

## The Subjunctive Mood: a Linguo-Cultural Approach



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“The biggest luxury is the luxury of human communication”, wrote Antoine de Saint-Exupery in the 30-s of the last century. These words of the French philosopher are still of current interest. Moreover, they have acquired contemporary sounding for the 21<sup>st</sup> century when the level of human communication has changed qualitatively. Nowadays communication connects people and plays a significant role not only in establishing interpersonal relations, but also in the sphere of international relations. Such state of affairs requires that the problems of communication study should be considered from the standpoint of the active approach to communication. In the framework of the given approach communication is not a one-sided transfer of information from one object to the other, but a concerted activity of the communicants which results in the common outlook, coordinated behaviour in this or that situation. The successful achievement of the above-mentioned goals guarantees the success of communication.

In the given paper the object of the investigation is the communicative-cultural peculiarities and functions of the subjunctive mood in the Italian language as compared to English. Thus, the concept of cross-cultural communication is the basis of this work.

In the text-book of Larry Samovar and Richard Porter “Communication of Cultures” (Samovar; Porter 1991) cross-cultural communication is approximately defined as the kind of communication the success or failure of which is mainly preconditioned by the cultural differences between the communicants. The emergence of various goals and tasks requiring solution at the professional level and involving the achievements of many spheres of knowledge, such as cultural anthropology, sociology, cognitive linguistics and others has naturally led to the formation of a new scientific discipline, namely cross-cultural communication which mainly deals with the study of behaviour and communication of people with different linguistic and cultural basis in different situations with all the outcomes.

The main standpoints of the theoretical and practical basis of the cross-cultural communication are Language, Culture and Communication – the focal concepts of human communication. Thus, the study of any aspect of cross-cultural communication presupposes acquaintance with the main principles of communication, which in pure shape can be considered universal for most nations.

Nevertheless, any communicative model and any communicative act are completely predetermined by the cultural grounding of the participants. It is the knowledge, understanding and proper usage of cultural norms of the interacting sides that make communicative process felicitous. In other words, it may be concluded that the communicative competence is always culturally predetermined. The next important link in the language-culture-communication chain is the language as the main medium between the humans and the social environment and the world of culture. We have stipulated above that investigations in cross-cultural communication can be conducted along many lines. Nonetheless, the linguistic approach to the solution of this or that cultural-communicative problem remains of paramount importance, for language is the main tool providing communication between people and thus responsible for success or failure of the communication.

Language signs are apt to fulfil the mission of culture carriers of the people who speak it, consequently language signs reflect the national mentality of its carriers. Since any language has its own way of reality representation which is preconditioned by its structure and the peculiarities of the cultural-historic layer of its carriers, it may be assumed that any language has a peculiar world picture\*.

In the given work an attempt is made to visually demonstrate the difference of reality representation by the languages of different nations exemplified by the peculiarities of the use of the subjunctive mood in different languages. This difference is predetermined by the specific perception of reality and is reflected in the so-called linguistic picture of the world.

In the scientific thought the concept of the linguistic world picture implies the question of the correlation of language and reality. Language is the main reflection and at the same time the cradle of traditions, habits and the mentality of people who speak it. It also contains information about the world for in any language the knowledge of the nation concerning the extralinguistic reality is imprinted. It is worth mentioning that any language has a specific way of world conceptualization and specifically divides it depending on the world perception of the given nation. Thus, the extralinguistic reality represented in any language is the result of its processing, in the consciousness of the given nation. In other words, in the process of world cognition a human being fixes the results of this cognition in the language which consequently assumes an intermediate position between the real world and the notion of this world in the consciousness of people who speak it.

However, the languages do not represent the world indirectly, but rather via its diffraction which is a peculiar process with any given nation. Thus, we can suppose that language is an indicator of how different nations perceive and divide the world.

On the basis of the use of the subjunctive mood we will make an attempt to demonstrate how different nations divide the world.

As is well known, the subjunctive mood is a grammatical category of the verb closely connected with the concept of modality and, therefore, expressing possibility, obligation, wish as well as transferring certain emotional-evaluative attitude of the speaker to this or that event. For this very reason the set of moods in different languages varies drastically: the sense content of this grammatical category is completely predetermined by the culture, history and the ethnic peculiarities of the nation.

