

SUBJUNCTIVE MAIN CLAUSES AND THE RESTRICTIONS ON SUBJUNCTIVE SELECTION IN PORTUGUESE POLAR INTERROGATIVES

Margarita Dimitrova¹

ABSTRACT: The subjunctive mood has been widely discussed from the perspective of its selection in complement clauses and has been considered the mood of subordination encoding a given type of dependency (Picallo, 1984; Raposo, 1985). Moreover, several studies (Ambar, 2016; Giannakidou, 2016) have shown that the selection of the subjunctive in main clauses contributes to the expression of speaker-related features, such as the speaker's kind attitude and evaluations. Focusing on the selection of the subjunctive mood in yes-no questions, it has been typically associated with the denotation of wondering and doubt, captured under the concept of *epistemic subjunctive* (Giannakidou, 2016). Crucially, it appears that languages differ in allowing for subjunctive in polar questions. While in languages like Modern Greek and Bulgarian, nothing precludes the selection of the subjunctive in either yes-no or wh-questions, subjunctive is typically excluded in some Romance languages, like Portuguese. In view of this intriguing restriction, our goal in this paper is to discuss the data from Portuguese subjunctive main and embedded clauses, building on previous analyses that discuss the syntax of polar questions and the properties of subjunctive main clauses (Ambar, 2013, 2016). We argue that Portuguese subjunctive polar questions are banned due to an intervening Interrogative operator.

KEYWORDS: subjunctive mood; polar questions; evaluation; Portuguese.

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Introduction

Mood selection has been widely discussed with respect to complement clauses (Ambar, 1988, 1999, 2012, 2016; Giannakidou, 1998; Kempchinsky, 2009; Picallo, 1984; Portner, 1997; Quer, 1998; Raposo, 1985) and traditionally related to the semantic contrast between *realis* and *irrealis*. More recent studies have shown that the selection of the subjunctive is not merely a consequence of the semantic properties of given predicate classes, such as volitional, directive, emotive-factive predicates, but also encodes the speaker's attitudes and evaluations, as well as a particular type of modality and the concept of (*non*)*veridicality* (Ambar, 2016; Ambar; Jiménez-Fernandéz, 2014; Giannakidou, 1998, 2009, 2016; Marques, 2009, 2010). The grammatical codification of these properties is particularly evident in data from main subjunctive clauses, as will be shown later in this work.

Curiously, the selection of the subjunctive mood in matrix clauses, particularly in different types of questions, has received little systematic scrutiny. Rouchota (1994), discussing data from Modern Greek (henceforth, MG), characterises subjunctive questions as “dubitative”. Giannakidou (2016) on MG and Rocci (2007) on Italian further argue that the selection of the subjunctive in interrogative sentences is linked to the expression of epistemic modality and evaluation. Observe the examples in (1) and (2):

(1) a. Ti na theli?

What SUBJ want-3SG

‘What might he want?’

b. Na tou arese to fagito?

SUBJ he-GEN liked-3SG the food

‘Might it be the case that he liked the food?’

[MG, Giannakidou; Mari, 2021, p. 27]

(2) [La macchina di Giovanni non è nel parcheggio.]

[John's car is not in the parking lot.]

Che sia andato a casa?

That go.perf.subj. to home

'Has he possibly gone home?'

[Italian, Rocci, 2007, p. 129]

In addition to conveying the speaker's evaluations and inferences, structures like (1) and (2) also differ from standard yes-no questions in the way polarity and the polarity alternatives [p, ¬p] (Hamblin, 1973) are encoded. Giannakidou (2016) points out that subjunctive yes-no questions are about "the possibility of p rather than p itself." (Giannakidou, 2016, p. 200).

Importantly, typologically different languages vary in whether they allow the subjunctive in polar questions. Languages like MG and Italian permit the selection of the subjunctive in polar questions, whereas Portuguese typically excludes subjunctive yes-no questions: (3) * O João vá ao cinema?

