

Chapter Twenty-Two

Subjunctive Mode

This chapter will introduce you to the subjunctive mode, which reveals intentions and other mental constructs and identifies them as ideas located in the mind rather than claims about reality.

Meaning of subjunctives

In indicative mode verbs make assertions about the “real world,” the world as it is outside our minds.

- I will become extremely wealthy.
- Aliens are taking over the planet.
- I am Napoleon.

Every claim about reality is open to challenge, as is particularly clear in the madman's assertion, "I am Napoleon." Using the indicative does not mean that something really is the case in the outside world—or even that the person who says it believes that it is. But, true or false, sane or mad, sincere or fraudulent, the thoughts contained in indicative verbs are presented as assertions (or asked as questions) about the actual state of the real world.

Languages need, though, to express other kinds of ideas. For example, people need sometimes to tell people the ideas they have in their heads. I am talking here about ideas that people *know* are just in their heads, ideas that they do not choose to assert as factual in the outside world—ideas that they *choose* to present as mental constructs. That's what the subjunctive mode does in Greek: It communicates various kinds of possibilities, making clear that they are just that—hypotheses about the future, notions residing only in the mind of the speaker. Consider the following English sentences.

- I became a Classicist so that I might become fabulously wealthy.
- Many aliens have become Classicists so that they may take over the planet.

Each sentence consists of two clauses. In each sentence the verb of the first clause operates in indicative mode. That is, it makes a claim (sane or insane) about the real world: I did become a classicist; many aliens have become classicists.

The second clause of each sentence is different though. Neither one of those verbs makes a claim about reality, as the *may* and *might* forms make clear. "I might become wealthy" produces quite a

different idea than “*I am wealthy*” or even “*I shall become wealthy*” does. “*I might become wealthy*” deliberately labels the notion of my future wealth as a *possibility* entertained in my mind rather than as a claim that it *will be* a future *reality*.

In one fashion or another all subjunctives do the same things. By being set in subjunctive mode, they put the listener on notice that they represent *a future possibility that the speaker is entertaining in her mind*.

Morphology of subjunctives

In subjunctive mode as in all other modes, the fundamental verbal notion is the **stem**—a fusion of **base** + **aspect**. Subjunctives *never* take **future-time** markers. A verb in the subjunctive carries future overtones simply because it is a subjunctive. The subjunctive envisions an inherently *future possibility* in any of the three aspects: **event**, **process**, or **resultant-state**.

The composition of subjunctives is extremely simple. Except in the resultant-state (perfect) middle/passive (and sometimes in the resultant-state active), subjunctives always take the following form: **stem** / subjunctive personal ending. Since you know stems, you need only learn the subjunctive personal endings.

Subjunctive Personal Endings

Active		Middle	
Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
<u>ω</u>	<u>ωμεν</u>	<u>ωμαι</u>	<u>ωμεθα</u>
<u>ης</u>	<u>ητε</u>	<u>ηαι</u> , Attic: <u>η</u> [<u>ησαι</u>]	<u>ησθε</u>
<u>η</u>	<u>ωσιν</u>	<u>ηται</u>	<u>ωνται</u>

The subjunctive personal endings are exactly the same as the indicative personal endings used in the present tense of λέγω—*except* that the theme vowel of each ending is lengthened. The event-passive (aorist passive) subjunctive adds *active* endings to the event-passive stem—as always. Otherwise, active forms add active endings and middle/passive forms add middle/passive endings.

The subjunctive of εἰμί. You will need to know the subjunctive forms of the verb “to be” (εἰμί, base ἔσ/). They are, in fact, identical to the active subjunctive endings except that they contain breath marks and accents. *To be* is always conceived of in Greek as a process (never an event or resultant state). So, *to be* has only **process subjunctive** forms, which were originally formed as ἔσ/ο/ω, etc., but the σ of the base was lost as intervocalic, and then the unaccented initial έ was lost, leaving only the subjunctive personal endings (the same sort of thing that happened to the **participles** of ἔσ/).

