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NATURAL LOGIC AND THE GREEK MOODS

*The Nature of the Subjunctive
and Optative in Classical Greek*

by

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PREFACE

Over the last few years a dispute has been waged amongst proponents of Transformational Grammar, always vigorously and often bitterly. The 'interpretivists' have maintained that syntactic rules operate autonomously of semantics and that a semantic representation for any sentence is generated by rules which 'interpret' the syntactic representations. The 'generativists', on the other hand, have claimed that syntactic rules are inextricably intertwined with semantic considerations and, indeed, that there is no useful distinction to be drawn between syntax and semantics. They visualise a grammar as consisting of one set of more or less homogeneous rules which map semantic representations into surface syntactic structures. Semantic representations will be based on a 'natural logic', a logic which will be built up to capture not only the traditional concerns of the standard logics but also linguistically significant generalisations.

This book does not attempt to advocate Generative Semantics over Interpretive Semantics or vice versa. Indeed, it is by no means clear that there is any such choice to be made, or whether there is a substantive difference between these two positions. Rather, we are undertaking a detailed examination of a certain area of grammar within the framework of Generative Semantics. We claim to solve a number of problems in the description of the Classical Greek mood system, explaining the nature of the subjunctive and optative moods. In doing this, we demonstrate certain strengths of the Generative Semantics position but we also show certain important problems inherent in it. Most of these problems centre on methods of argumentation: what constitutes valid evidence for an abstract verb? how can one give a sensible definition of 'presupposition', so that the presuppositions of a given sentence are not indeterminate and infinite? Chapter III in particular is concerned with problems of substantiating abstract verbs. Chapter IV makes claims about the presuppositions of several syntactic structures, particularly reason and conditional clauses, indefinites (sentences containing *any*, *ever*, etc.), and universal quantifiers.

Given the two-fold purpose of this book, to solve certain problems in the analysis of Greek and to identify problems for Generative Semantics, and for linguistic theory as a whole, it should not surprise readers to find that more than half of the example

sentences are in English. It is more convenient and in keeping with the traditions of Transformational Grammar to discuss points of theory largely in the framework of English. Sometimes I discuss Greek through English, because in many cases this makes the discussion more transparent. At the same time, there is enough Greek to prevent this from becoming irresponsible.

I should mention my great debt to Robin Lakoff. I am building on the framework she adopted in her analysis of Latin and in fact it was the power and elegance of her theory of abstract verbs which led me to undertake this study in the first place. The book began life as a doctoral dissertation, although it has since been revised radically in places; Robin was my thesis advisor and I benefitted enormously from her careful comments and criticisms. Also in order is a word of public thanks to my wife Sarah. When linguists' intuitions begin to wobble, their spouse is always the first line of defence; no sooner do they wake up in the morning than they are asked if they can accept some sentence like *who did the realisation that he was President disturb?* Sarah's answers were always 'right'. For her an evening at Le Petit Havre.

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I

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM

In Classical Greek the verb is marked morphologically for number, person, tense, aspect and mood. There are six distinct moods: the indicative, subjunctive, optative, imperative, and, according to some definitions of 'mood', the infinitive and the participle. The first three are finite and can be marked for all three persons in both the singular and the plural. This is where our primary interest lies. These moods are names for certain paradigms or sets of desinences; in fifth century Classical Greek the subjunctive endings have one of the inherently long vowels, η or ω , and the optative endings fall into two major classes but always have some kind of iota diphthong. When used in an independent clause each of these moods will carry quite distinct ideas and will be translated differently.

- (1) οἱ ἄρχοντες ἀποκτείνουσι τὸν Σωκράτη (indicative)
'the commissioners are putting Socrates to death'.
- (2) οἱ ἄρχοντες ἀποκτείνωσι τὸν Σωκράτη (subjunctive)
'let the commissioners put Socrates to death'.
- (3) οἱ ἄρχοντες ἀποκτείνοιεν τὸν Σωκράτη (optative)
'if only the commissioners would put Socrates to death'.

Traditional grammars say that the indicative is the mood of assertion, where the speaker describes something as an 'objective fact', that the subjunctive is the mood of exhortation and that the optative is the mood used to express a wish. These are nice, clean distinctions which account for most of the uses in main clauses. However, in dependent clause types one finds a great variety of mood uses, describable but hitherto not interrelated with each other. I shall give a brief list of the major mood uses in dependent clauses.

- (a) The subjunctive may be used in complement constructions to certain main verbs, notably to those which belong to the meaning classes of desire, fear, prevention and precaution.