The John go.SUBJ.3p.sg. to-the movies

In view of the contrasts outlined above, the present work examines the properties of Portuguese subjunctive yes-no questions with the aim of shedding light on the factors underlying the ungrammaticality of (3).

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 focuses on the distribution of the subjunctive mood, building on previous analyses discussing its syntactic expression in Portuguese. Section 3 provides a detailed description of the properties of subjunctive main clauses and subjunctive yes-no questions, with particular emphasis on the relation to the expression of evaluation and epistemic modality. Section 4 examines the licensing of subjunctive yes-no questions in Portuguese, building on earlier works dedicated to the syntax of polar questions (Ambar, 2013; Holmberg, 2012, 2016). Section 5 draws the concluding remarks.

Portuguese subjunctive clauses

In this section, we discuss some of the previous analyses concerned with the selection and properties of the subjunctive mood, building on data from Portuguese. As mentioned above, the subjunctive mood has traditionally been approached in relation to its obligatory selection in complements of volitional (4a), directive (4b) and emotive-factive (4c) predicates, as the examples from Portuguese illustrate:

(4) a. O João quer que a Maria escreva o artigo.

The John wants that the Mary writes.SUBJ.3p.sg.
the article

‘John wants Mary to write the article.’

b. O João pediu que a Maria escrevesse o artigo.

The John asked that the Mary write.PAST.SUBJ.3p.
sg the article

‘John asked Mary to write the article.’

c. O João lamenta que a Maria tenha escrito o artigo.

The John regrets that the Mary have.SUBJ.3p.sg
written the article

‘John regrets that Mary has written the article.’

[Dimitrova, 2020, p. 242-243]

The examples in (4) show that given predicates, like Portuguese *querer* ‘want’, *pedir* ‘ask’ and *lamentar* ‘regret’, obligatorily select the subjunctive in their complements, the indicative being ruled out:

(5) a. *O João quer que a Maria escreva o artigo.

The John wants that the Mary writes.
IND.3p.sg. the article

‘John wants Mary to write the article.’

b. *O João pediu que a Maria escrevia o artigo.

The John asked that the Mary write.PAST.IND.3p.sg the article

‘John asked Mary to write the article.’

c. *O João lamenta que a Maria tem escrito o artigo.

The John regrets that the Mary has.IND.3p.sg written the article

‘John regrets that Mary has written the article.’

[Dimitrova, 2020, p. 243]

Conversely, the data in (6) and (7) below show that the indicative is obligatorily selected under declarative and epistemic predicates, such as *dizer* ‘say’ or *pensar* ‘think’. In these cases, the subjunctive is excluded:

(6) a. O João disse que a Maria escreveu o artigo.

The John said that the Mary wrote.PAST.IND.3p.sg the article

‘John said that Mary wrote the article.’

b. O João pensa que a Maria escreveu o artigo.

The John thinks that the Mary wrote.PAST.IND.3p.sg. the article

‘John thinks that Mary wrote the article.’

(7) a. *O João disse que a Maria escrevesse o artigo.

The John said that the Mary wrote.PAST.SUBJ.3p.sg the article

‘John informed that Mary wrote the article.’

b. *O João pensa que a Maria escreva artigo.

The John thinks that the Mary write.PRES.SUBJ.3p.sg the article

‘John thinks that Mary wrote the article.’

[Dimitrova, 2020, p. 243-244]

The examples in (4-5) and (6-7) provide clear evidence for the properties of the predicates involved in mood selection: while volitional, directive and emotive-factive predicates select the subjunctive, declarative and epistemic verbs are restricted to the indicative.

Nevertheless, even though the data above felicitously captures the main facts about the distribution of the subjunctive mood and the properties of mood selection, the subjunctive-indicative divide is more complex. Drawing on data from Portuguese, Marques (2009, 2010) shows that some predicates are compatible with both the indicative and the subjunctive. In these cases, the selection of each mood is associated with the expression of the speaker's low or high degree of certainty with respect to the truth of the proposition:

- (8) a. Eu acredito que a Ana ganhe as eleições.
I believe that the Ana wins-SUBJ the elections
b. Eu acredito que a Ana ganha as eleições.
I believe that the Ana wins-IND the elections
'I believe that Ana will win the elections.'