The subjunctive mood or “congiuntivo” secures a particular place in the grammatical

structure of the Italian language. Many specialists and language carriers consider it as the property and pride of the Italian language. Nowadays the use of the subjunctive mood is an indicator of the social status of the speaker. Numerous works are devoted to the investigation of the structure, use and development of the subjunctive mood. In the given paper we consider the so-called “congiuntivo” from the linguo-cultural point of view, that is to say as a phenomenon of culture, as a means of expression of a certain national world outlook.

I. The essential peculiarity of the subjunctive mood is that it expresses an unreal situation which has not actually taken place, but rather exists in the imagination of the speaker. This division of reality into objective vs. subjective is the fulcrum for the use of “congiuntivo” in Italian. The concepts of objectivity and subjectivity are of quite relative character and vary with different nations depending on the national mentality. As is known Italians are notable for some irresponsibility, inaccuracy as compared to the English. Such division of the objective reality is directly reflected in the fact that in complex sentences with the verb in the main clause expressing supposition, opinion, judgement, congiuntivo is required in the subordinate clause. Here are included such verbs as pensare – to think; credere – to consider, believe; supporre – to suppose, assume; ritenere – to remember; mi sembra – it seems to me.

Let us consider the examples:

<b>Italian</b>	<b>English</b>
a. <i>Penso che lui <b>venga</b>.</i> (I think he would come).	<i>I think he will come.</i>
b. <i>Speriamo che voi <b>stiate</b> bene.</i> (We hope you would be well).	<i>We hope you are well.</i>
c. <i>Non importa che <b>arrivino</b> tardi.</i> (It does not matter they would arrive late).	<i>It doesn't matter that they arrive late.</i>
d. <i>E probabile che <b>nevichi</b> fra non molto.</i> (It is probable it would snow in a while).	<i>It's probable that it will snow in a while.</i>

Indiscipline and uncertainty characteristic of Italians and the high level of subjectivity of the personal opinions and judgements induced by the afore-mentioned qualities is obviously expressed in that a) if I think it does not mean he will surely come; thus the congiuntivo form **venga** is always used in the subordinate clause. To compare, the similar judgement in English has the form – I think **he will come**. The same refers to the rest of the examples.

Thus, for the adequate understanding of the language and for the perception of the true sense of the judgements in a foreign language it is necessary to consider it in the inseparable connection with the given culture. In this case we deal with the Italian unpunctuality, spontaneity of life and events. All this is to be considered when communicating with the representatives of this nation, especially that the linguistic signs warn us of it.

II. In Italian the modal verbs expressing wish require congiuntivo as well, and this enhances the shade of modality and subjectivity, which is characteristic of more spirited nations. The following verbs are in this group: volere – to want; preferire – to prefer; suggerire – to suggest; insistere – to insist; desiderare – to desire; avere paura – to be afraid; essere sorpreso – to be surprised; dispiacersi – to be sorry.

Let us consider the examples:

- a. *Viole che voi **sappiate** tutto.*  
(He wants you would know everything).
- b. *Preferisci che io **arrivi** alle due?*  
(Do you prefer I should arrive at two?)
- c. *Suggerisco che voi **partiate** presto.*  
(I suggest you should part early).
- d. *Ho paura che I ragazzi **si perdano**.*  
(I am afraid the boys should get lost).
- e. *Sono sorpreso che **ci siano** tutti.*  
(I am surprised that everyone would be here).

In all the above examples, the Italian language insists on the use of the subjunctive mood, whereas in the English language other verb forms are permitted. Here are the equivalents:

- a. *He wants you to know everything.*
- b. *Do you prefer that I arrive at two o'clock?*
- c. *I suggest that you part early.*
- d. *I am afraid the boys may get lost.*
- e. *I am surprised that everyone is here.*

As can be seen from the examples, the structure of English together with the subjunctive mood (b,c,d) permits the use of complex object (a) and indicative (e) in the subordinate clause.

It is interesting and important to note the fact that in English the alternative use of the subjunctive mood in the subordinate clause is admitted only after the modals of wish, preference, for the latter are more certainly referred to the domain of subjectivity, whereas in Italian the verbs transferring subjective notions also include verbs expressing opinion, judgement, etc. We consider that this division of reality into subjectivity and objectivity on the purely grammatical level somehow indicates the chaotic, unstable order, vagueness of character and actions of one ethnic group as compared to the other.

