

## On the Use of the Subjunctive with English *Hope*

Tris Faulkner<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kalamazoo College, USA

Correspondence: Tris Faulkner, Kalamazoo College, USA.

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### Abstract

The present paper describes how the structure of a particular expression of ‘hope’ (e.g., *I hope that x* vs. *My hope is that/would be that x*), as well as the presence or absence of an additional modal element (e.g., *would, might, may, could, can, should*), can influence the speaker or subject’s perceived investment in or commitment to the proposition’s materialization and, consequently, the (un)acceptability of the subordinate clause appearing in the subjunctive. Since, *hope* unlike *want*, tends to be associated with desires that result from careful and thoughtful reasoning (e.g., Portner & Rubinstein, 2012), the standard use of an indicative embedded complement is not unexpected. I, however, explain that the more *irrealis* (i.e., conditional, hypothetical, unreal, uncertain, or visceral and, thus, not likely to be the product of careful and thoughtful reasoning) the ‘hope’ statement is considered to be (as manifested by a diminished sense of speaker commitment to the proposition’s possible fulfillment), is the more acceptable the use of the subjunctive becomes.

**Keywords:** mood variation, desiderative predicates, volitional predicates, *hope* clauses, English, subjunctive, indicative

### 1. Introduction: The Curious Case of ‘Hope’

In spite of the subjunctive’s (relative) unproductiveness in English (Harsh, 1968; Picón Jácome, 2013; Leech et al., 2009; Skevis, 2014), there are several contexts in which its use may still be expected. Subjunctive meanings tend to be expressed in contexts that involve non-facts, such as those of wishes (e.g., *wish that...*), commands (e.g., *command that...*), and desires (e.g., *prefer that...*) (i.e., in volitive clauses) (Harsh, 1968). Accordingly, since ‘hope’ (or *not* ‘hope’) also reveals a speaker or subject’s (dis)preferred outcome (i.e., the speaker or subject’s will, desire, or (dis)preference), it should be expected that, like other volitional predicates, its complement would require the subjunctive. This, however, is not the case, as ‘hope’ tends to co-occur with indicative clauses. The sections to follow seek to elaborate on this contrast between volitionals.

### 2. Similarities Between French and English: *Espérer* vs. *Vouloir*

According to Portner and Rubinstein (2012), despite being an attitude of (dis)preference, in the case of French and English, ‘hope’ differs from verbs like ‘want’ or ‘(dis)prefer’, in that it presupposes the subject’s belief that the proposition will materialize (see Portner & Rubinstein, 2012). In other words, ‘hope’, unlike ‘want’, signals that the subject is committed to the possibility that their desire (or aversion) is reasonable, appropriate, and perhaps under the right circumstances, likely to come to pass (see Portner & Rubinstein, 2012). ‘Want’, on the other hand, implies no such commitment to the rationality, appropriateness, or likelihood of the coveted proposition. Thus, whereas ‘hope’ represents intellectual or intelligence-based (dis)preferences (i.e., (dis)preferences that have been reasoned out, thought about, and/or pondered on), ‘want’ expresses desires that are more likely to be visceral (see Bolinger, 1974; Portner & Rubinstein, 2012). Portner and Rubinstein use the following examples to demonstrate this position:

**1) [You are at your doctor’s office for an annual checkup. He has just told you what bad shape your lungs are in. If you continue to smoke, you will soon die.]**

a. *O mon Dieu! Avec tout ce stress, je veuX vraiment fumer une cigarette dès que je sortirai.*

‘Oh gosh, Doctor, with all this stress, I really **want** to have a cigarette as soon as I leave!’

(Portner & Rubinstein, 2012, pp. 470–471).

b. *??O mon Dieu! Avec tout ce stress, j’espère vraiment fumer une cigarette dès que je sortirai.*

'??Oh gosh, Doctor, with all this stress, I really **hope** to have a cigarette as soon as I leave!'

(Portner & Rubinstein, 2012, pp. 470–471)

If the patient were to use 'hope' in [the above] context, in either French or English, she would indicate that she is committed to the preference for a cigarette, in the sense that she believes that it is reasonable and is willing to defend it to the doctor. These commitments clash with the contextual assumptions in the scenario. In contrast, one does not need to defend the kind of preferences described by 'want'. It expresses a visceral desire, and "I can't help it" is valid as an explanation for the statement in [(1a)]. To use Bolinger's (1974, pp. 468–469) evocative terminology, 'want' expresses a "glandular" preference, and 'hope' an "intellectual" one (p. 471).