- (4) φοβοῦμαι μὴ οὐκ εἰσέλθῃ
'I am afraid that he will not come in'.
- (5) εὐλαβοῦμαι ὅπως μὴ τοῦτο ποιῶ
'I take care that I won't do this'.
- (6) *λέγω ὅπως μὴ εἰσέλθῃ
'I say that he will not come'.

(b) The subjunctive must be used in a purpose clause introduced by the conjunctions ἵνα, ὅπως or ὥς. The indicative is used if the purpose is unreal.

- (7) ἔπῃλθε ἵνα τὸν Σωκράτη ἴδῃ
'he came in order to see Socrates'.
- (8) ἄξιον ἦν ἄκουσαι, ἵνα ἤκουσας αὐτῶν διαλεγομένων
'it would have been worthwhile listening in order that you might have heard them discussing'.

(c) In conditional sentences the subjunctive mood is used in the protasis of an open condition referring to the future or of indefinite reference; otherwise the indicative is used. In a hypothetical condition referring to the future the verbs of the protasis and the apodosis are in the optative mood and the verb in the apodosis is accompanied by the so-called modal particle ἄν. The indicative is used if the hypothetical condition refers to the present or past, but the modal particle is retained.

- (9) ἐὰν ἐπέλθῃ, ὄψεται τὸν Σωκράτη
'If he comes, he will see Socrates'.
- (10) εἰ ἐπέλθοι, ἔωρα τὸν Σωκράτη
'if ever he came, he used to see Socrates'.
- (11) εἰ ἐπῆλθεν, εἶδεν τὸν Σωκράτη.
'if he came, he saw Socrates'.
- (12) εἰ ἐπέλθοι, ἴδοι ἄν τὸν Σωκράτη
'if he were to come, he would see Socrates'.
- (13) εἰ ἐπῆλθεν, εἶδεν ἄν τὸν Σωκράτη
'if he had come, he would have seen Socrates'.

(d) The subjunctive with the particle ἄν is used in relative, temporal and conditional clauses of indefinite or prospective reference.

- (14) ὃς ἄν ἐπέλθῃ διαλέγεται τῷ Σωκράτει
'whoever comes talks with Socrates.'
- (15) ὅταν ἐπέλθῃ διαλέγεται τῷ Σωκράτει
'whenever he comes, he talks with Socrates'.

- (16) ἐὰν ἐπέλθῃ διαλέγεται τῷ Σωκράτει
‘if ever he comes, he talks with Socrates’.
- (17) μενεῖ ἕως ἄν ἔξῃ διαλέγεσθαι
‘he will stay until it is possible to talk’.

(e) The optative is used in a reason clause when the reason is ‘unreal’, i.e. when the author does not presuppose the reason to be true.

- (18) εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὰς Ἀθήνας διότι βούλονται τῷ Σωκράτει διαλέγεσθαι
‘they came into Athens on the grounds that they want to talk with Socrates’.

(f) The optative may also be used in indirect discourse dependent on a main verb in a past tense. The indicative may also be used and there appears to be no difference in meaning.

- (19) εἶπεν ὅτι οἱ ἄρχοντες ἀπέκτειναν τὸν Σωκράτη (indicative)
(20) εἶπεν ὅτι οἱ ἄρχοντες ἀπεκτείναιεν τὸν Σωκράτη (optative)

Both mean ‘he said that the commissioners had put Socrates to death’. Furthermore, in cases (a), (b) and (d) the optative is normally used instead of the subjunctive if the main verb is in a past tense. In case (d) ἄν is never used with the optative.

In addition to this there are certain other uses of the moods in independent clauses which should be noted in our summary outline. The subjunctive introduced by the double negative οὐ μή denotes what is often described as a tentative assertion, being a somewhat watered down version of οὐ and the future indicative, according to most accounts. The subjunctive introduced by μή οὐ denotes an emphatic prohibition, a stronger version of μή and the subjunctive, the usual form of a negative command. In each of these two cases the future indicative may also be used instead of the subjunctive with no apparent change in meaning. The subjunctive may also be used in an interrogative sentence to give a ‘deliberative question’ or a ‘question of appeal’. The optative with the particle ἄν expresses a potential notion of future reference, although this is usually analysed as a special case of a hypothetical conditional sentence with the protasis suppressed.

It should be clear, then, that there is an extensive array of circumstances in which the subjunctive and optative moods are used in Classical Greek. The mood uses are similar in Vedic Sanskrit and in Avestan, so it may reasonably be hoped that a study of the mood uses in Greek will go a long way to providing an understanding of the nature of the moods in Proto-Indo-European. In fact there are good reasons to claim that a study of the Greek mood usage is the best way to get at the Proto-Indo-European usage; it has been generally supposed by Meillet, Gonda et al. that the situation in Greek closely reflects that of the proto language.

