):

- (14) A. Present subjunctive supplementing the imperative paradigm and in similar ("adhortative") cases in main clauses;
- B. counterfactual or hypothetical preterite subjunctive in main and subordinate clauses;
- C. present and preterite subjunctive in reported speech in subordinate and main clauses;
- D. a non-productive residual system consisting of the present and/or preterite subjunctive in non-governed, mainly adverbial subordinate clauses where the indicative is now often used instead, see for instance (Duden 1995: 157-162).

The appropriate conclusion concerning the use of the modern German subjunctive in reported speech in (14 C) appears to be that it constitutes a "quotative mood" of its own (as was pointed out to me by Martin Durrell), which has developed through a process of regrammaticalization of the older German and Germanic subjunctive in indirect speech.

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