[Marques, 2009, p. 140]

In (8b), the indicative is the mood indicating the speaker's high degree of belief in the truth of the embedded proposition. The subjunctive in (8a), on the other hand, is responsible for the denotation of a low degree of certainty. Considering these complex properties of structures such as those (8a-b), Marques (2009) suggests that mood selection is related to the concept of *(non)veridicality* (Giannakidou, 1998) and the speaker's attitude towards the truth of the proposition of the embedded domain. Importantly, the data in (8) further show that mood selection is not a mere consequence of the semantic properties of given predicates. Considering the data in (8) and the alternation between the indicative and the subjunctive, Ambar (2016) argues that the occurrence of the subjunctive mood in structures like (8a) is not a result of

selection and therefore dubs such structures *unselected subjunctive clauses*.

A well-known property concerning Romance subjunctive embedded clauses is related to the co-reference between the subjects of the matrix and the embedded domains. As shown in (9), Portuguese subjunctive clauses display obligatory obviation effects, precluding the co-reference between the matrix and the embedded subjects:

(9) O João*i* quer que *pro*^{*i} /*j* ganhe as
eleições.

The John wants that *pro* win.SUBJ.3p.sg the
elections

'John wants him to win the elections.'

In fact, obligatory obviation has been the topic of many discussions (Ambar, 1988; Picallo, 1984; Raposo, 1985). It has been commonly agreed that it is a result of the properties of tense of the embedded domain. According to the analysis put forth in Raposo (1985), subjunctive embedded clauses have dependent tense: the tense of the embedded domain is dependent on the tense of the matrix predicate given that they have [-T] on C, as shown in the structure below: (10) "[S' [+TENSE]*i* [S ... [+Tense]*i* ... V [S' [-TENSE] [S NP [Infl [+Tense]*i* Agr VP]]]" (Raposo, 1985, p. 80).

As illustrated in (10), by virtue of tense dependency, the binding domain of the embedded clause extends to the matrix clause, preventing the co-reference between the matrix and the embedded subjects in agreement with Principle B of the Binding Theory.

In a similar vein, Ambar (1988) further argues that the subjunctive embedded domain is dependent. However, besides the features [-TENSE] and [+TENSE], Ambar (1988) proposes that T and Agr further display the feature [$\pm$ strong]. Thus, according to this author, subjunctive clauses are classified as [+T, -strong] which suggests that T must be bound by the matrix verb. Since T governs Agr, the binding domain of Agr extends to the matrix

Nevertheless, while these proposals adequately capture the behaviour of subjunctive embedded clauses, the data from subjunctive main clauses, in which the subjunctive appears on its own, pose a clear challenge to the view that the subjunctive is characterised by dependent tense. The next section examines this question and the factors triggering the selection of the subjunctive in matrix clauses.

The properties of subjunctive main clauses and the aspects concerning their syntactic expression have not been subject to much systematic scrutiny, even though they are particularly important for a better understanding of the properties of the subjunctive mood. A comparison with the pairs in (4)–(5) and (6)–(7) shows that in matrix clauses the choice between indicative and subjunctive remains straightforward: the indicative is used in assertions, as in (11), while the subjunctive encodes evaluations and the speaker's attitude toward the state of affairs described, as in (12):

- (11) a. Ele vai _____ ao cinema.
he go.IND.PRES.3sg to.the movies
'He goes to the movies.'
- b. *Ele vá _____ ao cinema.
he go.SUBJ.PRES.3sg to.the movies
[Ambar, 2016, p. 125]
- (12) a. Vá _____ ele às aulas! (e /assim terá
êxito
Go.SUBJ.PRES.3sg he to-the courses (and/so he
will succeed

- nos seus estudos)
in his studies)
'Let him take the courses!'
b. *Vai ele às aulas!
Go.IND.PRES.3sg he to.the courses
'He takes the courses!'