Put differently, in the case of example (1b), the unnaturalness of 'hope' stems from the speaker *not* being able to reasonably defend their preference (for a cigarette), given the doctor's prior warning. In contrast, the naturalness of 'want' in (1a) results from the speaker *not needing* to have a defensible, desired outcome (i.e., their preference for a cigarette). Example (2) below represents a similar contrast.

**2) [The king is being bothered by an uppity bishop and makes his annoyance known to some knights. These knights go and kill the bishop, and when the king hears about it, he is angry because it makes him look bad with the church. The knights respond with [(2a) or (2b)].]**

a. *Mais vous vouliez qu'il soit tué!*

But you wanted that he be.SUBJ killed

'But you **wanted** him to be killed!'

(Portner & Rubinstein, 2012, p. 471)

b. *??Mais vous espériez qu'il serait/est tué!*

But you hoped that he be.COND.INDIC/is.INDIC killed

'??But you **hoped** for him to be killed!'

(Portner & Rubinstein, 2012, p. 471)

As related to example (2), we "again, we have a case of visceral desire, where the king is not contextually committed to his preference. 'Want' is acceptable in this context, whereas 'hope' is not" (Portner & Rubinstein, 2012, p. 471). More importantly, we can also observe that, whereas visceral (and possibly unrealizable) desires (e.g., *vouloir* 'to want') co-occur with the subjunctive, defensible, intellectual propositions take indicative clauses (e.g., *espérer* 'to hope'). The same is the case for English, where 'hope' takes indicative, despite most other volitional verbs prescriptively requiring the subjunctive.

**3) I hope that she gets.PRES.INDIC there on time.**

**4) I desire/prefer that she get.PRES.SUBJ there on time.**

Curiously, native speaker judgements suggest that there are a few, limited scenarios in which English 'hope' may, in fact, opt for subjunctive. Examples (5) through (8) illustrate this possibility.

5) a. **I hope (that) she gets.PRES.INDIC here on time.**

b. **\*I hope (that) she get.PRES.SUBJ here on time.**

c. **My hope is that she gets.PRES.INDIC here on time.**

d. **??My hope is that she get.PRES.SUBJ here on time.**

e. **My hope would be that she gets.PRES.INDIC here on time.**

f. **My hope would be that she get.PRES.SUBJ here on time.**

6) a. **They hope (that) she goes.PRES.INDIC to college.**

b. **\*They hope (that) she go.PRES.SUBJ to college.**

c. **Their hope is that she goes.PRES.INDIC to college.**

d. **??Their hope is that she go.PRES.SUBJ to college.**

e. **Their hope would be that she goes.PRES.INDIC to college.**

f. **Their hope would be that she go.PRES.SUBJ to college.**

7) a. **We hope (that) she buys.PRES.INDIC the house, rather than rent it.**

- b. \*We hope (that) she *buy.PRES.SUBJ* the house, rather than rent it.
  - c. Our hope is that she *buys.PRES.INDIC* the house, rather than rent it.
  - d. ??Our hope is that she *buy.PRES.SUBJ* the house, rather than rent it.
  - e. Our hope would be that she *buys.PRES.INDIC* the house, rather than rent it.
  - f. Our hope would be that she *buy.PRES.SUBJ* the house, rather than rent it.
- 8) a. I hope (that) she *goes.PRES.INDIC* with the latter option.
- b. \*I hope (that) she *go.PRES.SUBJ* with the latter option.
  - c. My hope is that she *goes.PRES.INDIC* with the latter option.
  - d. ??My hope is that she *go.PRES.SUBJ* with the latter option.
  - e. My hope would be that she *goes.PRES.INDIC* with the latter option.
  - f. My hope would be that she *go.PRES.SUBJ* with the latter option.

From the above examples, we can observe that, as the conditionality of the proposition increases (i.e., its hypotheticality or non-factuality), so too does the acceptability of the subjunctive. In other words, the more hypothetical or distant the proposition is from the actual world (and, thus, the less committed the speaker or subject is to its materialization), the greater the possibility that subjunctive becomes more acceptable (i.e., more acceptable than it would otherwise have been).