Greek Before Christmas

The process subjunctive of εἶμι (*to be*): ἐσ/

	Singular	Plural
1 st -person	ᾧ (ἐσ/ <u>ᾧ</u>)	ᾧμεν (ἐσ/ <u>ᾧμεν</u>)
2 nd -person	ῆς (ἐσ/ <u>ῆς</u>)	ῆτε (ἐσ/ <u>ῆτε</u>)
3 rd -person	ῆ (ἐσ/ <u>ῆ</u>)	ᾧσι(ν) (ἐσ/ <u>ᾧσι</u>)

Resultant-state subjunctives. Greeks chose not to construct *resultant-state (perfect) middle/passive subjunctives* in the normal way. Perhaps they found the normal result too cumbersome. At any rate, the structure they settled on consisted of two words (a so-called **periphrastic construction**):

a **resultant-state middle/passive participle** + **subjunctive** of *to be*

γεγράμμενον ῆ = (In the future) it may be written (= it may be in a written state)

Resultant-state (perfect) active subjunctives can be structured similarly:

resultant-state active participle + **subjunctive** of *to be*

τεθνηκότες ᾧμεν = (In the future) we may be dead (= we may be in a dead state)

Syntax of subjunctives

Subjunctive verbs in dependent clauses.

Usually the main clause in a sentence does not take a subjunctive verb. That is to say, clauses with subjunctives are usually **dependent clauses** (unable to stand as complete sentences on their own). Dependent clauses that take subjunctive verbs generally follow one of four patterns. Learn the following four structures, including the Greek words that introduce them.

1) Purpose clauses: ἵνα, ὥς, or ὅπως + subjunctive.

The words ἵνα, ὥς, and ὅπως followed by a subjunctive verb effectively mean *so that*, introducing purpose. Even in English the indicative is unsuitable for expressing purpose. We do not say, *I am studying Greek so that I will read Homer in the original*, but ... *so that I may read Homer in the original*.

The root meaning of ἵνα is *where*. So, the original meaning of ἵνα + **subjunctive** was *where x may happen*. E.g., *I am going to the marketplace where (I have in mind that) I may buy a goat*, which eventually came to be heard merely as *so that I may buy a goat*.

ὥς and ὅπως + **subjunctive**, on the other hand mean *how* or *in such a way that x may happen*. So, people might say, *I am working hard in such a way that I may purchase an education for my son*, which eventually came to mean *so that I may purchase an education for my son*.

2) If-clauses that sound more like hypotheses than facts: εἰ ἄν + **subjunctive**. εἰ ἄν typically contracts to ἐάν, ἄν, or ἥν.

In English we can present a possibility (an if-clause) as immediate and vivid,

“If the king is dying, who will replace him?”

or we can make it seem more like an intellectual hypothesis—not necessarily an unlikely hypothesis, but still a hypothesis.

“If the king should die, who would replace him?”

The indicative if-clause suggests that the king *really* is dying—out there, in the real world. The subjunctive if-clause calls our attention to a *possibility* that the king might die; it asserts a possibility located in our own minds.

In Greek when the speaker wants to present an “if” clause with realistic vividness—directing the hearer’s attention out into the real world—he will use $\epsilon\iota$ + an indicative verb. The indicative invites the hearer to envision the possibility as an actual event.

When the speaker chooses to present the possibility as a mental hypothesis, he uses the formula $\epsilon\iota \alpha\upsilon$ + subjunctive verb.

By nature intellectual hypotheses (subjunctive if-clauses) are well suited to expressing generalized possibilities: “If (ever) a king should die, who would replace him?”

3. Clauses that express fears about the future: verb of fearing + $\mu\eta$ + subjunctive

Greeks did not like to say such things as “I am afraid we shall all die.” Grammarians often attribute this to superstition: One doesn’t want to tempt the fates by stating as realities [indicative mood] the things one fears; instead, Greeks preferred to state their fears more circumspectly as possibilities that had arisen in their minds [subjunctive mood], which they then forbade with the negative particle $\mu\eta$. So, this is how you will find fears expressed in Greek: “I am afraid ...**No** [to the idea that] we might all die.”

verb stating or implying fear + $\mu\eta$ + subjunctive

The subjunctive is just what we should expect in expressions of fear: Fears are, after all, things in our heads and not real circumstances in the world. Be careful of the superstitious $\mu\eta$, though. *Do not translate $\mu\eta$ as “not”* in your final English translation. If you do, you will get things backwards: “I am afraid that we may *not* all die” instead of “I am afraid that we may all die.”

To express in Greek a fear that something will *not* happen, $\sigma\upsilon$ is inserted so that the entire construction is

verb indicating fear + $\mu\eta \sigma\upsilon$ + subjunctive

“I am afraid. **No** [to the idea that] we may not die.” I.e., “I am afraid that we may survive.”

Note: Clauses that express fears about the present or past—i.e., that something actually is (not) happening or has (not) happened in the real world—Greek uses

verb indicating fear + $\mu\eta$ ($\sigma\upsilon$) + indicative

“I am afraid that this ship really is sinking.” “I’m afraid that their ship has sunk.”

4) Indefinite clauses.

Both Greek and English employ dependent clauses that grammarians call *relative*, *temporal*, and *local clauses*, and *clauses of manner*.

Definite Clauses in English

Relative clauses involve notions of “who,” “that,” “what kind,” and “how much/many.”

They will arrest the man **who** robbed that house.

He stole the money **that** was hidden under the mattress.

I do not know **how much** money was stolen.

I do not know **what kind** of man the thief was.

Temporal clauses indicate time.

When the owner went to work, the thief broke in.

The burglary was not discovered **until** the owner returned.

Local clauses indicate place.

The police know **where** the thief is hiding.

Clauses of manner refer to the manner in which something is done.

The police do not yet know **how** the thief intends to leave the city.

All of these clauses, you should notice, are introduced by a **relative pronoun** or a **conjunction** indicating time, place, or manner and contain at least one indicative verb. In each case the verb is set in the indicative mood because *it asserts that something actually happened* in the “outside world”: somebody actually robbed the house; money was actually hidden under the mattress; a certain quantity of money really was stolen; the thief really was of a certain kind; etc.

Indefinite Relative Clauses in English

Sometimes, though, we want to entertain these notions in a way that does not assert them as definite events “in the real world.” Instead, we want to attach to them a sense of uncertainty. We may not want to say, “The police will arrest the man **who** will rob the house”—as though we are certain that a particular person really will rob the house. Instead, we may want to say something more uncertain: “If anyone were to rob the house, the police would arrest him—whoever he might be.” Hypothetical, uncertain notions of this sort can get compressed into what grammarians call **indefinite clauses**: “The police will arrest **whoever** robs (or may rob) the house.”

To communicate this sort of uncertainty in English, we often add “-*ever*” to the introductory word of the clause.

Indefinite Relative Clauses

The police will arrest **whoever** [or: **anyone who**] robs a house.

Whatever kind of man the thief may be, he should be arrested and prosecuted.

Indefinite Temporal Clauses

Whenever people are away from home, burglaries are more likely.

The owner cannot repair the door **until** (**whenever**) the police complete the investigation.

Indefinite Local Clauses

The police will capture the thief, **wherever** he is [or may be] hiding.

Indefinite Clauses of Manner.

However the thief intends [or may intend] to leave the city, he will have to avoid being seen.

Definite and indefinite clauses in Greek

Relative clauses are introduced by such words as

ὅς, ἥ, ὃ who, which

ὅστις, ἥτις, ὅτι who, which

ὅσος, ὅση, ὅσον of such a size, amount (so big, so little, so many, so few)

οἷος, οἷη [Attic: οἶα], οἷον of such a quality (so good, so bad, etc.)

