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From subjunctives to imperatives

The Romance subjunctive schema and its ramifications

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In the literature concerning the Romance subjunctive, there have always been two camps: One group of linguists sees the subjunctive as a means for expressing a wide array of modal meanings, while the other one sees this modality rather expressed by the context while the subjunctive as such is frequently only a concomitant and automatised feature, increasingly devoid of any meaning in and of itself. A compromise between these two positions might be the observation that there are clear-cut cases of subjunctives chosen over indicatives for semantic reasons, as there are also clear-cut cases of obligatory and therefore semantically empty subjunctives.

This state of affairs has been argued to be due to a set of subjunctive constructions at different diachronic stages in an overall process of grammaticalisation (or rather: constructionalisation) which slowly turns an erstwhile meaning-bearing inflection into an element of modal agreement by which subordinate clause verbs agree with the modality / illocution of the main clause. An empirical study of this hypothesis would imply determining the percentages of meaning-bearing freely chooseable subjunctive uses as opposed to those that are simply triggered by some context element (main-clause verb, conjunction etc.) (cf. Radatz 2021).

I will argue here that the percentage of meaning-bearing subjunctives tends to be overrated because many imperatives are still considered to be subjunctives on the basis that their morphology coincides with this mood. There are, however, good arguments for analysing the forms in *¡Espera aquí!* / *Preparin els tíquets!* / *Faça-me um favor!* no longer as subjunctives but as full-fledged imperatives – a phenomenon conspicuously absent in languages like French or Occitan. An analysis will be proposed which represents the various uses of Romance subjunctives as a constructional network informed by Traugott / Trousdale (2013), allowing for a direct comparison between the various Romance languages and a visual representation of the various stages of constructionalisation (cf. Radatz 2023).

Keywords: Romance subjunctive, imperative, neo-imperative, grammaticalisation, constructionalisation, construction grammar

1. Introduction

It appears to be a well-established fact within Romance philology and linguistics that some languages make a more extensive use of subjunctive forms than others. Thus, while the subjunctive is heavily used in languages like Spanish or Italian, it is frequently said that subjunctives are considerably rarer and more marked in French, than in the other Romance languages (cf. Rothe 1967; Thieroff 2004: 78), and French grammarians have tended to consider them artificial, superfluous, tedious and sometimes downright annoying. Brunot and Gougenheim call the subjunctive a “servitude grammaticale”, Bally “une exigence de la syntaxe morte” and Foulet (1919) writes:

dans la langue de la conversation, où le subjonctif est relativement peu employé, il n'est qu'un simple substitut de l'indicatif, dont l'emploi est régi par des règles traditionnelles et obscures. Si on l'emploie, c'est en vertu d'une convention où il est bien vain de vouloir aujourd'hui retrouver un sens. (Foulet 1919: §§ 209, 211)

Not only is the French subjunctive seen as functionless — it also seems to be disappearing from spoken and informal use altogether (cf. Harmer 1962; Gsell 1979, 50; Holtus 1980). In this vein, Blaikner-Hohenwart (2006) speaks of “oral corpora, where the *subjonctif* is only a marginal phenomenon within the use of verb forms — at least quantitatively” and of

newspaper and magazine texts, where, for example, in an issue of *Le Monde* (*Le Monde*, 9/1/1996, no. 15 847) only 56 examples were found on pages 1–24, in an issue of *ELLE* (7 August 1995) 50 subjonctifs on 105 pages and in the women's magazine *PRIMA* (September 1995) not a single example.

(Blaikner-Hohenwart 2006: 615)

But while these different degrees in subjunctive use within Romance as such have been reported time and time again, it remains less clear, what the reasons behind these differences are and, more interestingly, in which areas of subjunctive use these differences originate. In this paper, we will try and argue that a key parameter for the extent of subjunctive use in any Romance language is the etymological nature of the pronouns used in the polite address-system: if this system is based on etymologically 2nd person forms, the language will only make a limited use of subjunctives; if, however, it is based on etymologically 3rd person forms (sg. or pl.), it will exhibit a rich variety of highly frequent subjunctive constructions. We will argue in this article that at the center of these differences lies the emergence of a new class of **Neo-Imperatives** and a rich follow-up of further constructions based on these innovative usages.

In order to make this argument, we will be using a Construction-Grammar-based representation of the various subjunctive uses in a given language in the form of a cognitive network in the vein of Lakoff (1987) or Claudia Brugman's classical study of 'over' (Brugman 1988). For this part of the argument, we will be drawing extensively on material published in two earlier articles, certain portions of which we will have to repeat here, albeit in a more compact fashion.

2. The Romance subjunctive schema: A CxG-analysis

On the subject of the Romance subjunctive there appear to be two alternative (and mutually exclusive) schools of thought.¹ The first one claims that the subjunctive in itself expresses modality, wherever it appears; according to them, the task of linguists is therefore to formulate the modal semantics of the subjunctive in such a way that it is compatible with all occurrences we may find in actual use. The other school contradicts this view radically by assuming that the subjunctive is basically devoid of any semantic content and that its use normally depends on the presence of some triggering element (which will generally be modally tinged in its semantics). Thus, comparing these two schools we are confronted with the conflicting affirmations that subjunctives are either an expression of modality, free of any syntactic considerations – or else a morphological automatism triggered by some syntactic configuration and free of any semantic content. Depending on which school of thought is to be believed, the subjunctive either *expresses* or doesn't express modality.

In Radatz (2023) we have tried to find a dialectic compromise between these two seemingly incompatible positions by representing the whole complex repertoire of subjunctive uses as a structured linguistic network of coexisting stages of various ongoing processes of grammaticalisation or constructionalisation, in which some uses still retain at least traces of the original modal content, while others have already reached a state in which its function must be seen as purely configurational. Construction Grammar offers itself for such a task as it allows for a comprehensive representation of phenomena in the form of a cognitive network which is capable of mapping categorial extensions as branching structures, where every node stands for a new constructionalisation path, based on well-studied cognitive processes like analogy, metonymy or metaphor. In such a representation, it is not the subjunctive itself which is the focus of analysis but rather the

1. For research reports cf. Bergen (1978), Manteca Alonso-Cortés (1981), Bosque (1990), Navas Ruiz (1990), Borrego Nieto, Gómez Asencio & Prieto de los Mozos (1995), Knauer (1998), and Bosque (2012).

various schemas, sub-schemas and constructions it forms part of. The analysis is inspired by Traugott and Trousdale's (2013) concepts of Constructionalisation and Constructional Changes. We first applied this method to a comprehensive analysis of the Spanish SUBJUNCTIVE SCHEMA (Radatz 2023) and later extended it to other Romance languages; this served to illustrate its potential for direct typological comparisons within the Romània (Radatz 2024).