The problem to which we address ourselves here is to determine why it is that the subjunctive, say, should be used in these situations to convey these meanings. What is it that these situations share that entails that the subjunctive be used there? What is the underlying idea that the subjunctive expresses? In other words we are seeking to provide some kind of rationale for each of the moods. Of course, it could be the case that there is no single underlying idea peculiar to each of the moods and it might be maintained that it is mere accident that in Classical Greek the subjunctive is used in these particular situations and that it could well have happened that the subjunctive endings should have been used in an entirely different set of environments. That is to say, there may be no rationale for the moods and their occurrence may be just an accident of history. This is perfectly conceivable and this position has been adopted by a number of distinguished linguists, including Jespersen and Goodwin.¹ However, this is an empirical question and there is no sound reason to make this claim until one has sought a rationale by every means possible and against every conceivable theoretical background. Given the neolithic stage of linguistic theory it would be premature to claim today that there cannot be any systematic underlying rationale for the occurrence of the moods. It is entirely possible that new developments in linguistic theory will provide the basis for such a rationale. We are thus undeterred by the strictures of Jespersen and Goodwin. We feel that it is unreasonable to regard language as a system composed of a set of accidents, accidents which are unrelated to each other. We cannot conceive how such a position could be sensibly maintained except as a position of the last resort, i.e. when *all* attempts to find an adequate, rationally based linguistic theory have been proven failures. Such a day is unimaginable at this time, since we have scarcely begun to discover what an adequate linguistic theory would have to include. It is abundantly clear that previous attempts to discover one idea underlying all uses of each of the moods have been failures, and we shall discuss some of these failures in a moment. Furthermore this book will not provide a complete rationale for the moods, but it will, it is claimed, demonstrate that there must be such a rationale and it will give some very specific indications as to the nature of such a rationale. We shall avail ourselves of recent advances in linguistic theory, notably the kind of abstract entities posited by those working in the area of what has come to be known as Generative Semantics or Natural Logic. This will enable us to make significant progress in the quest for a rationale to the Greek mood system,

¹ Jespersen, *Philosophy of Grammar* (p. 317): 'The truth seems to be that the subjunctive was at first vaguely used in a variety of cases which it is impossible logically or notionally to delimitate as against the use of the indicative, and that each language took its own course in sometimes restricting and sometimes extending its sphere of employment, especially in dependent clauses.'

Goodwin (p. vi): '... nothing has been further from my thoughts than a complete theoretical discussion of all the principles which govern the use of the moods. He who ventures far upon that sea is in great danger of being lost in the fog or stranded; for, while Comparative Philology has thrown much and welcome light on the early history of the Greek language, it has also made us more painfully aware of our ignorance, although it is a more enlightened ignorance than that of our predecessors.'

and hence to the PIE system. We shall end, however, by asking as many questions as we answer. These questions will arise from the detailed study of a well-defined area of the grammar of Classical Greek and will have relevance to the future development of linguistic theory and will outline certain problems for the hypothesis of Generative Semantics, particularly in the intersection of mood and tense, concepts which have hitherto been regarded as more or less distinct and clear-cut.

One might also ask in what sense it is worthwhile to address oneself to this problem. Goodwin's classic *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of the Greek Verb* (1889) gives a perfectly thorough description of the mood uses and it can hardly be said that many problems of interpretation await the formulation of an adequate theory or rationale of the moods. Students learn Greek readily enough without such a theory and eventually get to know where to expect a subjunctive or optative verb, so it is unlikely that the discovery and articulation of a rationale will bring in its wake a pedagogical revolution in the teaching of Greek, although it is entirely likely that an understanding of the true nature of the mood system will enable the teacher to give a more lucid account of the mood uses to his composition classes. Rather, the justification for addressing ourselves to this particular problem has already been given, in part at least, in the previous paragraph. Here is an eminently well-defined problem which has attracted the attention over the years of many scholars with quite different theoretical backgrounds. There is a magnificent descriptive grammar but all attempts to relate the various uses of the moods have been more or less total failures. Yet if language is in fact rule-governed and if those rules do capture significant linguistic generalisations and do have some sort of psychological reality and are therefore heavily constrained in their possible form (and the justification for this position is well-known and thoroughly convincing), then there has to be a rationale, an underlying system for the mood uses of Classical Greek. The situation in which each of the moods is used cannot be a random accidental collection of environments; indeed we shall show that it is not a random collection and that there is an essential concept which all the mood uses express, although we shall have some difficulty in defining the precise nature of that essential concept. We shall seek to discover the psychic reality of the moods under the firm assumption that there must be one unifying reality. The specific problem is clear-cut and there will be few problems of textual interpretation. We shall discover many surprising correspondences between the underlying concepts of the Greek moods and certain phenomena in the use of modals and indefinite pronouns in modern English. These correspondences will be shown to be systematic and part of a pattern and therefore not accidental but rather of relevance to general linguistic theory. We shall discover that Classical Greek and modern English, two languages which are hardly closely related but are separated by 2,400 years of time and a few thousand miles of space, share a common treatment of sentences of future time or of indefinite reference. This will lead us to posit the existence of some kind of future-indefinite entity, which we shall have difficulty in defining precisely. Certain facts about some other languages, such as French and

