

Mood alternations in simulative clauses

The (minor) role of subjunctive in the expression of irrealis

Structure of the talk

1. The semantics of simulatives

- Simulative clauses and their interpretation
- Mood alternations in Germanic simulative clauses

2. The syntax of simulatives

- Licensing the subjunctive in simulatives
- Simulatives and conditionals

Defining simulative clauses

Manner adverbial clauses expressing a hypothetical similarity between two ways of doing something (cf. Treis&Vanhove 2017).

(1) John dances [as if he were drunk.]

COMPAREE

STANDARD
MARKER

STANDARD OF
COMPARISON

John's way of dancing is compared to John's way of dancing in case he is drunk.

Simulative clauses and (non)veridicality

Veridicality, nonveridicality and antiveridicality of functions

- (i) A function f is *veridical* iff $f(p)$ entails p .
- (ii) If $f(p)$ does not entail p , f is *non-veridical*.
- (iii) If $f(p)$ entails *not* p , f is *antiveridical*.

(Giannakidou&Zeijlstra 2017: 5)

Simulative clauses and (non)veridicality

Truth is relativized with respect to an epistemic model (i.e. the speaker and/or the subject of the sentence, cf. Giannakidou 1998: 31-34)

Epistemic model of an individual:

“A model $M_E(x) \in M$ is a set of worlds associated with an individual x representing worlds compatible with what x believes and knows.”

(from Giannakidou 2014: 24, after Giannakidou 1999: 45)

Simulative clauses and (non)veridicality

Truth is relativized with respect to an epistemic model (i.e. the speaker and/or the subject of the sentence, cf. Giannakidou 1998: 31-34)

Truth in a model (= full commitment of an individual)

A proposition p is true in an epistemic model M $E(x)$ iff $M \forall w [w \in M(x) \rightarrow w \in \lambda w'. p(w') E(x) \subseteq p$

(Giannakidou 2014: 24)

Simulative clauses and nonveridicality

Simulative clauses are said to constitute non-veridical environments (cf. Giannakidou 1997, 1998; Giannakidou&Quer 2013; Bledin&Srinivas 2019: 166)

(4) John dances [as if he were drunk.]

does not entail *John is drunk* > nonveridical
(compatible with a scenario in which John is drunk and one where he isn't)

Simulative clauses and antiveridicality

... but can also constitute antiveridical environments
(antiveridicality is a subset of nonveridicality, cf.
Giannakidou 1998 and subsequent works)

(4) John dances as if he were drunk...

... but (I know) he hasn't touched alcohol all night.

entails \neg *John is drunk* > antiveridical

Simulative clauses and antiveridicality

Given the right context, simulative clauses can be unambiguously antiveridical.

(5) John dances as if he were Fred Astaire.

= John is not Fred Astaire, but he is dancing like him

≠ John may or may not be Fred Astaire from the way he dances

Germanic simulative clauses and mood choice

In Germanic (as well as in other languages), subjunctive mood is a hallmark of simulative clauses.

- | | |
|---|----|
| (6) John dances as if he <i>were</i> drunk. | EN |
| (7) Jan tanzt, als ob er betrunken <i>wäre</i> . | DE |
| (8) Jan dansar eins og hann <i>væri</i> drukkinn. | IS |
| (9) Jan dansar som om han <i>vore</i> berusad. | SE |

A note on the terminology

- | | |
|---|----|
| (6) John dances as if he <u>were</u> drunk. | EN |
| (7) Jan tanzt, als ob er betrunken <i>wäre</i> . | DE |
| (8) Jan dansar eins og hann <i>væri</i> drukkinn. | IS |
| (9) Jan dansar som om han <i>vore</i> berusad. | SE |

Subjunctive as an umbrella term for both **“real” subjunctives** (German, Icelandic and Swedish *vore* ‘to be.SUBJ’) and fake past (English and Swedish)

Germanic simulative clauses and mood choice

Indicative alternates with subjunctive mood in English, German and Swedish simulative clauses (Icelandic does not allow indicative in these contexts)