As the basic idea is to represent all uses of the subjunctive in a given language as a constructional network and Spanish arguably has the most comprehensive Subjunctive Schema, we will, for the time being, use Spanish to exemplify the principle. For a global orientation within the full schema of the Romance subjunctive, Figure 1 gives an overview over its maximal extension:

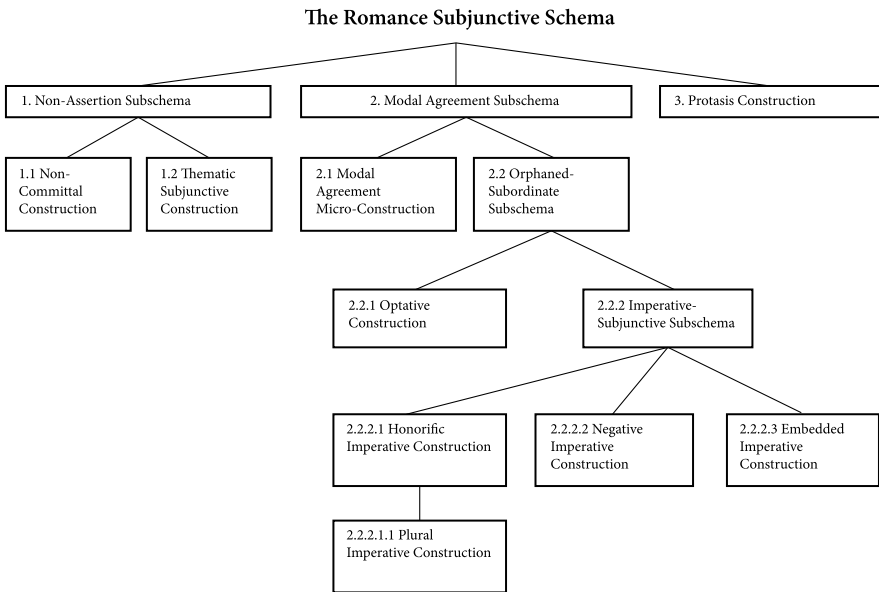


Figure 1. The Romance subjunctive schema

The starting point for the SUBJUNCTIVE SCHEMA, i.e. the mother-construction, simply consists of a subordinate clause which is introduced by a complementiser or subordinating conjunction and which has its verb inflected for subjunctive mood. It is stipulated that this is the basic construction underlying all other schemas and constructions, from which they all are ultimately derived. The constructional network then branches out into different sub-schemas and constructions, beginning with a first split into the three most important sub-schemas: NON-ASSERTION, MODAL AGREEMENT, and PROTASIS:

2.1 NON-ASSERTION Subschema [S [que V_{subj/ind}]

In this subschema, there is free choice between subjunctive and indicative inflection, depending on a modal (or rather: pragmatic) nuance a speaker wishes to express. Choosing the subjunctive withholds the assertion of the proposition in the subordinate clause, which would otherwise be interpreted as asserted (examples adapted from Gebhardt 1979):

- (1) No sé en qué me he equivocado.
= I made a mistake and request information about it.
- (2) No sé en qué me haya equivocado.
= You imply that I made a mistake; I request further information before I decide whether I concede this mistake, or not.

It bifurcates into two sub-branches: the NON-COMMITAL Construction, in which the choice of subjunctive inflection in the subordinate clause explicitly withholds the assertion of the proposition expressed therein to achieve some pragmatic inference on the part of the hearer (as already exemplified in examples (1) and (2) and the THEMATIC SUBJUNCTIVE CONSTRUCTION in examples like:

- (3) Me alegro de que hayas venido.
- (4) Je suis content que vous soyez venu.

Both constructions have in common that they use subjunctive inflection to withhold the assertion of the subordinate clause proposition; what divides them into two sub-branches is the pragmatic motivation behind this refusal. In the NON-COMMITAL Construction, assertion is withheld for reasons within the area of epistemic modality, because the speaker may not have sufficient information, may have information to the contrary or may wish to convey that he is only reporting somebody else's opinion. In the THEMATIC SUBJUNCTIVE Construction (c.f. Pérez Saldanya 1999: 3280 ff.) on the other hand, the proposition of the subordinate clause is not withheld for lack of information but rather for its obviousness, because here the proposition is already implied by the main clause and therefore thematic, i.e. "known". As re-asserting something thematic is pragmatically awkward and potentially even misleading, the subjunctive has come to be used in these cases to avoid re-asserting the blindingly obvious.

The NON-ASSERTION Subschema comprises most of those uses of the subjunctive, where it functions as a freely choosable means of expression, corresponding to what has traditionally been dubbed the "semantic" or "modal" subjunctive. Only here we still find cases in which the subjunctive can be used to purposefully express anything. Its potential to withhold the assertion of a proposition puts the hearer in the position of having to interpret the speaker's possible

motivations for this deliberate flouting of the maxims of conversation – e.g. the Maxim of Relation, i.e. “relevance” (Grice 1975: 47): Why would you say something while at the same time refusing to assert it? This pragmatic rule-flouting gives rise to a complex network of more and less conventionalised pragmatic inferences. Rather than expressing modality directly and as such, it is these pragmatically invited inferences which will generate the semantic effects traditionally associated with the subjunctive and which will, by and large, fall within the realm of modality.

Exactly the contrary is the case with the second subschema which represents the “automatised”, “obligatory”, “triggered” or “syntactic subjunctive”. Here, subjunctives will not express modality but rather serve as a morphological agreement marker with some modality or illocution independently expressed elsewhere; hence the name chosen for the:

2.2 MODAL AGREEMENT Subschema [[V_{trigger}] / [Conj_{trigger}] [que V_{subj}]]

This subschema covers all those all the other uses of subjunctive inflection in which the speaker has no choice, and where failing to use the subjunctive will simply result in inacceptability of the utterance. Subjunctive inflection is typically triggered either by the main-clause illocution or a subordinating conjunction:

- (5) No importa que [venga / *viene] Juan.
- (6) Cal que [vinguis / *vens].
- (7) Il faut que tu [viennes / *viens].

These are the two main types of subjunctive use in the Romance languages. There is a third type that we will only briefly touch upon for the sake of completeness, but which arguably belongs to a completely different area of research:

2.3 PROTASIS construction

Many Romance languages require past tense subjunctives to mark the protasis part of CONDITIONAL constructions. Because of this morphology, they must find their place within the Subjunctive Schema. They are, however, restricted to past tense subjunctives and are so deeply integrated into the CONDITIONAL Construction that we will not further be concerned with them in the present context.

We have now (superficially) covered the first three immediate daughter nodes of the SUBJUNCTIVE SCHEMA, of which only MODAL AGREEMENT will interest us in the remainder of this paper. This approximately covers the two phenomena that have been called the “automatised subjunctive” and the “subjunctive in main clauses”.

