

## A special minor sentence type in Romanian: subjunctive interrogatives

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In this paper, we concentrate on the use of subjunctives in Romanian interrogatives, a phenomenon which illustrates the uniqueness of Romanian among the Romance languages and its affinity with the Balkan languages (Bîlbîie & Mardale 2018). The subjunctive in root interrogatives is common in Romanian, in both yes/no questions (1a) and *wh*-questions (1b), as in other Balkan languages (Pavlidou 1991, Rouchota 1994). Other Romance languages do not allow the subjunctive in interrogatives, requiring instead other verbal moods: e.g. in French, the infinitive or the conditional; in Portuguese, the future or the conditional. If the subjunctive is semantically motivated when the interpretation involves a set of alternatives (i.e. the possibility of *p* along with that of non-*p*, cf. Farkas 1985, Godard 2012), the question is: why does the subjunctive not occur in other Romance interrogatives, where it would be motivated?

- (1) a. **Să fie** (oare) adevărat?  
      SBJV be.SBJV.3SG INTERR true  
      ‘Could/would it be true?’  
      b. **Ce să fie** (oare)?  
          what SBJV be.SBJV.3SG INTERR  
          ‘What could it be?’

First, we briefly draw a typology of the subjunctive interrogatives in Romanian, based on two main discursive strategies, namely out-of-the-blue vs. reactive uses. Out-of-the-blue uses cover ‘dubitative’ and ‘deliberative’ subjunctives. The dubitative use of the subjunctive (1a-b) (corresponding to the use of conditional in other Romance languages) is usually linked to an epistemic modality and expresses speaker doubt and uncertainty, being associated (in many cases) with an additional mirativity effect and/or the use of some modal epistemic adverbs, such as the interrogative particle *oare* ‘I wonder’ as in (1). The deliberative use of the subjunctive (2a-b) (corresponding to the use of infinitive in other Romance languages) is usually linked to a deontic modality and expresses speaker’s dilemma, being frequently used for title-making in instructions. On the other hand, reactive uses (3a-c) involve a reaction (e.g. refutation, presupposition cancellation, surprise) to the preceding utterance and cover (i) rhetorical questions (3a) (usually linked to an epistemic modality, with a mirativity effect and a bias for a negative answer), (ii) echo-questions (3b) (usually linked to a deontic modality and involving clarification requests, based on a reprise mechanism) and (iii) conventionalized ‘*wh*-imperatives’ (3c) (linked to a deontic modality and functioning as indirect proposals).

- (2) a. **Să mă căsătoresc** sau nu?  
      SBJV CL.ACC.1SG marry.1SG or not  
      ‘Should I get married or not?’  
      b. **Cu cine să mă căsătoresc?**  
          with who SBJV CL.ACC.1SG marry.1SG  
          ‘Whom should I marry?’  
  
(3) a. **Eu să mă supăr?** / **Cum să mă supăr?**  
      me SBJV CL.ACC.1SG get-upset.1SG / how SBJV CL.ACC.1SG get-upset.1SG  
      ‘Me get upset?’ / ‘How could I get upset?’  
      b. A: **Du-te acasă!** B: **Să mă duc acasă?**  
          A: go.IMP.2SG-CL.ACC.2SG at-home B: SBJV CL.ACC.1SG go.1SG at-home

A: ‘Go home!’ B: ‘Me go home?’

- c. De ce **să nu începem** cu desertul?  
why SBJV NEG start.1PL with dessert.DEF  
‘Why not start with the dessert?’

The subjunctive is traditionally viewed as a dependent mood (e.g. Jespersen 1924, Giannakidou 2009, Quer 2009), i.e. it is embedded under a matrix predicate. Under this assumption, ‘root’ subjunctive interrogatives in Romanian should be reanalyzed as embedded clauses in disguise, i.e. the subjunctive is embedded under a covert modal verb (Null Modal Hypothesis, as proposed by Grohmann 2000 for root infinitives in Germanic and Romance languages). However, this elliptical approach is not empirically adequate for Romanian, as shown (i) by the underspecified modality problem (a one-to-one mapping between a specific modality and a certain subjunctive interrogative type is not possible), (ii) by syntactic reconstruction failure (in some cases, it is very difficult – or even impossible – to reconstruct any modal verb), (iii) by word order differences (postverbal vs. preverbal subjects) or (iv) by semantic and pragmatic differences (the subjunctive interrogative with a reconstructed modal verb is more restricted in its interpretation than the root subjunctive interrogative, without a modal). We assume that, syntactically, there is no covert modal involved, but semantically there is an implicit – epistemic or deontic – modality contributed by the subjunctive itself.

We then propose an account of the subjunctive in interrogatives at the semantics–pragmatics interface. We follow Ginzburg & Sag (2000) and Beyssade & Marandin (2006) in assuming that the semantic content of interrogative clauses is a question, i.e. a propositional abstract obtained by abstraction of 0 parameters (in the case of polar interrogatives) or 1, or several parameters (in the case of *wh*-interrogatives). We have thus a correspondence between a syntactic type (i.e. an interrogative clause) and a type of semantic content (i.e. a question). As for the traditional association between clause types and illocutionary forces, we crucially adopt here the divide proposed by Beyssade & Marandin (2006) between speaker’s commitment and speaker’s call-on-addressee in a dialogical perspective. A crucial property of subjunctive interrogatives is their infelicity in regular information-seeking contexts, in which the addressee is assumed to answer the question. Therefore, the specific contribution of the subjunctive interrogative contexts in Romanian could be summarized as follows: a weakened speaker’s commitment along with a weak call-on-addressee. The first property seems to be shared by all subjunctive contexts (see Giannakidou 2016), whereas the second property seems to be representative of subjunctives in interrogative clauses (as shown by the possibility to have the particle *oare*, signaling the optionality of the answer, see Farkas & Bruce 2010 and Farkas 2022, and the impossibility to have illocutionary modifiers in such contexts, both suggesting a weak call-on-addressee). Therefore, if one looks at the indicative/subjunctive alternation in (4), we note that the interrogative using the indicative mood in (4a) behaves as a regular information-seeking question, whereas the interrogative displaying the subjunctive mood in (4b) is a ‘softened’ question, being less directly addressed than indicative interrogatives (i.e. the speaker’s call-on-addressee is weaker than in canonical questions). The subjunctive mood in such interrogatives could therefore be analyzed as a conjectural question marker (Eckardt 2020, Farkas 2022, Farkas *to appear*), suspending the addressee’s competence (i.e. the speaker does not expect the addressee to know the answer).

- (4) a. **Să fi plouat** afară?  
SBJV PRF rain outside  
‘Would it be the case that it rained (outside)?’  
b. A **plouat** afară?

has rained outside  
'Did it rain (outside)?'

The Romanian data show the rich semantic and pragmatic potential of the subjunctive mood in the interrogative domain, compared to other Romance languages, where the discursive effects presented here are covered by other moods (in particular, conditional or infinitive). We conclude that the main aim of the subjunctive interrogatives is not to request information (as in regular information-seeking questions), but rather to express a variety of illocutionary meanings related to the speaker's attitude.

Our study documents the heterogeneous behaviour of the subjunctive mood crosslinguistically and even within the same language, lending support to the assumption made by Wiltschko (2016), namely that the subjunctive is not a natural class in terms of one modality, or one type of subjunctive across languages; moreover, it is not a universally uniform category.

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