Russian, will indicate something similar in those languages. What this will suggest is that the kind of knowledge involved in reference to future events, or, if you will, the modality of futurity, is very similar and may be identical to the kind of knowledge involved in an indefinite statement. We shall then have to raise some questions as to the possible nature of such knowledge, but for the most part these questions will remain unanswered or at best hedged with speculations. Nonetheless we shall have identified a real issue for linguistic theory to meet. This will have been done as a result of examination of the mood uses of ancient Greek and a willingness to compare them to certain phenomena in our own modern-day English. In this way we shall be able to say something significant about the nature of an adequate theory of language. Our aim then, is to reveal some facts relevant to the quest for a universal linguistic theory and, eventually, to cognitive psychology, rather than to work on the problem out of some antiquarian interest in the speech habits of the speakers of Proto-Indo-European. We shall assume but not be able to prove fully that the correspondences between Greek and English as well as Russian and French are features of a system and not the results of various accidents. We do not share Householder's view that 'to ask such questions about 'original meaning' ... does not directly contribute to the advancement of knowledge';² the results of our study will give the lie to this curious view.

The problem of the Greek and Proto-Indo-European mood system is one to which many people have addressed themselves. The uses of the moods are well documented in Goodwin's *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of the Greek Verb* (1889), but he does not seriously attempt to relate the various uses. Delbrück's *Der Gebrauch des Konjunktivs und Optativs im Sanskrit und Griechischen* (1871) is the standard work from which others have taken their theoretical cues. E. Adelaide Hahn's *Subjunctive and Optative: Their Origin as Futures* (New York, 1953) and Jan Gonda's *The Character of the Indo-European Moods* (Wiesbaden, 1956) are the more notable modern treatments of the subject. Robin Lakoff in her *Abstract Syntax and Latin Complementation* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968) and Hansjakob Seiler in his Collitz Lecture of 1970 have undertaken radically different approaches to the problem. These are the most interesting of the earlier works on our subject and we shall discuss them briefly and outline just why they constitute inadequate accounts. We shall also comment briefly on the psychologically oriented approach of the French linguist Jean Humbert, as exemplified by his fascinating *Syntaxe Grecque* (Paris, 1945). There have been a number of morphological studies wherein people have tried to trace the origin of the distinctive endings as a basis for an explanation,³ and there have been many historical

² F. Householder Jr, Review of *Subjunctive and Optative: Their Origin as Futures* by Adelaide Hahn, *Language* 30.3, 389-399.

³ Sometimes this can take the most idealistic of forms, such as in the theory which says that the Proto-Indo-European subjunctive forms were constructed by adding the conjugation of the verb *to go* to the indicative forms. It was never made clear why the subjunctive should be formed in this way or how the verb *to go* contributed to the semantics of the subjunctive.

studies where the development of the uses has been examined; these will not concern us, although occasionally we shall use the results of these studies where they are useful or help to prove our point.