3. Subjunctives in independent main clauses?

A flagrant case of insubordination!

All nodes under the MODAL AGREEMENT schema are characterised by the common principle that the choice of subjunctive inflection is triggered by some element within the main clause of the sentence – generally either the main-clause verb or some conjunction. This is a configuration which arguably exists in all Romance languages alike, albeit with individual differences with respect to the actual triggering elements. In Spanish, these might include conjunctions like *aunque*, *sin que* or *para que* or expressions like *es importante que* or *quiero que*. To what extent these expressions actually “trigger” or only “invite” the subjunctive is beyond the scope of this paper and would be the subject of empirical studies on each and every individual micro-construction. Suffice it to say that they are a clearly identifiable and relevant sub-category of the subjunctive motivations in all Romance languages.

The other remaining node under MODAL AGREEMENT is the systematic place, where most of the innovations and new constructionalisations of subjunctives have taken place, as we will now turn to the ORPHANED SUBORDINATE Subschema. Under this heading we will unite all those cases in which there is no overt main clause with which an agreement of the subjunctive could be construed so that, at face value, it might seem that we have subjunctive inflection on main clause verbs. In traditional terms, this part of the schema concerns “the subjunctive in main clauses” (cf. eg. RAE 1973: 458), because these utterances appear to be independent:

(8) *Visca el Barça! / Vive la France! / ¡Viva el rey!*

(9) *Que existeixi la llum. / ¡Hágase la luz! / Que la lumière soit!* (Genesis 1:3)

(10) *Presenti la seva acreditació! / ¡Vengan todos! / ¡Dígame!*

We would, however, contend that none of these are truly independent main clauses, although this appears to be a widely held opinion in the field (cf. De Bruyne 1993: 426–429; Donaire 1998: 225; Laca 2010: 215). Others have, rather more convincingly, interpreted these examples as subordinates whose matrix clauses have been elided for their low and easily recuperable informational content (cf. Harris 1974: 173; Green 1988: 113–114; Posner 1996: 142–143 etc.). As we are dealing with subordinate clauses “bereft” of their matrices, Ruiz Campillo (2008) rather felicitously coined the expression *subjuntivos huérfanos*, i.e. “orphaned subjunctives” which I have gratefully adopted for this branch of the SUBJUNCTIVE SCHEMA. What binds it together is the fact that some matrix sentences with a non-declarative illocutionary force like HOPING or ORDERING that can be easily recuperated from the context has been elided and that the subjunctive in the

remaining “orphaned” subordinate clause functions as a signal inviting the hearer to make precisely this inference.

Depending on the illocutionary force of the elided matrix sentence, the ORPHANED SUBORDINATE Subschema gives rise to two further sub-branches, one of which corresponds to the classical OPTATIVE CONSTRUCTION, present in all Romance languages – as in (8) and (9)–, in which there is no particular addressee implied. The other branch, however, only developed in some Romance languages, while in others, e.g. French, it never did. This is the IMPERATIVE SUBJUNCTIVE Subschema as in Example (10), in which the original optativity is directed towards a clearly identifiable addressee, thereby crossing the boundary between optative and imperative semantics.

Constructions like the ORPHANED SUBORDINATE Subschema appear to have an intermediate status between full main clauses (e.g. in that they can stand alone) and subordinate clauses (in that they may take an open complementiser), i.e. between finite and non-finite clauses. These phenomena have been treated by Evans (2007) who recasts the traditional privative opposition of finite vs. non-finite as a continuum on which certain sentences may be more or less finite. Evans calls the phenomenon of subordinate clause-constructions in which the main clause is conventionally elided “insubordination”, i.e. “the conventionalized main clause use of what, on prima facie grounds, appear to be formally subordinate clauses” (Evans 2007:367). Under the heading of “Special subordinate verb forms”, he also lists

forms such as the subjunctive in Italian [...]. Typically, such verb forms are either non-finite or can be analysed as containing an old complementizer.

(Evans 2007: 379)

The examples given by Evans correspond exactly to the cases which interest us here:

(11) Non voglio che venga domani → (“subordinate”)

(12) Che venga domani → (“insubordinated”)

The insubordination analysis has various advantages over the traditional view of calling them “subjunctives in main clauses”. For one, it is in better agreement with the known facts of Latin where the subjunctive was decisively associated with subordination. Moreover, it allows for an important generalisation about the Romance subjunctive and a more uniform description as a morphological marker of subordination – whether modally tinged, or purely syntactic. Such a description is not only scientifically more sound but can also be fruitfully exported to other more practically oriented disciplines as e.g. school grammar or foreign lan-

guage teaching. Already back in the sixties, Robin Lakoff had called Latin, Greek and Romance subjunctives “complementizers” in the sense of morphologically expressed markers of subordination:

We are suggesting that no indicators of mood per se can be present in deep structure. The markers of mood – subjunctive in Latin, subjunctive and optative in Greek – are all complementizers and, as such, are always devoid of meaning of their own and are always transformationally introduced. (Lakoff 1968: 161)

We will therefore – provisionally – treat the constructions under the ORPHANED SUBORDINATE Subschema not as main clauses but as cases of insubordination, depending on whether an elided main clause must still be assumed to account for the semantics of the construction in question. There may, however, be a point, where the constructionalisation has progressed so far that this interpretation no longer is needed – or even no longer makes sense. This stage is reached, when e.g. the subjunctives have come to the end of their constructionalisation path and have turned into full imperatives.

Our analysis might be criticised by observing that in these constructions the subjunctives are actually meaningful in themselves and that calling them cases of “modal agreement” is not justified. At least on the surface, there is nothing they could be said to agree with and sentences like *Vive la France!* have traditionally been analysed as independent sentences with a subjunctive expressing optativity. This analysis can not be disproven; we would, however, argue that our explanation is superior because it allows to maintain the general principle that Romance subjunctives are bound to subordination, as stipulated in the most basic form of the SUBJUNCTIVE SCHEMA. It is also better suited to explain the syntactic characteristics of these constructions like the possibility (and at the same time optionality) of a complementiser. And it accounts for the easy pragmatic recoverability of the respective elided main clauses. In this sense, we would argue that the subjunctive in the orphaned constructions does not express “modality”; it functions as a marker of subordination and – in the absence of a surface main clause – a trigger for an invited pragmatic inference to recover the elided main clauses and their illocutionary forces. In this sense, the semantics of these constructions does not emanate from the semantically empty subjunctive but from the elided main clauses.