[Ambar, 2016, p. 131]

The data from Portuguese show that the subjunctive is excluded from simple assertions, such as (11b), and is instead employed to encode evaluative meaning, as illustrated in (12a).

Furthermore, Ambar (2016) notes that the subjunctive also contributes to the expression of wishes or possibilities. In these cases, it is triggered by the presence of *talvez* 'maybe' (13a-b) or *é possível/provável* 'it is possible/probable' (14a-b):

- (13) a. Talvez (que) ele venha.
Maybe (that) he come.SUBJ.PRES.3sg
'Maybe he comes.'
b. * Talvez (que) ele vem.
Maybe (that) he come.IND.PRES.3sg
Intended: 'Maybe he comes.'
(14) a. É possível/provável que ele venha.
Is possible/probable that he come.SUBJ.PRES.3sg
'It is possible/probable that he is coming.'
b. *É possível/provável que ele vem.
Is possible/probable that he come.IND.PRES.3sg
'It is possible/probable that he is coming.'
[adapted from Ambar, 2016, p. 134-135]

As shown in (13b) and (14b), paralleling the data discussed above, the indicative is, once again, excluded.

In light of the above observations, Ambar, Dimitrova and Amaral (2017), building on Ambar (2016), argue that subjunctive main clauses should be treated as another instance of *unselected*

Interestingly, the observations discussed above regarding subjunctive main clauses also extend to subjunctive polar questions. Giannakidou (2016), drawing on data from MG, argues that subjunctive yes-no questions display the so-called *epistemic subjunctive*, captured under the possibility modal *might*:

- (15) Na tou milise (arage)?
SUBJV him talked-3SG Q-particle
‘Might she have talked to him?’
(Giannakidou, 2016, p. 200)

According to this author, the epistemic subjunctive weakens the veridicality of sentences. As a result, the polar question in (15) does not encode the alternatives $[p, \neg p]$ the same way standard yes-no questions do: “here, the speaker asks the hearer about the possibility of p rather than p itself.” [Giannakidou, 2016, p. 200].

As noted above, unlike MG, Romance languages, like Portuguese, typically disallow the subjunctive in polar questions. In Portuguese, subjunctive polar questions are strongly ungrammatical, as shown in (3) above, repeated below for ease: (16) * O João vá ao cinema? The John go.SUBJ.3p.sg. to-the movies.

In what follows, we turn to a discussion of the factors responsible for the ungrammaticality of (16).

Towards an analysis

In this section, we focus on what triggers the ban on the licensing of the subjunctive mood in Portuguese yes-no questions, drawing on previous analyses dedicated to the syntactic

expression of Portuguese yes-no questions, on the one hand, and to the syntax of subjunctive clauses, on the other.

On the syntax of Portuguese yes-no questions

The study of Portuguese yes-no questions has typically focused on a detailed analysis of their prosodic properties (Frota, 2000, 2002). Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, the precise syntactic structure underlying Portuguese polar questions has not been subject to much discussion.

An attempt to address the apparent gap concerning the syntax of Portuguese polar questions was made by Ambar (2013), who convincingly argues that their underlying structure patterns that of *wh*-questions. The proposal put forth in Ambar (2013) is supported by some intriguing data on the distribution of quantified subjects and the so called ‘special adverbs’ (Ambar; Gonzaga; Negrão, 2004; Ambar, 2008) such as *lá* ‘there’ and *sempre* ‘always’. The behaviour of these elements in yes-no questions provides evidence that the structure of Portuguese yes-no questions is more complex than traditionally assumed. Crucially, Ambar (2013) argues that, like *wh*-questions, Portuguese polar questions involve verb-movement to C.