Prior to 1871 discussion of the PIE moods was couched in metaphysical language and was based on the philosophy of Wolff and then of Kant. Under the head of modality Kant placed the categories of possibility, existence and necessity. Gottfried Hermann then created further subdivisions and characterised the subjunctive as the means of expression for objective possibility, the optative for subjective possibility, the imperative for subjective necessity and the verbal adjectives in -τεος for objective necessity. Kant's dominant influence over grammatical studies was outlined by W. G. Hale,⁴ although later American linguists⁵ were to berate Hale for urging a psychological approach and a return to the attitude of Apollonius, who viewed moods as indicating a δικάσεις ψυχῆς 'attitude of mind'. Delbrück (1871) gave a very different kind of analysis of the mood system and the methods he used in his search for a *Grundbegriff* and, to a large extent, the conclusions he reached have dominated and shaped all subsequent research on the subject right up to the most recent times. His study centred on Vedic Sanskrit (where the moods remained in contrast) and Homeric Greek, since only here and in Avestan of the early Indo-European languages were moods of both present and aorist stems attested. His criteria for establishing the categories were purely morphological and he assumes that parataxis preceded hypotaxis. His basic claim (p. 13) was that the original use of the subjunctive was one of will, supplementing the imperative, and that of the optative was one of wish. The long acceptance of this thesis is rather surprising in view of its obvious inadequacy. Goodwin points out that there can be no element of will in the subjunctive expressing futurity (p. 372) or in the protases of conditions introduced by ἐάν, and similarly no element of wish in potential optatives, optatives of protases, or, we might add, in the optatives of historic sequence in indirect discourse or of unreal reason clauses. Indeed by the time he wrote his *Vergleichende Syntax der indogermanischen Sprachen* some 25 years later, Delbrück distinguishes a volitive and prospective subjunctive, which he does not relate, and optatives of wish, prescription and potential, of which the latter two were derived from the first. Then, despite this, he re-asserts his 1871 view, claiming that futurity and potentiality were only secondary functions of the two moods. We might have expected a man of Delbrück's background and inclinations to give an account of the morphology of the moods, but he does not give any reason why the optative should have secondary desinences. Incidentally, I shall ignore Delbrück's arguments on the nature of the injunctive⁶ and indeed those of all other

⁴ 'A Century of Metaphysical Syntax', in the *St. Louis Congress of Arts and Science, Universal Exposition* (1904), Vol 3, 191-202.

⁵ For example Miss Hahn, who asserts (p. 5) that 'we must likewise eliminate the psychological approach which Hale advocates, and truly deal directly and exclusively with the language itself'.

⁶ The injunctives are unaugmented verb forms with secondary endings, which neutralise the verbal categories of tense and mood and express only number, person and voice.

writers. I believe that Kiparsky's 'Tense and Mood in Indo-European Syntax' has given an adequate analysis of this phenomenon.

While condemning the theories of Delbrück and warning his readers against 'a complete theoretical discussion of all the principles which govern the use of the moods', Goodwin makes the claim (p. 375) that the subjunctive was 'originally and essentially a form for expressing future time, which Greek inherited, with its subdivision into an absolute future negated by οὐ and a hortatory future negated by μή, and used in independent sentences'. The optative (p. 385) was a 'weaker form ... expressing the same idea less distinctly and decidedly'. Thus Proto-Indo-European once had two future tenses, one later becoming the subjunctive, the other the optative. The development from tense to mood began in the proto-language but was still not complete in Latin. Greek and Sanskrit then developed new futures, partly out of special cases of the old. He admits to one difficulty (p. 374) that 'the only use of the subjunctive in conditions which cannot be derived from the simple future meaning is that in general suppositions'. There are, however, many other difficulties to which he does not admit: for example, what does it mean to say that the optative is a 'weaker form' or a 'less vivid' version of the subjunctive? Furthermore, if the subjunctive is 'essentially a form for expressing future time', how does it differ from the future indicative? What does it mean to talk of a transition from tense to mood? We shall reach a similar conclusion to that of Goodwin with regard to the nature of the subjunctive, but it seems that Goodwin has glossed over many problems and bought his conclusion very cheaply.

Miss Hahn agreed completely with Goodwin's view of the subjunctive but did make some attempt to face up to some of the problems. With reference to Goodwin's one admitted problem she asserted (p. 9) that

it is very easy to associate the general condition with the future condition. Indeed the strong tendency in both Greek and Latin to use the subjunctive rather than the indicative in generalisations ... can be accounted for, it seems to me, precisely on the assumption that these subjunctives were originally futures, and in no other way whatever. The point is that what is *always* true is true of both present and future, and, since the future represents a period of far greater extent than the present, it is natural enough to select a tense describing it for a habitual or repeated action belonging to the present-future sphere.

The subjunctive of will was a later development. She agrees that the optative was a 'less vivid' form of the subjunctive, but feels that the potential optative was the source from which expressions of wish developed. Such was the nature of the arguments. Hirt (*Handbuch der griechischen Laut- und Formenlehre*, Heidelberg, 1912) characterised the subjunctive as essentially a future from which the voluntative notions later developed and the optative as a means to express wish; Meillet-Vendryes (p. 185ff) maintain precisely the opposite, the subjunctive being originally voluntative and later a future and the optative being originally a potential and later developing the idea of a wish.

Miss Hahn, however, is little more precise than her predecessor on what is meant