4. The Orphaned Subordinate Subschema: From insubordination to Neo-Imperatives

We have now finally come to the section of the subjunctive schema in which a major part of the innovations of the last 800 years have occurred in some Romance languages – or failed to occur in others. As a consequence, this is also the part of the schema in which the most prominent differences between the Romance languages are to be found. Some of them (like Spanish) developed a whole new paradigm of “Neo-Imperatives”, i.e. morphological subjunctives that have constructionalised into real new imperatives.² Others, like French, have remained conservative in this respect and continue to use the old etymological imperative forms directly derived from (or at least closely corresponding to) the etymological Latin imperatives:

| | Indicative | Imperative |
|---------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Informal, sg. | Tu viens. | Viens! |
| Informal, pl. | Vous venez (, les enfants). | Venez! |
| Formal, sg. | Vous venez, M. Dupont. | Venez, M. Dupont! |
| Formal, pl. | Vous venez, Mme. et M. Dupont. | Venez, Mme. et M. Dupont! |

In French, the polite forms of address are based on the principle of *pluralis maiestatis* in that the 2nd plural used for an individual person conveys politeness; consequently, this differentiation can no longer be made in addressing groups of people.

Other Romance languages (Spanish, Portuguese & Catalan) took a different turn. During the middle-ages, the simple 2nd person plural pronoun *vos* came to be used ever more frequently and began to encroach upon the domain of the traditional informal *tu*-forms in Spanish and Portuguese. This weakened their honorific character and the need for new, more formal ways of addressing higher ranking people arose to mark social distance: forms corresponding to English expressions like “your majesty”, “your” grace” or “your excellency” rose in frequency, eventually leading to a restructurisation of the address-system:

However, in later Old Spanish, it is evident that *vos* has widened its range of reference in such a way that it is used for many social relationships, and thus has lost much of its deferential value. By the fifteenth century, *vos* has become so close in value to informal *tú* that new deferential forms of address are experimented with,

2. For imperatives in general cf. Han (2019).

based on abstract nouns such as *merced* ‘grace’, *señoría* (‘lordship’ etc. [...] it was *vuestra merced* that found favour, together with *vuestras mercedes*, representing an entirely new plural deferential category (Penny 2002: 138)

By virtue of their high frequency of use, these new forms of address first developed pronoun-like shortened forms and eventually lexicalised into the new 2nd person pronouns derived from parallel constructions to Spanish *vuestra merced*, thus giving rise to the modern forms *Usted* (Spanish), *Você* (Portuguese), and *vostè* (Catalan).

These new pronouns came with an inherent flaw in that they were still recognisably 3rd person morphologically, while at the same time they were now referentially used as 2nd person pronouns: the polite distancing derives from the fact that the addressee is treated as a remote 3rd person entity rather than as a person physically present. One of the problematic consequences of this morphological misalignment derived from the fact that there is no such thing as a 3rd person imperative. In order to circumvent this communicative lacuna, the subjunctives of the OPTATIVE CONSTRUCTION came to be used – but now combined with an addressee. At this point, the construction was no longer a classical optative but rather an imperative directed towards the addressee – but camouflaged as a mere wish directed towards a higher 3rd person entity.

The resulting modern imperative system in Peninsular Spanish has morphological subjunctives for all cases of formal address and etymological imperatives for informal sg.; the informal pl. still maintains an etymological imperative (*¡venid!*, *¡cantad!*, *¡decid!* ...) but this already shows clear signs of erosion (popular forms in -r, resulting in a confusion with the infinitive; conventional public signs already use the infinitive as in *¡No fumar!* or *¡No pisar el césped!*).

| | Indicative | Imperative |
|---------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Informal, sg. | Vienes. | ¡Ven! |
| Informal, pl. | Venís (, los niños). | %¡Venid! / %¡Vengan! |
| Formal, sg. | Ud. viene, sr. López. | ¡Venga, sr. López! |
| Formal, pl. | [Uds.] vienen. | ¡Vengan [Uds]! |

This was the first step towards a new constructionalisation-path which developed out of an innovative use of the OPTATIVE construction, from which arose the new IMPERATIVE SUBJUNCTIVE Schema. The introduction of 3rd person honorifics gave rise to a whole new branch of constructionalisations, and the innovation would change important parts of the SUBJUNCTIVE SCHEMA of the languages in question.

Polite pronouns are high frequency items and so are imperatives (cf. Ashdowne 2016). As a result, a sizeable portion of all “subjunctive” tokens occurring in modern Spanish, Catalan and Portuguese texts are Neo-Imperatives. In a following chapter we will argue that Neo-Imperatives are today real imperatives in their semantics, but importantly also in their syntactic behaviour. Only their morphology still binds them together with subjunctives; apart from that, Neo-Imperatives should be discussed with the other imperatives and should be excluded from all debates on the subjunctives of modern Romance languages. Before we embark on this argument, we will first give an overview of the internal ramifications of the IMPERATIVE SUBJUNCTIVE SCHEMA.

The IMPERATIVE-SUBJUNCTIVE Schema is comparable to the OPTATIVE CONSTRUCTION in that it is ultimately based on an elided matrix sentence with an imperative illocutionary force, i.e. ‘I order / ask / command you to ...’. Its semantics is therefore desiderative, but, unlike the optative, directed at 2nd person addressees, rather than being impersonal. By this, the Imperative-Subjunctive becomes semantically indistinguishable from etymological imperative forms which it has been cannibalising for quite some time. The IMPERATIVE-SUBJUNCTIVE Schema feeds subjunctive forms as **Neo-Imperatives** into the imperative paradigm, in which the older etymological forms slowly become a minority. This massive restructuring of the imperative paradigm is the result of the IMPERATIVE-SUBJUNCTIVE Schema, subdividing further into four individual micro-constructions (one of which is limited to Latin American varieties of Spanish and Portuguese). The resulting constructional network takes the following form:

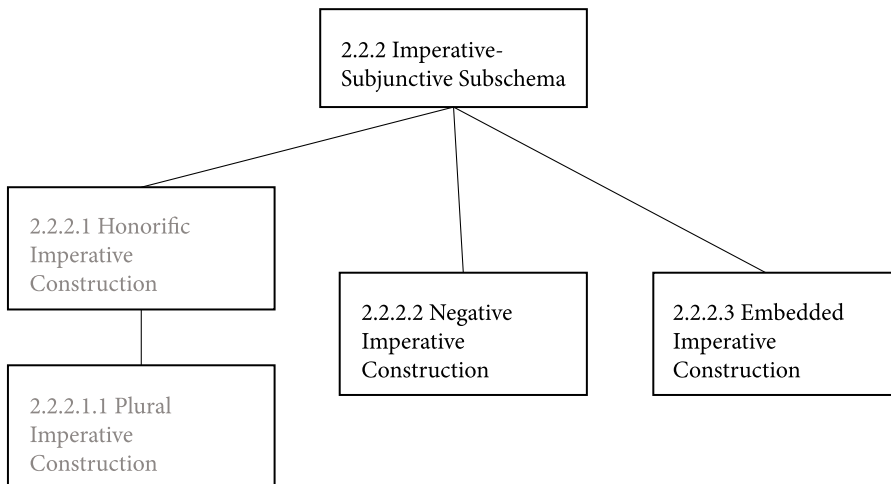


Figure 2. The imperative subjunctive schema

One direct daughter-node is the:

