

Functional and Formal Aspects of Mood Shift in Icelandic Conditionals

In addition to optative/hortative and reportive construals (cf., e.g., Sigurðsson 2011), Modern Icelandic present subjunctives possess "potentialis" uses like (1) (Thráinsson 1979:213), which are absent from their counterparts in related languages like Modern German.

- (1) *Það er mögulegt að Jón hafi* [SUBJ] / **hefur* [IND] *barið Maríu*
"It is possible that John has hit Mary."

It is thus striking that "realistic possibilities" introduced in *ef*-conditionals are obligatorily realized by present indicatives in the standard language (Thráinsson 2007:405), (2).

- (2) *Hvað á ég að gera, ef hann er* [IND] *ekki heima?*
"What am I supposed to do if he is not at home?"

In line with the diagnosis that mood choice in Icelandic "is partially governed by certain grammaticalized rules that are not entirely transparent [...] from a semantic point of view" (Thráinsson 2007:404), Sigurðsson (2011:47) conjectures that "mood-selection is lexically "frozen" for certain elements, including [...] conditional *ef* 'if'" (cf. Quer 2001:102,fn.23, for Catalan and Spanish). It is therefore important to note that, as documented by Þórðardóttir (2012:1.3.1.1), use of the present subjunctive in cases like (2), (*er*[IND]>*sé*[SUBJ]) (cf. Thráinsson 2007:405), is on the rise. Our talk aims at shedding further light on this alternation, both from a broader functional and a narrower formal perspective.

As for the former, following Gärtner and Eypórssón (2020), we can interpret the above (present) IND>SUBJ-shift in *ef*-conditionals as part of a change in the default system of clausal (in)dependency marking, where verb placement (V° -in- C° = independent; V° -ex- C° = dependent) takes over from mood choice (indicative = independent; subjunctive = dependent) (cf. Schrodtt 1983:5.1). As a consequence, Icelandic "embedded V2" is drifting toward the Mainland Scandinavian "limited" (Vikner 1995:65) variety (cf., Jónsson 1996:39, on "dialect B"), while mood choice is becoming more "autonomous," i.e., free to express semantico-pragmatic distinctions. In particular, the function of indicative vs. subjunctive can be seen as consisting in (non-at-issue) "commitment-flagging" vs. "anti-commitment-flagging," respectively (cf. Gärtner and Eypórssón 2020). This functional perspective may be further vindicated by the fact that the IND>SUBJ-shift does not affect past tense, perhaps due to avoidance of overlap with counterfactual construal.

At the same time, a look at the more narrowly formal syntactic side of the (present) IND>SUBJ-shift in *ef*-conditionals is called for. Note, first of all, that *ef* differs from English *if* in optionally being accompanied by *að* ("that"), as shown in (3) (Thráinsson 2007:450)

- (3) *Ég kem, ef (að) þú býður mér*
"I'm coming, if you invite me."

Assuming an analysis of conditional protases that involves movement of an "irrealis operator" to Spec,TypeP (cf. Haegeman 2012:5.4), the difference between English and Icelandic might be captured by (4a) and (4b), respectively, with *ef* spelling out *Op*.

- (4) a. ... [TypeP [\emptyset_{Op}]_i [Type' *if* [... t_i ...]]] b. ... [TypeP [*ef*_{Op}]_i [Type' (*að*) [... t_i ...]]]

However, as argued by Jónsson (2017:174), the fact that *bona fide* A'-operators like *hvert* ("where") do not combine with *að*, e.g., in dependent interrogatives (*Þú ræður hvert (*að) við förum á morgun*; "You decide where we go tomorrow.") favors an analysis of *ef að* as complex Type $^\circ$ -head. What's more, X $^\circ$ -status of *ef* can be taken to be incompatible with V° -in- C° (here V° -in-Type $^\circ$), which directly accounts for the strict complementarity of *ef*-conditionals and V1-conditionals.

Second, the latter complementarity is known to be accompanied by a difference in verbal mood. Thus, V1-counterparts of (2) have to contain finite subjunctive verbs, as shown in (4) (cf. Nordström 2010:152; Thráinsson 2007:406).

(4) *Hvað á ég að gera, sé* [SUBJ] / * *er* [IND] *hann ekki heima?*

The pattern in (4), which is obligatory for all speakers of Modern Icelandic, opens up an alternative "narrow" perspective on the (present) IND>SUBJ-shift. In analogy with the grammatical realization of "counterfactuality" (Iatridou 2000), which involves an interaction of (counterparts of) *if*, verbal (subjunctive) mood, and (past) tense, one may postulate that Modern Icelandic "realistic" conditionals have to be marked for potentialis. In the standard language, *ef* alone carries the appropriate feature [MOOD:pt]. This can be formalized by assuming that [MOOD:pt] in Mood^o upward agrees with *ef*, leaving the finite verb unaffected, which results in the latter being realized as indicative per default, (5a). In the absence of *ef*, the finite verb realizes [MOOD:pt], which requires subjunctive morphology, (5b). Now, crucially, the IND>SUBJ-shift means that for "innovative" speakers, *ef* has lost its ability to carry [MOOD:pt]. Agreement therefore has to occur downward between Mood^o and the finite verb, which again results in the latter being realized as subjunctive, (5c).

- (5) a. ... *ef*_[MOOD:pt] ... Mood^o_[MOOD:pt] ... *er*_[IND] ...
 b. ... [*sé*_{[SUBJ].[MOOD:pt]} [Mood^o_[MOOD:pt]]]_i ... t_i ...
 c. ... *ef* ... Mood^o_[MOOD:pt] ... *sé*_{[SUBJ].[MOOD:pt]} ...

The remainder of this talk will be devoted to the following issues. (i) We will explore an extension of the system in (5) to past subjunctives, in order to account for the absence of any IND>SUBJ-shift there. (ii) On the basis of this, we will discuss the question as to what extent narrow syntactic and broad functional approaches to mood choice in Icelandic are competing with or complementing each other. (iii) We will address historical vacillation between (5a) and (5c) (Nygaard 1905), drawing upon additional evidence from Old English, which occasionally allows present subjunctives in *gif*-conditionals (Fischer et al. 2000:64), as does Old High German for its *ôba*-counterparts (Petrova 2008:92). (iv) Time permitting, we will contrast the behavior of present potentialis and reportive subjunctives in the light of the "anti-origo condition" banning "free" occurrences of reportive subjunctives in conditional protases (Schlenker 2005; Sode 2018), and the absence of that condition in Icelandic (Gärtner and Eypórrsson 2020).

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