Building on seminal works discussing the structure of yes-no questions, namely Holmberg (2012), Ambar (2013) proposes that Portuguese yes-no questions have the structure in (17) below:

(17) [TopP [IntP [FocP [TopP [PolP [TP

Following Holmberg (2012), who argues that the structure of yes-no questions includes a Polarity head (PolP), responsible for the encoding of polarity features, Ambar (2013) considers that PolP projects in a position above TP. However, unlike Holmberg (2012), Ambar (2013) assumes that Pol has two possible values – affirmative and negative – whose valuation results from V-to-Pol movement, with the verb carrying both tense and event features

(Ambar, 2005, 2007). The Interrogative Operator is taken to originate in FocP and is represented in (18):

(18) $\langle T, \text{aff}, \text{neg}, F\text{aff}, \text{neg} \rangle$

The value of the interrogative operator therefore consists in a bundle of features (Chomsky, 2001). In (18) T and F correspond to True and False, respectively, and are valued by the answer. The features aff and neg, by contrast, pertain to the value of the polarity head. The verb undergoes movement to Pol⁰ where it assigns the corresponding aff or neg value to Pol as well as to the heads of FocP and IntP. Consider the question in (19a) and its derivation in (19b):

(19) a. O João comprou o livro?

The John bought the book

'Did John buy the book?'

b. [TopP O Joãoi [IntP [Int' comprouk aff [FocP [Foc' comprouk aff

[TopP Θ Joãoi [PolP [Pol' comprouk [TP Θ Joãoi comprouk o livro]]]]]]]]]

As noted above, T and F values are determined and assigned by the answer. Ambar (2013) suggests that answers to yes-no questions involve the functional projections AssertiveP and EvaluativeP (Ambar, 2000, 2003). In the present work, adopting Ambar's (2013) analysis, we assume that Portuguese polar questions project PolP and involve verb movement to C.

The ban on subjunctive in Portuguese yes-no questions – proposal for analysis

Considering the properties of subjunctive main and embedded clauses, and assuming with Ambar (2013) that Portuguese polar questions involve an Interrogative Operator triggering verb movement, this section examines the factors responsible for the ungrammaticality of subjunctive yes-no questions in Portuguese.

As noted above, one of the core properties traditionally associated with subjunctive clauses is tense deficiency. Obligatory obviation effects have been analysed as a consequence of this dependency: unlike indicative clauses, in which C is specified as [+T], subjunctive clauses are assumed to have [-T] on C (Picallo, 1984; Raposo 1985). Nevertheless, with respect to complements of volitional predicates, Bošković (1997) and Martin (1996) argue that these clauses are in fact [+T], building on Stowell's (1981) analysis of the tense properties of control infinitives. According to Stowell (1981), control infinitives have independent tense and denote an unrealized future event. In view of these opposing accounts, the tense properties of subjunctive clauses remain unclear.

In Ambar's (2016) terms, these two conflicting views in fact reflect different properties of the subjunctive mood. Assuming that t-features enter the derivation as bundles (Chomsky, 2001), Ambar (2016) distinguishes between two types of features: (i) tt-features, which are responsible for the morphological tense and for the nominative case, and (ii) tev-features which encode the properties of event and Aktionsart and the accusative. Following Chomsky's (2001) *interpretable* vs. *uninterpretable* features, Ambar (2016) assumes that features enter the derivation as *valued* or *unvalued*. Unvalued features receive a value via Agree. Within this system, Ambar (2016) proposes that, in indicative clauses, both tt and tev are valued when they enter the derivation, whereas in subjunctive clauses only tev features are valued in V, the tt-features being valued by the matrix verb.

A central focus here are *unselected subjunctive clauses*. As discussed above, in Romance languages such as Portuguese, the occurrence of the subjunctive is not always determined by selection: certain predicates, like Portuguese *acreditar* 'believe' are compatible with both the indicative and the subjunctive. Extended the proposal outlines above, Ambar (2016) argues that in *unselected subjunctive clauses* the unvalued tt features are valued by an Evaluative Operator. Crucially, assuming that the subjunctive

encodes the speaker's evaluations, while the indicative is restricted to assertions, Ambar further proposes that the properties of each mood are determined by the activation of two projections of the Left Periphery, the speaker's projections EvaluativeP and AssertiveP, proposed in previous works (Ambar, 2000, 2003).