HONORIFIC-IMPERATIVE Construction

This corresponds to the development of Neo-Imperatives in Spanish, Catalan, and Portuguese as already described, where etymological imperatives may only be used with the informal 2nd person pronouns and verbal inflection, while the formal address system requires the HONORIFIC IMPERATIVE Construction:

- (13) ¡Ven aquí, Pepa! / Vine aquí, Núria! (informal) [Spanish / Catalan]
(14) ¡Venga aquí, [Vd./sra. Gómez!] / Vinga aquí, [vostè / sra. Pla] (formal) [Spanish / Catalan]

PLURAL-IMPERATIVE Construction

The second micro-construction under the IMPERATIVE-SUBJUNCTIVE Subschema is the PLURAL-IMPERATIVE Construction; it is largely limited to Latin American varieties of Spanish and Portuguese and has made all plural forms of the etymological imperative obsolete in these varieties. It can be seen as an extension of the HONORIFIC IMPERATIVE Construction to informally addressed plural referents:

- (15) ¡Venid aquí, los niños! [Spain]
(16) ¡Vengan acá, los niños! [Latin America]

So, while the informal plural imperative already shows signs of erosion in Peninsular Spanish, it has been completely lost in Latin American Spanish. Just like the “subjunctives” in the HONORIFIC IMPERATIVE Construction, these forms are completely identical to etymological imperatives in meaning as well as syntactical behaviour. The IMPERATIVE-SUBJUNCTIVE and the PLURAL-IMPERATIVE Constructions belong firmly in the domain of imperatives and can no longer be associated with mood in any sense.

NEGATIVE-IMPERATIVE Construction

The third subschema, the NEGATIVE-IMPERATIVE Construction, is used obligatorily instead of the etymological imperative forms when an imperative is negated:

- (17) ¡Ven! → ¡No vengas! [Spanish]

This is another good example of how the Neo-Imperatives have already encroached upon their etymological predecessors which can no longer be used in

these cases and must be substituted by the corresponding subjunctives. The reason for grouping this Construction under the IMPERATIVE-SUBJUNCTIVE Schema is the conjecture that its development is somehow connected to the same factors that have brought about its sister nodes. This is corroborated by the fact that Languages with a system of 2nd person honorifics do not seem have developed this construction:

(18) Venez ! → Ne venez pas ! [French]

(19) Vieni! → Non venire! [Italian]

EMBEDDED-IMPERATIVE CONSTRUCTION

The last of the four imperative micro-constructions is the EMBEDDED-IMPERATIVE Construction which is used for indirect and reported commands. Etymological imperatives cannot appear in this function:³

(20) ¡Ven! → Dicen que vengas. [Spanish]

In other Romance languages, this construction exists alongside alternative constructions. Thus, while French may use *Ils disent que tu viennes*, the preferred way of expressing this seems to be:

(21) Ils (te) disent de venir ! [French]

Likewise, Italian allows for the subjunctive solution, but seems to favour the alternative construction based on an infinitive:

(22) Ti ordino che lo faccia! / Ti ordino di farlo! [Italian]

5. Neo-Imperatives are no longer “Subjunctives”

Let’s now turn to the central argument of this paper: Spanish, Portuguese and Catalan have developed a new class of Neo-Imperatives corresponding to the HONORIFIC IMPERATIVE construction which, by and large, have been seen as “subjunctives doing the job of imperatives”. We will argue that this is essentially correct but can – and should – be put even more poignantly: they are *ex*-subjunctives doing the job of imperatives. Because, while these forms may still be using subjunctive morphology, there are good semantic and syntactic arguments for claiming that they can no longer be considered “subjunctives” at all because they are

3. Many languages do not allow imperatives to be embedded (cf. Palmer 1986; Han 2019: 229).

now fully integrated into their respective imperative paradigms. The fact that the constructionalisation of these erstwhile subjunctives into full imperatives has now come to a conclusion can be seen from their semantics, but even more compellingly from their behaviour with respect to cliticisation.

As for their semantics, it no longer permits nuances within the domain of deontic modality but is firmly locked into a clear imperative interpretation in that they can only be used for the speech act of ordering or requesting. The syntactic facts derive from the rules of clitic-placement. Modern Spanish and Catalan pronominal clitics are obligatorily proclitic with finite verbs (including subjunctives!) and always enclitic with non-finite verbs and imperatives. This syntactic regularity constitutes a valid diagnostic test for determining, if a *prima facie* subjunctive actually behaves as such (proclitic pronouns) or like an imperative (enclitic pronouns). So when we use subjunctives in the EMBEDDED IMPERATIVE construction, the cliticisation test shows proclitic pronouns and so marks these as real subjunctives, rather than imperatives:

(23) Quiero que [me lo diga]! / Vull que [m'ho digui] [Spanish / Catalan]

We can now turn these into “insubordinated” sentences by eliding the matrix clauses, while keeping the complementisers in place:

(24) ¡Que me lo diga! / Que m'ho digui! [Spanish / Catalan]

This is apparently still felt to be a simple case of conversational elision by the speakers which does not change the inherent syntactical structure: the cliticisation test still marks these forms as “subjunctives”. Things change, however, when we also elide the complementisers! Now the speakers quite obviously no longer consider these as cases of elision. Therefore, the clitics now obligatorily move to the end of the clitic-group, marking them out as imperatives:

(25) ¡Dígamelo! / Digui-m'ho! [Spanish / Catalan]

Note that this categorial change is not in any way bound to the morphology but to the construction itself, which is why our analysis arises naturally within a CxG framework, while the same phenomena threaten to fall between the descriptive levels of morphology and syntax in many traditional descriptions. Depending on the degree of insubordination, we can distinguish between the subordinate subjunctive in (23), the insubordinate in (24), and the Neo-Imperative in (25). The categorial rupture takes place between the latter two.⁴

4. For an in-depth discussion of subjunctive free-standing que-clauses vs. imperatives cf. Sansiñena, De Smet & Cornillie (2015).

As we have seen, the IMPERATIVE-SUBJUNCTIVE Subschema arose as a reaction to the introduction of 3rd person honorifics into certain Romance languages. This is the reason why we find it in Spanish (where 3rd person *usted* is the standard form of polite address), but also in Portuguese (where either *você* or other 3rd person forms like *o senhor / a senhora XYZ* are used). French, on the other side, has a firmly established and centuries-old tradition of using 2nd person *tu* and *vous*, whereby a 2nd person *pluralis maiestatis* form is the conventional formal address. French therefore has not developed the Imperative-Subjunctive innovations and still uses a fully etymological imperative-system.

On the basis of the above argument, it should be possible to classify all Romance languages with respect to the feature “2nd vs. 3rd person honorifics”. And a comparison of various Romance languages shows this implicational universal to be essentially true:

| Language | 3rd person polite address? | HONORIFIC IMPERATIVE Subjunctive? | NEGATIVE IMPERATIVE Subjunctive? | EMBEDDED IMPERATIVE Subjunctive? |
|------------|----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Portuguese | + | + | + | + |
| Spanish | + | + | + | + |
| Catalan | + | + | + | + |
| Occitan | - | - | - | - |
| French | - | - | - | - |
| Italian | +/- | +/- | - | +/- |
| Rumanian | - | - | - | Ø |

We have marked Italian as an unclear case, because for the recent past, a 2nd person system has existed alongside a (more recent) 3rd person system. Traditionally, Italian used the French-style 2nd person pronoun *voi* for polite address. However, in the 16th century, a new formal honorific was introduced, a 3rd person treatment based on titles like *Vostra Reverenzia*, *la Padronità Vostra*, *la Magnanimità Vostra*, *Vostra Prestanza*, *Vostra Mansuetudine*, etc.; it was finally conventionalised as *Vostra Signoria*. Initially, these titles were combined with the pronouns *tu* or *voi*, but eventually, 3rd person anaphoric pronouns *ella*, *essa*, *quella*, *questa*, *codesta* and *lei* come into use (cf. Pignataro 2025). Of all these, *Lei* finally developed form an anaphoric reference to *Vostra Signoria* into a new pronoun of formal address (cf. Brunet 2003, Accademia della Crusca 2011). The popular hypothesis that this might have been caused by “Spanish influence” is now

generally rejected.⁵ During the fascist regime, this suspicion of being an “alien intrusion” into the purity of the Italian language had led to a campaign to ban its use altogether and to return completely to the older *voi*-treatment (cf. Brunet 2003, 10f.). It was, however, already deeply rooted in everyday usage and this campaign did not survive the fascist era. Today, the formal *lei* + 3rd person morphology is considered the unmarked form of polite address (c.f. Schuepbach *et al.* 2007:6).

At first glance it might seem that modern Italian *lei* + 3rd person inflection is more or less comparable to (Peninsular) Spanish *usted* + 3rd person inflection. But numerous aspects speak against this analysis. Italian *lei* was introduced considerably later. It never managed to completely oust the older *voi*-address but rather coexisted with it in a three-level system *tu-voi-lei*. Moreover, the language situation in Italy is characterised by widespread standard/dialect-diglossia and most dialects never adopted the *lei*-system; as a consequence, most speakers of Italian are also speakers of another variety in which no 3rd person address forms are used.

Most importantly, Spanish came up with a contracted form of *Vuestra Merced* in the new pronoun *usted*, in which the feminine gender of the original honorific was lost, giving way to a form that can unobtrusively be used for both sexes. Italian never took this step; rather, the original term of reference, *Vostra Signoria*, never got contracted – but neither can it be used any longer. The actually used form of address is only the feminine (!) anaphoric pronoun, referring to something that is no longer expressed. This results in situations where a clearly feminine pronoun is used to refer to a man, which led Benedetto Croce to speak of a “grammatical scandal” (Croce 1895:182):

- (26) Sono lieto di conoscerla, signor Miller.
‘It’s my pleasure to meet you, Mr Miller.’

All these factors indicate that Italian *lei* is not comparable to Spanish *usted*. To all the above observations which have already been made in the literature, we can now add another one: the vacillations of the Italian language with respect to Neo-Imperatives and the other constructions of the IMPERATIVE-SUBJUNCTIVE Schema. For the same reasons as in Spanish, the imperative is expressed by means of subjunctives with *lei*:

5. Nobody ever seems to have noticed that the whole theory is also logically flawed because the so-called “Spaniards” following king Alfonso the Magnanimous (1396–1458) until the reign of Charles of Ghent (1500–1558) were Catalan-speaking and Catalan had largely been the language of the Neapolitan court. But Catalan did not adopt a 3rd person address-system until the 19th century and thus could not have served as a model for Italian.

- (27) *Vieni, Peter! Venga, signor Müller!*
 ‘Come, Peter! Come, Mr Miller!’

This may look like the Spanish situation; but the cliticisation test shows that the step towards full Neo-Imperatives has not yet taken place, as the Italian equivalent of Spanish *¡Dígame!* (with an enclitic pronoun!) is *Mi dica!*, where the proclitic use of the pronoun shows that speakers still treat this as a special case of the OPTATIVE construction. As a consequence, the Italian SUBJUNCTIVE SCHEMA has not fully developed the constructions under the IMPERATIVE-SUBJUNCTIVE Subschema: The HONORIFIC IMPERATIVES are still subjunctives and have not completely grammaticalised into Neo-Imperatives; the PLURAL IMPERATIVE, the NEGATIVE IMPERATIVE and the EMBEDDED IMPERATIVE constructions do not exist (cf. Figure 3).

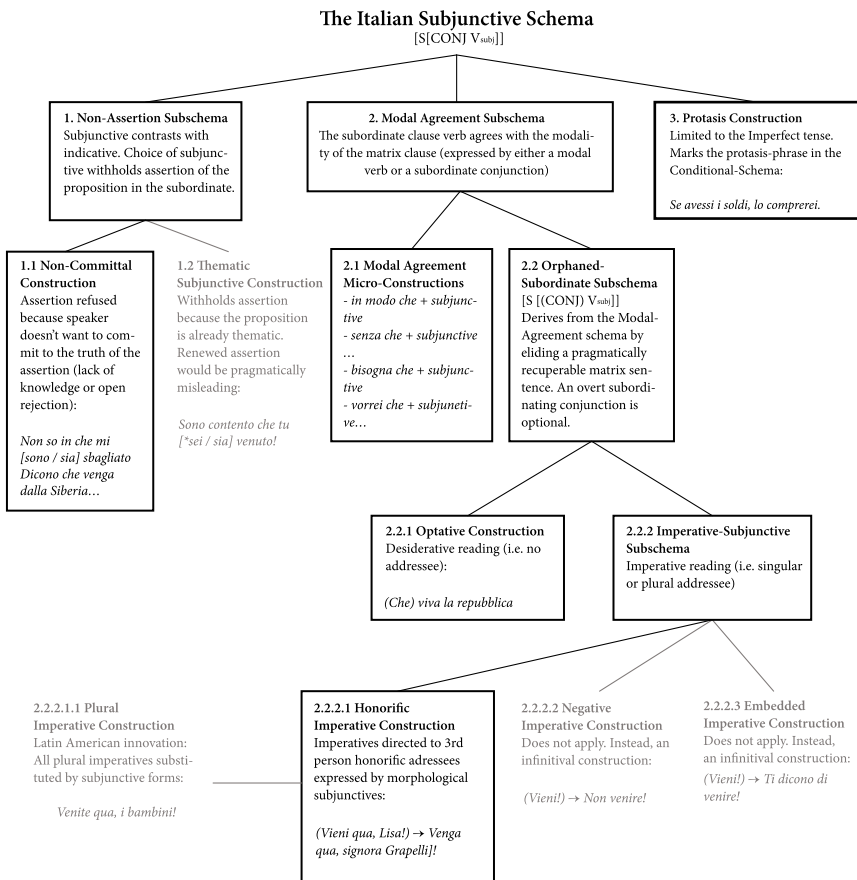


Figure 3. The Italian subjunctive schema

In the Italian case we have already seen that only looking at the modern language may hide relevant difference in the constructionalisation processes of a language; Italian didn't have the time to develop the Neo-Imperatives we find in Spanish. We also saw that looking only at the standard language may hide important influences from non-standard varieties; in the case of Italian, the continued use of a 2nd person polite address system alongside the standard language may have contributed to the state of affairs we have just sketched.

In Catalan we find a situation which resembles the Italian case in many aspects. Catalan is essentially a Gallo-Romance language which had formed a diasystem together with Occitan (cf. Radatz 2012 and forthcoming). When Catalan and Occitan were politically and culturally separated, Catalan came under Iberoromance influence and has been adverting with Spanish ever since. Like French and Occitan, Catalan has always expressed normal politeness with the pronoun *vos* + 2nd person inflection; 3rd person honorifics like *Vostra Mercè* were used but remained limited to especially high-ranking persons and never developed into a new 3rd person pronoun comparable to Spanish *usted* or Italian *Lei*. On the other hand, the modern standard language considers that in Catalan there are three forms of address: *tu* + 1st sg. for intimacy, *vostè* + 3rd sg. for politeness. This address system of modern standard Catalan functions exactly like the Spanish system in all respects – including fully developed Neo-Imperatives. This, however, is by no means the result of a parallel internal development within the Catalan language. Rather, the whole *vostè*-system is just a recent lexical and structural calque of the Spanish system, which was introduced only recently, i.e. in the first half of the 19th century during the reign of Ferdinand VII (1784–1833) (cf. Elies 2001). It took at least another century for it to percolate from the speech of the urban bourgeoisie into generalised use – and, to our days, it still feels alien to many native speakers. In Catalonia proper, the notion of 'please' is still expressed by the formula *si us plau* (an analogue to French *s'il-vous-plait*), containing a 2nd person treatment. The Imperative Subjunctive is also still excluded from public signs like *Empenyeu / Estireu / No fumeu / No trepitgeu la gespa* ('Push', 'Pull', 'Don't smoke', 'don't step on the lawn'). The subjunctive versions would still be seen as Spanish interferences: *ⁿEmpenyin / ⁿEstirin / No ⁿfumin / No ⁿtrepitgin la gespa*. So, the traditional *vós* is still present in many ways, underlining the inherently foreign character of *vostè*. Officially, *vós* + 2nd pl. can still be used in writing among colleagues, but to most speakers, its function is no longer really clear. To the ears of city dwellers in Barcelona, *vós* sounds pompous and archaic. This is not the case, though, when we begin to look at the dialects!

Rural Mallorcan (cf. Radatz 2010), for one, retains to this day an address-system in which *tu* + 2nd person singular morphology is the informal and *vos* + 2nd person plural is the formal treatment:

(28) Tu què fas, Toni? / Vós què feu, l'amo en Toni? [Mallorcan Catalan]

3rd person honorific *vostè* is felt to be foreign and will generally not be used for people from the same village and is reserved for interactions with city-folk. When pressed to use *vostè*, this is still felt to be a recent Spanish innovation. Mallorca was a rather remote place until the 1970s and rural Mallorcan Catalan had little exposure to Spanish or mainland Catalan until very recently. So Catalan speakers on the Balearic Isles missed out on the innovation that had taken place in the 19th without ever reaching their islands. So, the wholesale adoption of the entire Spanish system (including the Neo-Imperatives) never happened there and to this day, rural Mallorcan maintains the old system.

From all the above we would expect Mallorcan Catalan to be like Italian in the sense that the IMPERATIVE SUBJUNCTIVE construction never had enough time to constructionalise into full Neo-Imperatives (c.f. Radatz 2010: 193–95, 241). That this is effectively the case can be shown with the clitic-test. In the following examples of IMPERATIVE SUBJUNCTIVES in standard Catalan in (29), all pronouns are enclitic here:

(29) Digui-m'ho! / Porti'm un got d'aigua! / Faci'm el favor ...! [standard Catalan]

The corresponding dialectal versions, however, show proclitic behaviour:

(30) M'ho digui! / Me dugui un tassó d'aigo! / Me faci es favor ...!
[Mallorcan Catalan]

Analogous examples can also be found in other dialects, e.g. in Girona. This reveals that, under a modern Iberoromance veneer, the older Galloromance solutions still live on in Catalan. It also provides further evidence for the hypothesis that the early introduction of 3rd person honorifics is decisive for the development of the Subjunctive Schema, more precisely: the ORPHANED SUBORDINATE branch.

6. Conclusions





Some Romance languages seem to have little use for their subjunctives while for others they are a high-frequency item with many functions. In this article, we have argued that these differences are to a large extent localised within the ORPHANED SUBORDINATE subschema where the most important innovations have taken place. Languages like Spanish, which developed 3rd person address systems in the medieval period and made these a part of everyday interaction, had to use a modified version of the *Optative Subjunctive* construction in order to make good

for the structural lack of imperative forms for 3rd person verbs. This modification led to the development of a whole new subschema: the IMPERATIVE SUBJUNCTIVE. The new subschema in its turn became the starting point for a bundle of further Imperative constructions, eventually leading to a whole new class of Neo-Imperatives, at the expense of the older, etymological forms.





Neo-Imperatives derive from OPTATIVE SUBJUNCTIVES but take them one step further on the constructionalisation path: in a first step, the complementiser may be dropped; then, the semantics aligns fully with that of etymological imperatives; the last step is finally a change in syntactic behaviour from finite subjunctives with proclitics towards non-finite imperatives with enclitics.