In Italian of special interest is also the use of “congiuntivo” in the subordinate attributive clause. Consider the examples:

- a. *Conosco una segretaria che sa l'italiano.*      *I know a secretary who speaks Italian.*  
(I know a secretary who would speak Italian).
- b. *Cerco una segretaria che **sappia** l'italiano.*      *I'm looking for a secretary who speaks Italian.*  
(I am looking for a secretary would speak Italian).

In the first sentence the subordinate attributive is exact and clear-cut, while in the second case the secretary has not been found yet and the phenomenon described is still indefinite. In this case Italian requires “congiuntivo”. In English both variants are acceptable. And again, spontaneity and irregularity and the appropriate mentality persistently pave their way in the language.

III. Another socio-cultural factor accounting for such frequent use of “congiuntivo” in Italian is a peculiar free attitude of Italians to the notions of time and arrangement. It is quite explicable for the country where past and present merge all around, slowing down the running of time, making life measured and imperceptible for people this alloy of past and present flows into future which is nonetheless penetrated by the same Italian uncertainty. Let us observe how it is reflected in language. For example in the sentence *I will see John as soon as he arrives* in Italian “congiuntivo” can be used in the subordinate clause, as there is no absolute guarantee that John is sure to come. In these cases for the Italian mentality it is more likely to use the subjunctive mood, whereas in English it is completely unacceptable. This is obviously accounted for by the world outlook of people and their national peculiarities. This free attitude to time is reflected in Italian in all the cases whereas in English the notion of time acquires special importance. For example the conjunctions like *che-before*, *dopo che-after*, *finche (non) – until*, *non appena che -as soon as* require congiuntivo. Let us consider the examples:

- a. *Prima che Luisa **parta**, voglio vederla.* I would like to see Luisa before she leaves.  
(I would like to see Luisa before she would leave).
- b. *Decidiamo dopo che loro **arrivino**.* We’ll decide after they come.  
(We’ll decide after they would come).

Thus, when one reads the sentences in English he feels sure that a) Luisa will come and surely at planned time; b) they will come and surely at fixed time. To some extent this reflects how arrangement is observed and what importance is ascribed to the notion of time in an English-speaking society. Meanwhile, in the Italian sentences neither the fact of completed action nor its **time** is certain. In other words, time in an Italian-speaking society is a relative notion which is visually reflected in the language.

We have considered three socio-cultural factors, peculiarities of the mentality which are reflected in the structure of the language, namely the degree of subjectivity/objectivity of the personal opinion, modality, emotional-evaluative attitude to the content of the utterance, attitude to time. The survey has shown that in real life considerable discrepancies between the carriers of Italian and English with regard to these factors are encountered in the degree of subjectivity/objectivity of personal judgements, and it is in these spheres that the linguistic reflections of the above-mentioned notions are strikingly divergent. The expression of emotions and modality brings close both the mentality and its linguistic realizations of the two nations. And the last factor, i.e. attitude to time again moves them apart.

Undoubtedly, the linguistic reflections of these peculiarities of the national mentality are to be taken into consideration for the purpose of successful realization of communicative goals at the intercultural level.

#### Notes:

- \*. The notion of the linguistic picture of the world goes back to the ideas of W. von Humboldt and the American linguists E. Sapir and B. Whorf who put forward the

hypothesis of linguistic relativity (see Whorf 1960; Humboldt 1985). Later many linguists like Apresyan J. Heidegger M., Leontiev A. wrote of and considered the world picture through the prism of the language. Today the problems of the linguistic picture of the world are an object of profound investigation by Anna Wierzbicka, the author of numerous works on this topic (Wierzbicka 1980; Wierzbicka 1991; also Paducheva 1996).

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### Շղծական եղանակ. լեզվամշակութային մոտեցում

Սույն հոդվածը նվիրված է շղծական եղանակի վերլուծությանը լեզվամշակութային տեսանկյունից: Հոդվածում վեր են հանվում իտալերենի շղծական եղանակի հաղորդակցական գործառնությունները և գործառական առանձնահատկությունները, որոնք պայմանավորված են իտալացիների մշակութային բնութագրով և լեզվամտածողությամբ: Զուգահեռներ են անցկացվում նաև իտալերեն և անգլերեն լեզուներում շղծական եղանակի գործառնության առանձնահատկությունների միջև: