

The meaning of free factive subjunctives

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Introduction

- (1) *Da wäre Pizza im Kühlschrank.*
there is.SUB pizza in-the fridge
'There is pizza in the fridge.'
side message: 'Feel free to eat the pizza!'

Free factive subjunctives:

unembedded use of the subjunctive

factive interpretation

Roadmap

- **Claim 1:** Free factive subjunctives are* hidden relevance conditionals
- **Claim 2 :** Free factive subjunctives need decision problems
- **Claim 3 :** They signal that they are not 'great information'

Introduction

Uses of the subjunctive in German:

- *nonfactive uses*:
 - reported speech;
 - optatives;
 - FLV conditionals;
 - counterfactual conditionals
- *factive uses*:
 - 'careful speech' (Buscha + Zoch 1984)

The data

Shopping

(2) *Heute hätten wir eine schöne Dorade.*

today have.SUB we a nice gilthead

'Today we have a nice gilthead.'

If you would like to hear our specials, today we have a nice gilthead.

(3) *Das wären 19.95 Euro.*

that are.SUB 19.95 Euro

'That makes 19.95 Euro.'

If you would like to pay, that makes 19.95.

The data

Frequent naturally occurring example:

- (4) *Ich hätte eine Frage.*
 I have.SUB a question
 'I have a question.'
If you are wondering what to do next, I have a question.

Presentational use:

- (5) *Das wäre das Rathaus.*
 this is.SUB the city-hall
 'This is city hall.'
*If you are wondering whether this structure is worth taking
 a photo of, it is city hall.*

The data

Past tense

- (6) *Da wäre (doch) Pizza im Kühlschrank gewesen.*
 there is.SUB PART pizza in-the fridge been
 'There was pizza in the fridge.'
If you were hungry, there was pizza in the fridge.

Unembedded nonfactive subjunctives

Some languages (e.g. English) allow unembedded (but nonfactive) uses of the ‘subjunctive’.

- (7) a. Alex would have passed that test.
 b. *Alex hätte den Test bestanden.*
 Alex have.SUB the test passed
 ‘Alex would have passed that test.’

- Note: Alex did not pass the test in w_0 .

Unembedded nonfactive subjunctives

- Kasper (1992), Schueler (2008): unembedded nonfactive subjunctives are **hidden counterfactuals**:

- (8) a. Alex would have passed that test.
b. *If he had taken it*, Alex would have passed that test.

- The antecedent names a 'necessary precondition'.
- The 'necessary precondition' is retrieved from context.

Free factive subjunctives

- (9) a. *Da wäre Pizza im Kühlschrank.*
there is.SUB pizza in-the fridge
'There is pizza in the fridge.'
- b. *Wenn du Hunger hast, da wäre Pizza im Kühlschrank.*
if you hunger have there is.SUB pizza in-the fridge
'If you are hungry, there is pizza in the fridge.'

- Speaker is committed to pizza in the fridge in w_0
- \Rightarrow A hidden relevance conditional!

An analysis of relevance conditionals

- Many proposals assume a different syntax/semantics for relevance and hypothetical conditionals (e.g. Ebert, Endriss and Hinterwimmer (2008))
- Franke 2009: Relevance conditionals have the same semantics as hypothetical conditionals!
- The ‘relevance conditional’ interpretation comes about by pragmatic reasoning:

If antecedent and consequent are *conditionally independent* (world knowledge: they are not causally related), the speaker must have independent evidence to suggest that the consequent holds
⇒ hearer reasons: the consequent must hold in w_0

The role of mood

The analysis in brief:

- FFS presuppose that there is a salient decision problem D
- D is referred to in the antecedent of a relevance conditional
- the prejacent of FFS must be relevant to D in the sense of van Rooij (2003)
- the subjunctive signals (non-truthconditionally) that there may be additional relevant information out there
- **Disclaimer:**
for now I have to assume that mood in German is ambiguous between FFS and a non-factive use

Contextual restrictions: Decision problems

Free factive subjunctives cannot occur in all places where indicatives occur.

- Restriction 1: There needs to be a **salient decision problem** in the context.

(10) **Context:** The addressee is participating in a clinical study. He has to eat certain foods at certain times. He is hungry and is scheduled to eat pizza.

a. ?? *Das einzige Essen wäre diese Pizza.*
the only food is.SUB this pizza

intended: 'The only food option is to have this pizza.'

b. ✓ *Das einzige Essen ist.IND diese Pizza.*

Contextual restrictions: decision problems

- Changing the context to add a decision problem makes the FFS acceptable.
- (11) **Context:** Speaker and addressee arrive in Geneva late at night. They want to eat something, but the only restaurant that is still open sells questionable pizza.
- a. *Das einzige Essen wäre diese Pizza.*
the only food is.SUB this pizza
'The only food option is to have this pizza.'
 - b. *If you are wondering what to do about food, das einzige Essen wäre diese Pizza.*

Contextual restrictions: decision problems

- Absence of a decision problem disallows FFS.
- (12)
- a. **Context:** The speaker wants to politely tell the addressee he looks terrible.
 - b. *Du ✓ siehst/ ??sähest schrecklich aus.*
you look.IND/ look.SUB terrible
intended: 'You look terrible.'
 - c. ?? *Wenn ich ehrlich bin, du sähest schrecklich aus.*
if I honest am you look.SUB terrible
intended: 'If I am honest, you look terrible.'

Contextual restrictions: Relevance

- Restriction 2: The prejacent of the FFS must be **relevant to the solution of the decision problem** in a particular way. Gricean relevance is not enough.
- (13) Context: the addressee has just complained that he is hungry.
- a. ?? *Du wärest auf Diät.*
 you are.SUB on diet
 intended: 'You are on a diet.'
 - b. ✓ *Du bist auf Diät.*

Contextual restrictions: Relevance

- The consequent proposition needs to be relevant in the 'right' way!