(10) John dances as if he *is* drunk. EN

(11) Jan tanzt, als ob er betrunken *ist*. DE

(12) Jan dansar som om han *är* berusad. SE

(13) Jan dansar eins og hann *væri*/**sé* drukkinn. IS

Mood alternation in simulative clauses

- According to some speakers, simulative clauses marked with subjunctive mood are more likely to be interpreted as antiveridical environments;
- The use of the indicative in a simulative correlates with the presupposition that the comparison might correspond to reality from the point of view of the speaker (i.e. the simulative is interpreted as veridical with respect to an epistemic model)

Mood alternation in Swedish simulatives

- MiMA questionnaires' preliminary data;
- 3 out of 4 speakers share the same intuition;
- Shared judgements also in English and German

- Is there any interpretive difference between *Jan dansar som om han vore berusad* and *Jan dansar som om han är berusad*?

Answer: Yes.

Jan dansar som om han vore berusad = I'm quite sure that Jan is *not* drunk but he sure dances like he is

Jan dansar som om han är berusad = Jan's dancing makes me think he might be drunk.

(I also asked my partner who gave the same interpretation)

Mood alternation in simulative clauses

- According to some other speakers, mood alternation in simulative clauses does not correlate with any change in the interpretation (synonymy);
- In fact, indicative is still accepted in antiveridical environments without giving rise to any ambiguity

Mood alternation in German simulatives

Man betrachtet die folgenden Satzpaaren:

- a. Jan tanzt gerade, als *wäre* er betrunken // Jan tanzt gerade, als *ist* er betrunken.
- b. Jan tanzt gerade, als ob er *betrunken wäre* // Jan tanzt gerade, als ob er *betrunken ist*.
- c. Jan tanzt gerade, als wenn er *betrunken wäre* // Jan tanzt gerade, als wenn er *betrunken ist*.
- d. Jan tanzt gerade, wie wenn er *betrunken wäre* // Jan tanzt gerade, wie wenn er *betrunken ist*.

1. Sind die Sätze im Indikativ für Sie grammatisch? Bitte bewerten Sie die Sätze mithilfe einer Skala von 1 (ungrammatisch) bis 5 (grammatisch).

Paar (a) 2

Paar (b) 5

Paar (c) 5

Paar (d) 4 (für mich ist es schwierig, „wenn“ hier nicht temporal zu interpretieren)

2. Wenn die Antwort auf die erste Frage positiv ist, denken Sie, dass die Satzpaare als Synonyme betrachtet werden können oder gibt es Ihrer Meinung nach Bedeutungsunterschiede?

Paar (a)

Paar (b) synonym

Paar (c) synonym

Paar (d) synonym

- MiMA's questionnaires' preliminary results;
- 5 out of 9 speakers share the same intuition;
- Shared also by some English and Swedish speakers

Mood alternation in simulative clauses

DWDS: Digitales
Wörterbuch der
Deutsche Sprache

With the right context, indicative is fully accepted in antiveridical environments.

(14) a. Seine Eltern behandeln ihn dort, **als ob** er ein Baby **ist**.

“His parents treat him as if he is a baby.”

(DWDS, s.v. „als ob #>2 @ist“ > Filmuntertitel > 40)

b. Ich will nicht so tun, **als ob** dies hier die Krosse Krabbe **ist** [...]

“I don’t want to act as if this here is the Krusty Krab [...]”

(DWDS, s.v. „als ob #>2 @ist“ > Blogs > 52)

Mood alternation in simulative clauses

OED: Oxford English
Dictionary

.. even more so with English *like*-constructions.

(15) a. John dances **like** he's Fred Astaire.

b. They look at me **like** I'm dirt.

(OED s.v. *like* (conj.) sense 1.a, March 2024)

c. They ran away to get married, **like** she **was** a princess and he **was** a commoner.