With these observations in mind, we now return to the discussion of the factors that prevent the occurrence of the subjunctive mood in Portuguese polar questions:

- (20) * O João vá ao cinema?
The John go.SUBJ.3p.sg. to-the movies
Intended: "Might John go to the movies?"

Assuming with Ambar (2016) that, in languages like Portuguese, *unselected subjunctive clauses* display unvalued *tt* features valued by an Evaluative Operator, and that the occurrence of the subjunctive in interrogative sentences does not depend on selection, we propose that the ungrammaticality of the structure in (20) results from the valuation of *tt* features being blocked by the intervening Interrogative Operator:

- (21) [EvalP OpEVAL [Eval' [IntP OpINT [Int° [TP o
Joãoj [T° vá ~~utt~~, ~~tev~~ i [VP ~~o~~ Joãoj
|_____X_____|
[V° ~~vá~~ ~~utt~~, ~~tev~~ i ao cinema]

The structure in (21) provides a straightforward explanation for why the subjunctive is banned in Portuguese polar questions. Moreover, the analysis of the Portuguese data in (20) aligns with Giannakidou's (2016) observations, according to which subjunctive yes-no questions differ from standard yes-no questions in the denotation of the alternatives $[p, \neg p]$. Since the encoding of these alternatives is triggered by the Interrogative Operator, its incompatibility with the subjunctive mood captures this contrast.

Conclusions

Our goal in the present work was to examine the properties of subjunctive yes-no questions drawing on data from Portuguese. Assuming that the occurrence of the subjunctive in questions reflects the speaker's evaluations and attitude, we observed that, in contrast to other typologically distinct languages, Portuguese systematically blocks the licensing of the subjunctive in polar questions.

In order to account for this intriguing restriction, we adopted the analyses proposed in Ambar (2016) and Giannakidou (2016) which suggest that the licensing of *epistemic subjunctive* results from verb movement to the Left Periphery (Ambar, 2016). On this basis, we proposed that yes-no questions are among the contexts in which unselected subjunctive occurs. Building on this analysis and on recent proposals on the structure of Portuguese yes-no questions, we argued that Portuguese subjunctive yes-no questions are disallowed as a result of an intervening interrogative operator that blocks the *tt* features valuation by the Evaluative Operator.

Orações principais no Conjuntivo e as restrições à seleção do Conjuntivo em interrogativas polares do português

RESUMO: O modo conjuntivo tem sido amplamente discutido a partir da perspectiva da sua seleção em orações completivas e tem sido considerado o modo da subordinação que codifica um determinado tipo de dependência (Picallo, 1984; Raposo, 1985). Adicionalmente, vários estudos (Ambar, 2016; Giannakidou, 2016) demonstraram que a seleção do conjuntivo em orações principais contribui para a expressão de traços relacionados com o falante, tais como a atitude e as avaliações do falante. Ao focar-se na seleção do modo conjuntivo em interrogativas polares, ou sim-não, essa tem sido tipicamente associada à denotação de dúvida e questionamento, capturada pelo conceito de *conjuntivo epistêmico* (Giannakidou, 2016). Crucialmente, as línguas diferem quanto à possibilidade de ocorrência do conjuntivo em interrogativas polares. Enquanto em línguas como o grego moderno e o búlgaro nada impede a seleção do subjuntivo tanto em interrogativas sim-não como em interrogativas *wh*, o conjuntivo é tipicamente excluído em algumas línguas românicas, como o português. Tendo em conta essa restrição intrigante, o objetivo deste artigo é discutir os dados do português relativos ao conjuntivo em orações principais e encaixadas, com base em análises prévias que abordam a sintaxe das interrogativas polares, por um lado, e as propriedades das orações principais no conjuntivo, por outro (Ambar, 2013, 2016). Assim, no presente trabalho propomos que o licenciamento do conjuntivo é bloqueado nas interrogativas polares do português devido à intervenção de um operador interrogativo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: modo conjuntivo; interrogativas polares; avaliação; português.

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