(14) ?? *Wenn du Hunger hast, du wärst auf Diät.*
 if you hunger have you are.SUB on diet
intended: 'If you are hungry, you are on a diet.'

⇒ does not help addressee make a choice that best satisfies his goal

Decision problems: some background

Decision problems are modelled (e.g. by van Rooij 2003) similar to questions as a partition of the decision maker's action alternatives:

- The decision maker calculates each action alternative's *expected utility*
- Expected utilities take into account what could be the case and how probable it is
- The action alternative with the highest expected utility is the 'optimal' action

Decision problems: an example

Decision maker assigns utilities to each action, depending on states of the world:

action	pizza in fridge	pizza not in fridge
open fridge	18	1
order Chinese	1	13

Decision maker also assigns probabilities to states of the world:

probability	pizza in fridge	pizza not in fridge
	.1	.9

Expected utilities

- **Expected utility** is then calculated from utility and probability
- $0.1 \cdot 18 + 0.9 \cdot 1 = 2.7$ EU of *open fridge*
- $0.1 \cdot 1 + 0.9 \cdot 13 = 11.8$ EU of *order Chinese*
- 'optimal' action is ordering Chinese

Relevance in decision problems

Decision makers can change their models on the basis of new facts!

old probability	pizza in fridge	pizza not in fridge
	.1	.9

(15) 'There is pizza in the fridge.'

new probability	pizza in fridge	pizza not in fridge
	.9	.1

Van Rooij (2003)'s notion of relevance

- Old expected utilities
 - $0.1 \cdot 18 + 0.9 \cdot 1 = 2.7$ EU of *open fridge*
 - $0.1 \cdot 1 + 0.9 \cdot 13 = 11.8$ EU of *order Chinese*
- New expected utilities
 - $0.9 \cdot 18 + 0.1 \cdot 1 = 16.3$ EU of *open fridge*
 - $0.9 \cdot 1 + 0.1 \cdot 13 = 2.2$ EU of *order Chinese*

⇒ Learning that there is pizza in the fridge is relevant to the decision problem.

Great information

When does a speaker give 'the best information'?

- For proposition p :
 expected utility of action a^* given that p is higher than all other expected utilities
- p is 'great info' iff $\neg \exists q$ such that $EU(a_q | q) > EU(a^* | p)$
- **free factive subjunctives signal that they are not 'great info'**

The meaning of the subjunctive

For a structure $SUB(q)$, SUB signals the following.

- (16) a. *presupposition*: there is a salient decision problem D .
 b. Then SUB signals that $\exists k$:
 $EU(a_k | p) \geq EU(a_i | p) \forall i$
 where a_j are action alternatives of D .

- Note: compared to what counts as 'great info', this is quite weak!

Competition with the indicative?

- Indicative signals nothing about potential EUs of action alternatives
⇒ subjunctive is more complex!
- FFS asserts propositional content *plus* conveys info that relevance of the proposition is 'ok'
⇒ implicature: there might be propositions with 'better' relevance
- this causes tentative/polite effects of FFS

Summary

- Free factive subjunctives presuppose a decision problem
- They have relevance conditional antecedents
- They signal that the information conveyed may not be the most informative

Open questions

- Why are FFSs restricted to these specific contexts?
should follow from question 2
- How can we integrate the meaning of the subjunctive in FFS
with that in reported speech and counterfactuals?
some vague ideas...
- What about other languages?
e.g. Polish (A. Pietraszko, pc)

Thank you!

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Appendix: potential problems

Relevance conditionals allow mixed-and-matched moods, but hypothetical conditionals don't.

- (17) a. *'If you are hungry, there is pizza in the fridge.'*
- b. ✓ Wenn du Hunger **hast**, **ist** da Pizza im Kühlschrank.
- c. ✓ Wenn du Hunger **hast**, **wäre** da Pizza im Kühlschrank.
- d. ✓ Wenn du Hunger **hättest**, **ist** da Pizza im Kühlschrank.
- e. ✓ Wenn du Hunger **hättest**, **wäre** da Pizza im Kühlschrank.

- (18) a. *'If Alex is/was hungry, he will/would go to the mensa.'*
- b. ✓ Wenn Alex Hunger **hat**, **geht** er in die Mensa.
- c. ??Wenn Alex Hunger **hat**, **ginge** er in die Mensa.
- d. ??Wenn Alex Hunger **hätte**, **geht** er in die Mensa.
- e. ✓ Wenn Alex Hunger **hätte**, **ginge** er in die Mensa.

Mix-and-match moods

- (19) a. *'If you are hungry, there is pizza in the fridge.'*
- b. Wenn du Hunger **hast**, ist da Pizza im Kühlschrank.
Ind/Ind ⇒ *neutral*
- c. Wenn du Hunger **hast**, wäre da Pizza im Kühlschrank.
Ind/Sub ⇒ *pizza not 'great'*
- d. Wenn du Hunger **hättest**, ist da Pizza im Kühlschrank.
Sub/Ind ⇒ *unlikely that hungry*
- e. Wenn du Hunger **hättest**, wäre da Pizza im
Kühlschrank.
Sub/Sub ⇒ **unlikely that hungry AND pizza not
'great'**

The meaning of the free factive subjunctive

- (20) *Wenn du Hunger hast, da wäre Pizza im*
 if you hunger have.IND there is.SUB pizza in-the
Kühlschrank.
 fridge
 'If you are hungry, there is pizza in the fridge.'

(21)