(OED s.v. *like* (conj.) sense 1.a, March 2024)

Intermediate summary

For some speakers, subjunctive mood in Germanic simulative clauses signals antiveridicality, whereas indicative mood is used when the speaker believes that the comparison might be compatible with reality (expected under several approaches, cf. Giannakidou 1998 and subsequent works; Quer 1998; Iatridou 2000)

Intermediate summary

- For some other speakers, the use of the subjunctive over the indicative (and vice versa) does not necessarily coincide with changes in the interpretation;
- What seems to matter in these cases to disambiguate between an antiveridical and a veridical reading is the context and/or the restriction provided by the *if*-clause

Intermediate summary

- How to account for this (apparent) free variation?
- For some speakers, indicative and subjunctive simulatives are said to be synonymous with an antiveridical interpretation, but not with a veridical one (at least to my knowledge). If they are truly synonymous, then why cannot they be used interchangeably also in veridical contexts?

Intermediate summary

- It can be the case that subjunctive in Germanic is slowly disappearing from certain antiveridical environments (like simulative clauses), but not from others (such as counterfactual conditionals). If so, why? To what extent do these contexts differ (semantically)?
- Romance languages (and Icelandic) are less flexible in terms of mood alternations in simulative clauses: is Germanic subjunctive any different? If so, how?

A note on English *like*-simulatives

Though *like*-simulatives mostly occur with indicative in English, it is possible to have them in subjunctive/fake past (especially in older stages of English).

(16) a. None of them act **like** they **belonged** to the hotel.

(OED, s.v. *like* (conj.) sense 1.a, March 2024)

b. I sprung from the chair **like** a man **had shot** me through the head.

(OED, s.v. *like* (conj.) sense 1.a, March 2024)

Subjunctive mood

- Subjunctive needs to be licensed by an element in the matrix or subordinate clause;
- Depending on the element responsible for the licensing, we speak about Intensional Subjunctive (triggered by an intensional verb in the matrix) or Polarity Subjunctive (licensed by negation, a question operator, or **conditional *if***) (cf. Quer 1998, 2006 and Manzini 2000)

The syntax of simulative clauses

From a syntactic point of view, the fact that subjunctive can surface (under specific semantic/pragmatic circumstances) tells us something about the internal structure of such constructions

> underlyingly, all simulative clauses share the same syntactic structure featuring a conditional *if*-clause whose marker is (partly) responsible for the licensing of the subjunctive

The syntax of simulative clauses

Two main approaches in the (semantic) literature:

- Bücking (2015; 2017) (but see also Rett&Starr 2022)

as if-clause = *as*-clause + *if*-clause (=conditional clause)

- Bledin&Srinivas (2019, 2020, 2023)

as if-clause = *as if* + clause

The syntax of simulative clauses: the *if*-layer

Contra Bücking (2017), Bledin&Srinivas (2019 and subsequent works) provide a bunch of observations against the view that the *if*-clause contained in a simulative is a conditional clause

- Weak NPI-licensing
- Coordination

Weak NPI-licensing

Differently from conditional clauses, simulative clauses do not license weak NPIs such as *any* (17) or *ever* (18).

(17) She took a bow as if {*someone* / **anyone*} was in the theatre watching her perform.

(18) John smells as if he (**ever*) got sprayed by a skunk.

(Bledin&Srinivas 2019: 166)

Coordination

The *if*-clause in a simulative cannot be coordinated with a conditional *if*-clause.

(19) *Annie was treated by the king [**as if** she were a noblewoman] or [**if** she were a commoner].

(Bledin&Srinivas 2019: 165)

The syntax of simulative clauses: the *if*-layer

In line with Bücking (2017) and contra Bledin&Srinivas (2019 and subsequent works), I assume that the *if*-clause in simulatives is indeed a conditional clause

- Subjunctive licensing
- NPI-licensing (revisited)
- Coordination (explained)
- Conditional markers and/or conditional inversion

***as if*-clauses and (weak) NPIs (I)**

- Nonveridicality plays a role in licensing NPIs, but this does not mean that all NPIs are compatible with all nonveridical contexts;
- NPIs like English *any* are banned from all veridical contexts, but this does not exclude that they could also be banned in some nonveridical contexts (*antilicensing*, cf. Giannakidou 1998 and subsequent works)
- Conditional clauses only allow NPIs under particular pragmatic conditions (cf. a.o. Heim 1984 and Zeijlstra 2013)

