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## SUBJUNCTIVE AS FACT?

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In virtually every description of the Spanish verbal system, whether an erudite treatise on grammar or a popular introductory text, the subjunctive is described at least in part as dealing with doubt-negation and/or emotion. For example, Ramsey<sup>1</sup> notes that "the subjunctive [is based] upon doubt, desire or some emotion or mental inquietude," while Gili Gaya<sup>2</sup> somewhat more cautiously declares "El subjuntivo . . . depende de otro verbo que exprese algún matiz de irrealidad." Essentially the same description is found in nearly every Spanish textbook, both past and current, although at times the issue is clouded by breakdowns along purely syntactic lines, i.e. nominative phrases, adjectival phrases, and so forth. The student is then led through the tortuous labyrinth of possibilities demanding the use of the subjunctive forms, with the necessary caveat that reality is as perceived by the speaker, and must not necessarily conform to externally verifiable information. Speaker's point of view results, for example, in such pairs as

(1) ¿Crees que vendrá mañana?

(2) ¿Crees que venga mañana?

where use of the subjunctive in (2) indicates doubt on the part of the speaker. Other examples of speaker's implicit point of view may be seen in

(3) Carlos no cree que José ganara el concurso.

(4) Carlos no cree que José ganó el concurso.

In (3), only Carlos's doubts are being reported, with no contradictory information supplied by the speaker; however, in (4) the speaker is in effect letting us know that, Carlos's doubts notwithstanding, José did in fact win.

The subcategorization of subjunctive uses into doubt/negation and emotion,

spurred largely by historical precedents, has led to the positing of two separate subjunctives, with identical forms but varying syntactic characteristics, and the battle over "one or two subjunctives" has been well represented in the pages of this journal. The [optative]/[dubitative] dichotomy may be defended on various grounds, one of which is the fact that, in current usage, the subjunctive is becoming optional after emotional expressions such as *es lástima que*, *siento que*, and so forth, while remaining obligatory after true expressions of denial or uncertainty.

It is not the purpose of the present note to enter into the tumult resulting from the posited optative/dubitative contrast; rather, attention will be focused on a seldom-studied aspect of the Spanish subjunctive which at first glimpse appears to widen even further the gap separating the various subjunctive-counters, but which hopefully may be resolved without adding further fuel to the flames of debate. The issue at hand concerns the use of the subjunctive in clauses which express neither doubt nor emotion, but which rather appear to deal with strictly factual material. Manifest among such examples are clauses involving the expression *el hecho (de) que*. Consider the following:

(5) El hecho de que te hayan aprobado no es una prueba de tu inteligencia.

(6) El hecho de que nadie se oponga a esa idea no muestra un acuerdo común sino que delata un miedo fundamental.

In examples such as (5) and (6), the events in question are assumed to have happened, whence the use of *el hecho*, which unequivocally reports accepted information. *El hecho* is not, it must be noted, synonymous with, for example, *la posibilidad de*, *la necesidad de*, etc., which would also trigger subjunctive usage in the following verb, but for radically different reasons. In (5) and (6), the subjunctive is used to describe REALITY, apparently with

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out strong emotional overtones, thus presenting a paradox in the fundamental defining characteristics of the subjunctive mood. Is it therefore necessary to entertain the possibility of a THIRD subjunctive, to handle such putative anomalies? Rather than violating the premise stated earlier, we shall, despite the evident loss of sensationalistic impact, pursue the matter with a view toward accommodating such uses of the subjunctive within more generally accepted one- or two-subjunctive models.

An additional complicating factor, but one of key importance to the usage in question, is the fact that it is also possible to construct phrases using *el hecho de que* in which the indicative is used instead of the subjunctive. At this point, it must be confessed that native-speaker usage is far from consistent on this point, since the issue has been clouded by a number of erroneous judgments. In their compendium of material on the Spanish subjunctive, Fente et al.<sup>3</sup> state that "en la mayoría de los casos, esta expresión admite indistintamente los dos modos, por lo que puede considerarse un caso más de neutralización, aunque existe una tendencia decidida en el habla cuidada a usar el subjuntivo." Such appears in fact to be the case for certain speakers, who use *el hecho que* only in more formal speech styles, and who have either been taught or have inferred that it always dictates the subjunctive, regardless of meaning. This situation finds an analogy in the use, in elevated styles, of the past subjunctive after *como*, and the previous obligatory subjunctive after all occurrences of *después de que* and the current usage with *antes de que*. For such speakers, the subjunctive is not governed by a process of analysis, but rather is dictated by a set of exceptionless internalized rules, which in the process eliminate the possibility of various contrasts. It has been noted by the present writer, for example, that speakers who consistently use the subjunctive after *el hecho que* generally also refuse to accept contrasting pairs such as (3)/(4) or

(7) Dudo que es bonita

(8) Dudo que sea bonita,

relying instead on the security of hard and fast rules.

