Sentence mood in dependent clauses

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Target group: PhD students, advanced graduate students

Course description: Usually, three types of dependent clauses have been distinguished: i) complement clauses, ii) adverbial clauses, and iii) relative/correlative clauses. What i)-iii) have in common is that they depend on (an element within) the matrix clause. This dependency, in turn, can be marked in the embedded clause by the choice of a particular sentence mood, e.g. indicative mood, subjunctive mood, etc.; see, for example, Becker & Remberger (2010), among many others, for the role of mood in Romance languages, or Rothstein & Thieroff (2010) for a general cross-linguistic overview.

The main aim of this course is to examine the notion of sentence mood in the sense claimed by Portner (2009) in dependent clauses. In particular, we will analyze selected dependent clauses in Germanic, Romance and Slavic languages, elaborate on their synchronic as well as diachronic mood differences, and finally, account for where the mood variation/alternation comes from.

To illustrate the mood alternation in embedded clauses, it is reasonable to take a brief look at the diachrony of, for instance, the object control verb *befehlen* 'command' and its complement clauses in the history of German. In Present-day German (1900-present), *befehlen* predominantly embeds infinitival complements headed by the infinitival marker *zu* 'to':

(1)   Er befahl   die Sicherheitsvorkehrungen **zu verstärken**.
       he command.3SG.PST the safety:precautions   to strengthen.INF
       'He commanded to strengthen the safety precautions.'

                                                  (DeReKo, *Rhein-Zeitung*, 12/4/2011)

As the next example shows, *zu*-infinitives after *befehlen* can be attested already in Early New High German (1350-1650):

(2)   der Koenig hette   jm   befohlen   / in sein Schiff **zu ziehen**
       the king   have.3SG.KonjII him.DAT command.PTCP / in his   ship   to move.INF
       'the king commanded him to move on his ship'

                                                  (Ulrich Schmidl, 1567, *Neuwe Welt*, p. 26)

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However, as opposed to Present-day German, *befehlen* 'command' in Early New High German favors finite complements. In principle, two groups can be distinguished. The first group contains clauses introduced by the complementizer *dass* 'that'. The embedded verbal phrase usually contains an infinitive of a lexical verb and an inflected modal verb. The following example illustrates this configuration with the modal verb *wollen* 'want':

(3) vñ befahl   jm   mit ernst   / dz er sich **wolte**
     and command.3SG.PST him.DAT with earnestness / that he REFL want.3SG.PST
     bearbeiten
     exert.INF
     'and [he] seriously commanded him to exert himself'

<div align="right">(Ulrich Schmidl, 1567, Neuwe Welt, p. 3)</div>

The second group of finite complements contains clauses exhibiting V-to-C movement and lacking any complementizer marking the dependency between the matrix and the embedded clause. Remarkably, it is usually the modal verb *sollte* 'should' that occupies the second position in the clause, as (4) shows:

(4) vnd der Oberst befahl   / man **sollte**   jnen   schellen geben
     and the colonel command.3SG.PST / one should.3SG them.DAT haddocks give.INF
     'and the colonel commanded to give them haddocks'

<div align="right">(Ulrich Schmidl, 1567, Neuwe Welt, p. 7)</div>

Interestingly enough, although *befehlen* 'command' has not changed semantically, it has developed a strong preference towards infinitival complements, while finite complements took a backseat. If the lexical semantics of *befehlen* did not change, the question, of course, arises what the driving force behind the preference for a selected sentence mood could be.

We will discuss different possible explanations for mood replacement and alternation. As it will turn out, the changes under discussion depend not only on the type of the dependent clause, but also on other factors being distinctive of a particular language grammar.

References

Becker, Martin G. & Eva-Maria Remberger. 2010. *Modality and Mood in Romance: Modal Interpretation, Mood Selection, and Mood Alternation* (Linguistische Arbeiten 533). Berlin: de Gruyter.

Portner, Paul. 2009. *Modality* (Oxford Surveys in Semantics and Pragmatics 1). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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