***as if*-clauses and (weak) NPIs (II)**

So-called “exclamatory *as ifs*” do license weak NPIs

- (20) a. As if my son will *ever* leave home and get a job!
b. A: Who won Eurovision?
B: As if *anybody* cares!
(Bledin&Srinivas 2019: 166)

Coordination facts (explained)

Simulative clauses as a kind of prepositional relatives

(21) I saw the man [**with whom** you talked] and [***(with) whom** you had dinner yesterday].

(22) John behaves [**as if** he didn't see us] and [***(as)** if he wanted to avoid us].

Conditional markers and conditional inversion (I)

In Germanic simulatives, the markers introducing the *if*-layer are always conditional markers

EN – as *if/though*

DE – als *ob/wenn*, wie *wenn*

NL – also *of*

SE – som *om*

English *though*, German *ob*, and Dutch *of* appear in so-called *irrelevance conditionals* (cf. a.o. König 1986, Leuschner 2005)

Conditional markers and conditional inversion (II)

When the conditional marker is absent, we have verb-first order (*conditional inversion*, cf. Iatridou&Embick 1994) in those languages that admit it (namely German, Dutch and Swedish).

(23) Jan benimmt sich, als *wäre* er dumm.

Jan behaves REFL as were he stupid

“John behaves as if he were drunk.”

Simulative clauses and conditional clauses

For some speakers, subjunctive simulative clauses give rise to a negative entailment much like the one that arises in counterfactual (= subjunctive) conditionals.

(24) John acts as if he were a monkey.

(\neg John is a monkey)

(25) If John were a monkey, he would climb the highest tree in his garden.

(\neg John is a monkey)

Coming back to *like*-simulatives

- The very fact that it is possible to have a subjunctive in *like*-simulatives hints at the presence of a (covert) conditional marker that licenses it (together with the right semantic/pragmatic setting).
- In the absence of a licensing element in the syntax, the subjunctive is ruled out

> Swedish *som att*

Swedish *som att* vs. *som om*

Swedish *som att* 'as that' is the indicative "counterpart" of *som om* 'as if' which can be used when the comparison is felt to be real by the speaker.

- (26) a. Jan dansar **som om** han är/vore berusad.
b. Jan dansar **som att** han är/*vore berusad.
"John dances as if he is/were drunk."

No licensing element > no subjunctive

Swedish *som att* vs. *som om*

SAG: Svenska Akademiens
Grammatik

.. but maybe a different construction altogether?

(On the Swedish expression *det tredje fantastiska kapitlet*):

(27) *Uttrycket kan tolkas antingen som att alla tre kapitlen är fantastiska eller som att bara det tredje är det.*
expression.the can be.interpreted either as that all three chapters are fantastic or as that only the third is it
"The expression can be interpreted as either all three chapters are fantastic or only the third is (fantastic)."
(SAG vol.2, p. 498)

Conclusion

- Simulative clauses feature a conditional clause restricting the interpretation of the manner at hand;
- The conditional marker (*if, though, ob,..*) is the element that is responsible for the syntactic licensing of the subjunctive;
- Syntax, however, is not entirely responsible for the licensing of the subjunctive: the semantic/pragmatic context is crucial to determine what mood appears in simulatives

Conclusion

- Mood alternations seem to be sensible to (non)veridicality: subjunctive is compatible with nonveridicality/antiveridicality, indicative with veridicality (in line with Giannakidou 1998);
- Surprisingly, indicative mood can surface in English, German and Swedish simulatives that are interpreted as antiveridical (even though more research is required to ascertain whether this is really the case)