For those speakers who do exhibit consistency in the indicative/subjunctive contrast with *el hecho de que*, the indicative appears in phrases such as

(9) ¿Cómo explicas el hecho de que nadie te quiere?

(10) El presidente no se fijó en el hecho de que el hambre todavía existe en este país.

In both (9)/(10) and (5)/(6) we may speak of the presence of the feature [factive]; that is, it is impossible to utter such a sentence if the statement in question is not true, or merely supposed. This holds true whether *el hecho de que* is used, or whether the speaker merely opts for *el que*, although with the latter variant the subjunctive usage predominates:

(11) El que no lo quieras hacer no es una razón válida.

DeMello,<sup>4</sup> one of the few authors to treat this topic, offers the following observations: "The expression *el hecho de que* . . . requires the subjunctive if the fact referred to is the premise on which a conclusion is based. It should be noted that the information stated in this subjunctive clause is presumed to be known by the listener. The information presented in the indicative *el hecho de que* clauses is new or has not been previously considered." Clearly a generalization of this nature is valuable for teaching purposes, and considerable success may be attained using this contrast. There are, however, some cases in which this close approximation fails to completely describe the situation. In the examples presented by DeMello, the subjunctive clause is clearly the premise of a logical syllogism:

(12) El hecho de que haya dicho tal cosa prueba que es capaz de mentir.

(12) El hecho de que tengan tres casas muestra que son ricos.

The use of such verbs as *mostrar*, *probar*, *indicar*, etc. naturally points to a premise-conclusion type of situation. It is more difficult to apply the same notion in sentences like

(14) Me importa un comino el hecho de que el jefe le diera el ascenso a Menéndez.

The fact that someone received a promotion does not naturally entail my indifference, but rather my mental state is to a certain degree removed from the previous action. In no way can one describe the promotion as a "premise" with the "conclusion" being my indifference. The confusion here results from a failure to discern between conclusion and related notions such as result or effect.

Turning now to the topic of new vs. old information, we appear at first glance to be on safer ground, especially since there are other cases in Spanish where syntactic markers signal the new/old information dichotomy. A case in point would be the placement of adjectives, where, for example, if asked to identify a young man I might say

(15) Es un joven poeta

adding the qualification of poet to the already known description of young man; on the other hand, while reading an anthology of poetry I might describe one of the contributors as:

(16) Es un poeta joven

since in this case the age would be the previously unknown information. Like nearly every other example in Spanish, subjunctive phrases with *el hecho de que* require a highly specific context, and it appears safe to assert that part of this context is explicit mention, either verbally or paralinguistically, of the facts in question. However, the contrary assertion, that phrases using *el hecho de que* with the indicative necessarily add new or unconsidered information, does not always hold true. Sentence (9) might, for example, be uttered by a consoling friend, who has repeatedly heard of the other's troubles, and who, after reviewing the inventory of the listener's good qualities, is led to question the nature of the situation. A sentence like (10) might well appear during a conference on world hunger, in which the president's failure to mention a fact already known and discussed by the other participants is being commented upon. Thus, information already known and discussed, may also be included in phrases with *el hecho de que* and an indicative comple-

ment, thus rendering somewhat less than totally general the assertion offered above.

Bolinger<sup>5</sup> offers further possibilities when discussing sentences like

(17) Es un comportamiento adolescente, más bien que infantil, que desafien la autoridad del estado.