We have argued that, once subjunctives have developed into Neo-Imperatives, they are to be treated as full Imperatives in all respects, except for their etymology (or morphology). This analysis seems to go against the grain of most traditional accounts which still consider these forms “subjunctives”. We have argued against this analysis and we are convinced that this new categorisation as imperatives rather than subjunctives is crucially important for all statistical studies on the use of Romance subjunctives because the high frequency of Neo-Imperatives would otherwise result in incorrectly high token-counts for the subjunctive. Even more importantly, a common research question has been the degree to which the subjunctives in a given language are still meaningful or have already been reduced to purely configurational purposes. Because Neo-Imperatives are clearly meaningful, counting them all as if they still were subjunctives in a corpus study will give the impression that, in a language like Spanish, still an important amount of subjunctives were “semantic” and “modal”, rather than a mere device of modal coherence and agreement. If, on the other hand, we take all Neo-Imperatives out of the equation, a radically different – and much more realistic – picture will emerge: even in Spanish, subjunctives are today mostly triggered agreement-devices and are only residually used as a means of expression. This realisation, then, could and should also have far-reaching consequences for the ways in which the subjunctive is taught to foreign language learners.

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Appendix. A comparison

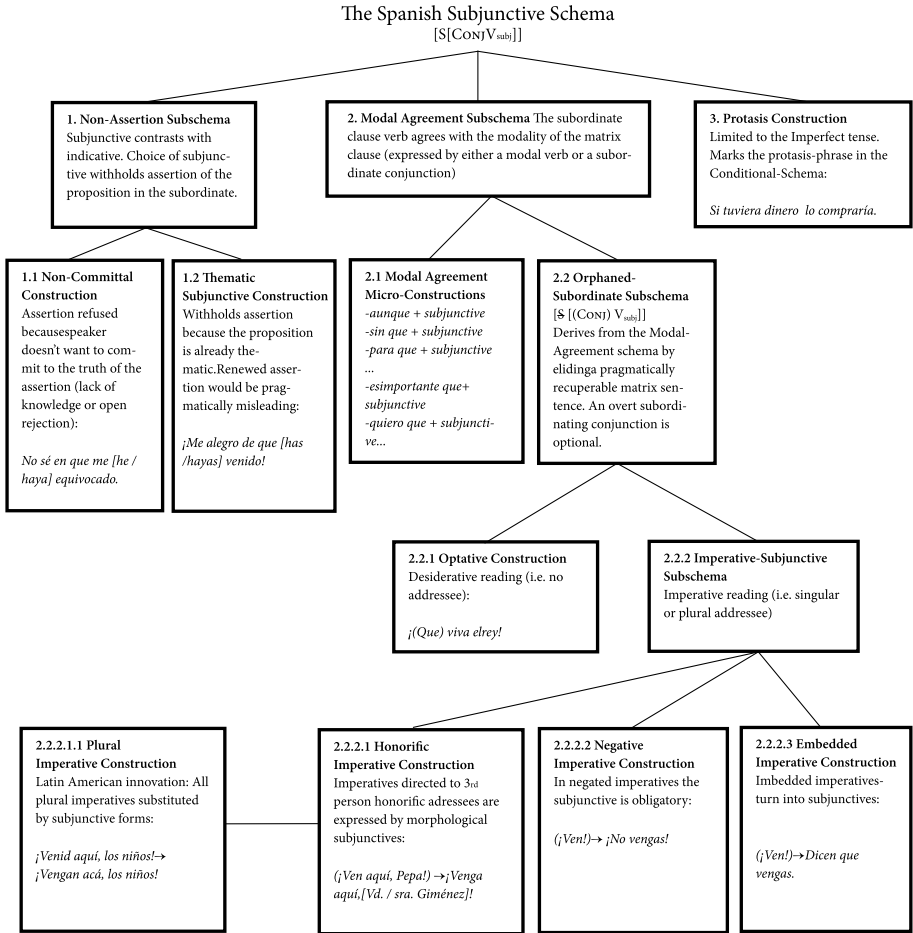


Figure 4. The Spanish subjunctive schema

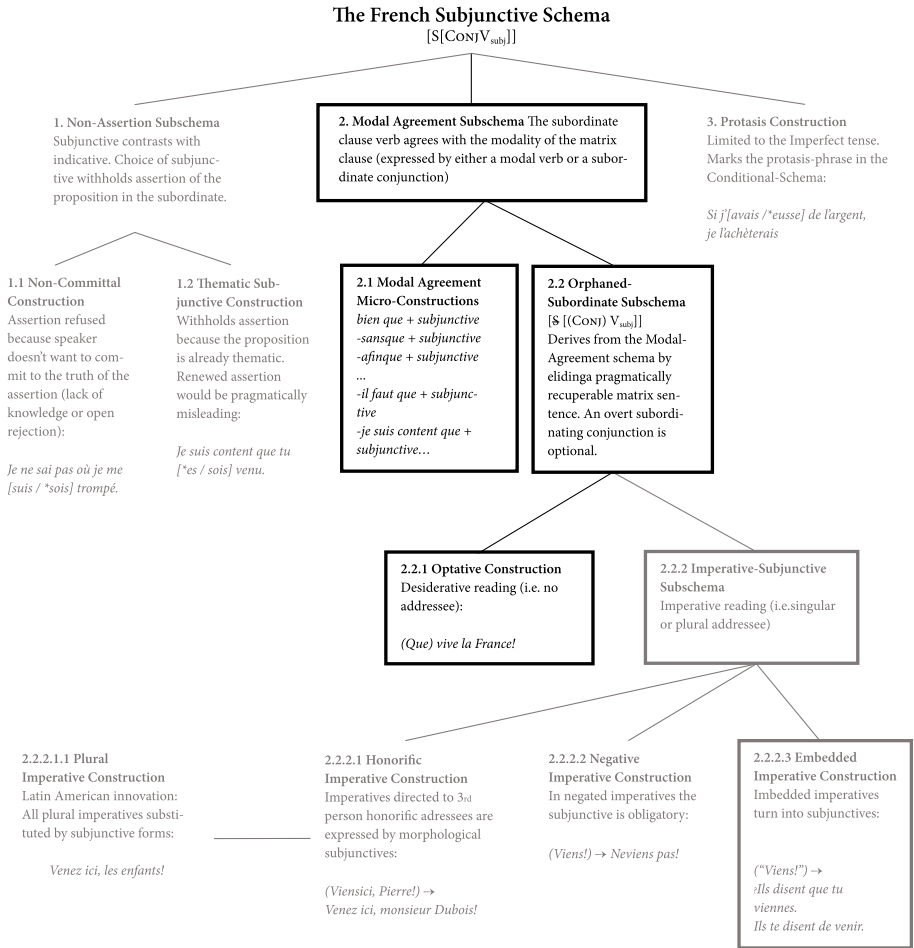


Figure 5. The French subjunctive schema