References

- Bledin, Justin & Srinivas, Sadhwi. 2019. As ifs. In M. Teresa Espinal, Elena Castroviejo, Manuel Leonetti & Louise McNally (eds.), *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung* 23, 167–184.
- Bledin, Justin & Srinivas, Sadhwi. 2020. Exclamatory as ifs. In Michael Franke, Nikola Kompa, Mingya Liu, Jutta L. Müller & Juliane Schwab (eds.), *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung* 24(1), 84-101.
- Bledin, Justin & Srinivas, Sadhwi. 2023. Descriptive as ifs. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 46(1): 87-134.
- Bücking, Sebastian. 2015. Zur Syntax hypothetischer Vergleichssätze im Deutschen. *Zeitschrift für Germanistische Linguistik* 43(2): 261-305.
- Bücking, Sebastian. 2017. Composing wie wenn: The semantics of hypothetical comparison clauses in German. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 35(4): 979-1025.
- Giannakidou, Anastasia & Quer, Josep. 2013. Exhaustive and non-exhaustive variation with free choice and referential vagueness: evidence from Greek, Catalan, and Spanish. *Lingua* 126: 120-149.
- Giannakidou, Anastasia & Zeijlstra, Hedde. 2017. The landscape of negative dependencies: Negative concord and N-words. In Martin Everaert & Henk van Riemsdijk (eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Syntax*, Second Edition. London: Blackwell.
- Giannakidou, Anastasia. 1997. The landscape of polarity items. PhD dissertation. University of Groningen.
- Giannakidou, Anastasia. 1998. *Polarity sensitivity as (non)veridical dependency*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Giannakidou, Anastasia. 1999. Affective dependencies. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 22: 367-421.
- Giannakidou, Anastasia. 2009. The dependency of the subjunctive revisited: Temporal semantics and polarity. *Lingua* 119(12): 1883-1908.
- Giannakidou, Anastasia. 2011. (Non)veridicality and mood choice: Subjunctive, polarity, and time. In Renate Musan & Monika Rathert (eds.), *Tense across Languages*, 59-90. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Giannakidou, Anastasia. 2014. (Non)veridicality, evaluation, and event actualization: Evidence from the subjunctive in relative clauses. In Taboada, Maite & Radoslava Trnavač (eds.), *Nonveridicality and Evaluation: Theoretical, Computational and Corpus Approaches*, 17-49. Leiden: Brill.
- Heim, Irene. 1984. A note on negative polarity and downward entailingness. In C. Jones and P. Sells (eds.), *NELS* 14, 98–107. Amherst, MA: GLSA.
- Iatridou, Sabine. 2000. The grammatical ingredients of counterfactuality. *Linguistic inquiry* 31(2): 231-270.
- Iatridou, Sabine & Embick, David. 1994. Conditional inversion. *North East Linguistics Society* 24(1): 189-203.
- König, Ekkehard. 1985. On the development of concessive connectives. *Historical Semantics-Historical Word-Formation* 29: 263-282.
- Leuschner, Torsten. 2005. Ob blond, ob braun, ich liebe alle Frau'n. Irrelevanzkonditionale als grammatikalisierte Diskurs. In Torsten Leuschner, Tanja Mortelmans & Sarah de Groot (eds.), *Grammatikalisierung im Deutschen*, 279-307.
- Manzini, Maria Rita. 2000. Sentential complementation: the subjunctive. In Peter Coopmans et al., *Lexical Specification and Insertion*, 241-267. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Quer Villanueva, José Francisco. 1998. *Mood at the Interface*. Dissertation, Holland Academic Graphics.
- Quer Villanueva, José Francisco. 2006. Subjunctives. In Martin Everaert & Henk van Riemsdijk (eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Syntax*. London: Blackwell.
- Rett, Jessica & Starr, W. 2022. Decomposing as if. *Semantics and Linguistic Theory*, vol. 1: 872-890.
- Treis, Yvonne & Vanhove, Martine (eds.) 2017. *Similitive and equative constructions: A cross-linguistic perspective*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Zeijlstra, Hedde. 2013. Negation and negative polarity. In Dikken, Marcel den, ed. *The Cambridge Handbook of Generative Syntax*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thank you!



**Utrecht
University**

Sharing science,
shaping tomorrow