He notes that "the speaker uses the subjunctive because he is not saying "they defy the authority of the state" to inform his hearer of the fact; the fact is already there, but is suspended under a judgment or attitude. Here we see the real dichotomy: indicative to convey intelligence, subjunctive for all else, all else being conveniently termed attitudinal." Thus the use of the subjunctive in so-called "factive" clauses appears to result from the speaker's attitude toward the facts under consideration, a description consistent with DeMello's observation that in subjunctive *el hecho* clauses the information is previously known. The "judgment" or "attitude" mentioned by Bolinger not only covers the cases mentioned by DeMello, but also such recalcitrant examples as (14), which do not appear to follow the premise-conclusion format. In other instances, however, the possibility of attitude or judgment appears less easily obtainable:

(18) El hecho de que el alcalde sea un ladrón es la causa del gran escándalo que se ha armado.

(19) El que el rector no aprobara el presupuesto viene como resultado la pérdida de varios profesores.

In these examples, it is not immediately apparent that a judgment or attitude is being displayed, although one might of course argue in a circular fashion that any such statements must by definition be attitudinal. Rather than attempting to force the data to the definition, however, we shall opt for a more general characterization of the subjunctive in such cases, which may be roughly stated as follows: The subjunctive may be used in factive complements when such clauses are used as the basis for a meta-level of commentary, showing the relation between the facts in question and some other individual, entity, or event.<sup>6</sup> We use the meta-level for commentary on the fundamental level,

thus establishing the two levels of discourse represented in the main and subordinate clauses. Meta-language plays an important role in normal communication, from dictionary definitions to literary criticism, and it is therefore not surprising that the notion of meta-language might be useful in a characterization of the Spanish subjunctive. We might also note at this point that the notion of commentary or meta-language also applies to many so-called emotional expressions such as *es lástima que, me da pena que*, etc. Bolinger remarks<sup>7</sup> that "Every student of Spanish has probably wondered at some time or other why, if the indicative is the mode of "fact," he is forced to use a subjunctive in *siento que no haya salido bien* when the action of the subordinate clause is known to have occurred." Bolinger perceptively discerns the situation as one involving attitude, which may be related to earlier statements describing the subjunctive as the mood expressing any REACTION in the speaker. Since each of the "factive" emotive expressions may be paraphrased by an *hecho de que* construction, it is seen that the latter type of phrase, generally considered to be a fine point of grammar, is in fact intimately related to the basic fibres of the Spanish modal system. If we regard the subjunctive in factive clauses as the creation of a meta-level of commentary, which may be reaction, attitude, logical syllogism, or other less easily defined categories, the question of "one or two subjunctives" loses some of its urgency, for it becomes clear that we are not talking about "facts" as such but rather offering some commentary about these facts.

As a further corollary of the preceding observations, we are led to speculate as to the nature of the vacillation between indicative and subjunctive in certain "emotive" expressions. It is widely recognized that there is a growing use of the indicative after expressions such as *es lástima que*, which is one of the reasons urging a

split between the categories of optative and dubitative. One may venture to suggest, however, that the use of the subjunctive in such expressions, as well as expressing genuine emotion, in fact fulfills the criteria for a meta-level, i.e. the expression of a valid commentary on a previously-noted fact. The indicative usage, on the other hand, merely registers the fact in question, without the necessity of a true commentary. One may say, for example,

(20) Es una lástima que no lo sabes

not to express a commentary on the lack of knowledge, but merely to describe, as though there were two disjoint sentences:

(21) Tú no lo sabes. Es una lástima.

A simplistic explanation will not suffice to describe the intricacies of indicative/subjunctive usage in such borderline cases involving the language in a state of transition. The very lack of consistency on the part of native speakers belies any attempt to force the data into a single mold. Nonetheless, significant progress toward a total description and consequent pedagogical paradigm may be made by attempting to synthesize the various observations which have been offered regarding modal usage into a more coherent model encompassing a wider range of data.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>M. Ramsey, *A Textbook on Modern Spanish*, rev. R. Spaulding (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1956), p. 413.

<sup>2</sup>S. Gili Gaya, *Curso superior de sintaxis española*, 11th ed. (Barcelona: Vox, 1973), p. 132.

<sup>3</sup>R. Fente, J. Fernández, L. Feijóo, *El subjuntivo* (Madrid: Sociedad General Española de Librería, 1972), p. 54.

<sup>4</sup>G. DeMello, *Español contemporáneo* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 94.

<sup>5</sup>D. Bolinger, "Again—One or Two Subjunctives?", *Hispania*, 59 (1976), 41-49 [p. 43].

<sup>6</sup>Op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>7</sup>For a characterization of the level of meta-language in structuralist terms, see R. Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, tr. A. Lavers and L. Smith (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).