Temporal clauses are introduced by such words as

ὅτε or ὁπότε when

ἐπεὶ or ἐπειδή when

ἕως until

Local clauses are introduced by such words as

οὗ or ὅπου where

Clauses of Manner are introduced by such words as

ὡς or ὅπως how, as, in the manner that

ἣ or ὅπη how, in the way that

These words introduce *definite clauses* that employ indicative verbs to assert the reality of an action “in the real world.” To transform these expressions into *indefinite clauses*—to add the tone of hypothesis that avoids making a claim about some specific person, time, or place in the real world—Greek adds **the indefinite particle ἄν** and sets the verb in the subjunctive to make clear that the action is hypothetical rather than actual.

Sometimes the particle ἄν is assimilated into the relative pronoun or adverb to form a single word:

ὅταν = ὅτε ἄν

ὁπότεν = ὁπότε ἄν

ἐπὶν = ἐπεὶ ἄν

ἐπειδάν = ἐπειδή ἄν

In summary, Greek *indefinite clauses* require the **relative pronoun or conjunction** + the **indefinite particle ἄν** and a subjunctive verb.

Subjunctive verbs in independent clauses

In relatively rare cases a subjunctive may be the verb of the main (“independent”) clause. When you encounter a subjunctive in an independent clause, it will have one of three uses:

1) Prohibitions (negative commands).

One way of expressing a prohibition is to imagine a possible future (subjunctive) event and to forbid it. The thought “Don’t step on that snake, Kid” emerges in Greek as “**No** [to the possibility:] you might step on that snake.” The construction is always μή + event (aorist) subjunctive.

This construction differs in sense from μή + process (present) imperative, which you have already encountered. The process imperative suggests ongoing action. So, μή + process imperative is used to say something like “**Don’t be stealing**,” meaning either “Don’t be a thief” or “Quit stealing,” while μή + event (aorist) subjunctive means simply “Don’t steal,” “Don’t commit an act of theft.”

2) Deliberative questions.

Occasionally a speaker uses the subjunctive to express an idea about the future and puts a question mark at the end. Such questions tend to emphasize the uncertainty implicit in all questions. When you ask “What shall we eat tonight—pizza or tacos?” the verb is future indicative because the tone implies an assertion about reality: “We’re going to eat something. What will it be?”

But sometimes we want to ask questions that are much more uncertain than that. When Jesus’ disciples looked over a crowd of 5000 in the middle of the desert and asked “Where shall we get food for so many?” they used (in the Greek narrative) the subjunctive to show that the real force of the question was “Where in the world might we get food for so many?”

3) 1st-person exhortations.

Occasionally a subjunctive verb occurs *in the first person (singular or plural) without any additional particle or indicator* and means “Let me x,” “let’s x.” This *hortatory use* of the subjunctive (so called because it *exhorts*) is the closest that Greek can come to issuing a command in the 1st person. It isn’t actually a command, of course, but the suggestion of a future possibility: “We might eat” = “Let’s eat.” “I might study” = “I should study” or “Let me study.”

What now?

Identify the specified three features of each form and make sure you understand what each form would mean in the various uses that you have learned for the subjunctive.

<u>Subjunctive form</u>	Aspect	Tense	Voice
1) λαμβάνωμεν			

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2) λάβωνται			
3) λέγῃς			
4) ληφθῇ			
5) ἐλθῶσιν			
6) λέγεται			
7) ἐρχώμεθα			
8) γράψῃ			
9) γράψωσι			
10) ὀρᾷ (ὀράῃ)			
11) ὀφθῇ			
12) μεθίῃς			
13) λελοίπωσι			
14) τεθνηκυῖα ἦς			
15) γεγραμμένα ἦ			
16) διδῶς			
17) δῶς			
18) δοθῇ			
19) στῇ			
20) ἰστῇ			

#16, 17, 20, 21. The subjunctive ending contracts (according to normal rules of contraction) with the final vowel of the base of the common verbs δίδωμι, ἵστημι, τίθημι. Whenever you encounter these words, remember that the reduplication in iota is the process marker.

#4, 11 etc. Aorist passive subjunctives are always accented on the first syllable of their personal endings.