### 3. The English Subjunctive

#### 3.1 English Uses of the Subjunctive

Before delving further into the *hope-want* dichotomy, it might be helpful to first discuss: 1) how the English subjunctive is formed; as well as 2) the contexts in which it tends to be encountered.

In present-day Englishes, the subjunctive is formed through inflectional contrasts that “usually only occur in the third-person, singular present tense of the verb (e.g., *play/plays*). The single exception to this rule is the anomalous verb *be*; in addition to the usual contrast *be/is*, contrasts also occur in the present tense, first and second-person singular, [...] in all persons plural (e.g., *be/am; be/are*), and in the preterite, first- and third-person singular (e.g., *were/was*)” (Harsh, 1968). As mentioned in section (1), these inflections tend to come about in volitional contexts (as well as in conditional and counterfactual statements). Sentences (9) through (22) to follow, provide examples of these environments.

**I. Desiderative Clauses:** e.g., *desire that, it is desirable that, prefer that, it is preferable that, etc.*

9) “Yet this is very different than claiming that the doctor’s **desire that** the H1N1 virus *not exist* entails that it doesn’t exist” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

10) “It is **desirable that** shipments *be delayed* where possible [...]” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

**II. Directive Clauses:** e.g., *recommend that, suggest that, demand that, require that, etc.*

11) “While it took a little getting used to, I now wholeheartedly **recommend that** anyone using Windows 8 on a desktop *get and use* a Microsoft touch mouse” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

12) “Ms. Cuneo **suggested that** the poster *be forwarded* to HRES to judge the appropriateness of the term [...]” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

**III. Personal Adjectival Expressions:** e.g., *to be determined that, to be insistent that, etc.*

13) “[...] unprotected by a cordon of adults **determined that** he *not be harmed*” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

14) “If human beings did not eat grains as a significant calorie source for most of our evolution, why are you so **insistent that** they *be eaten* in ‘moderation’?” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

**IV. Impersonal Adjectival Expressions:** e.g., *it is vital that, it is essential that, it is important that, it is advisable that, etc.*

15) “It is **vital that** a journalist *become* as good at saying what she doesn’t know as what she knows” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

16) “It is **important that** our campaign *be represented* in each county” (The Corpus of Contemporary American

English, 2008).

**V. Conditional and Concessional Statements:** e.g., *even if that, if, lest, for fear that, etc.*

17) “**Even if that *were*** so, I cannot just leave the shop [...]” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

18) “Phyllis had always acted as **if she *were*** the oldest, primarily because her personality was like a drill sergeant’s [...]” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

**VI. Counterfactual Statements:** e.g., *if, contrary-to-fact statements*

19) “**If she *had served*** it to me raw like in a salad, I would have gobbled it up” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008-).

20) “Now, **if I *had known*** going in, **if they *had told*** me, I would have been mentally prepared” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008-).

**VII. Formulaic Statements:** e.g., exhortations, prayers, etc.

21) “**God *bless*** you, your fiancée, her son, and your team!” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

22) “A long story but ***suffice it to say*** that documentary film funding isn’t easy [...]” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

In the examples above, subjunctive inflections are identifiable by means of the following:

**A.** Present, third-person forms that do not coincide with present, third-person indicative inflections; i.e., absence of the *-s*.

Table 1. Third-person subjunctive inflections

Example	Context	Subjunctive	Indicative
9	“Yet this is very different than claiming that the doctor’s <b>desire that</b> the H1N1 virus not <b><i>exist</i></b> entails that it doesn’t exist” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	<i>exist</i>	<i>exists</i>
11	“While it took a little getting used to, I now wholeheartedly <b>recommend that</b> anyone using Windows 8 on a desktop <b><i>get</i></b> and <b><i>use</i></b> a Microsoft touch mouse” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	<i>get, use</i>	<i>gets, uses</i>
15	“It is <b>vital that</b> a journalist <b><i>become</i></b> as good at saying what she doesn’t know as what she knows” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	<i>become</i>	<i>becomes</i>
21	“ <b>God <i>bless</i></b> you, your fiancée, her son and your team!” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	<i>bless</i>	<i>blesses</i>
22	“A long story, but <b><i>suffice it to say</i></b> that documentary film funding isn’t easy [...]” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	<i>suffice</i>	<i>suffices</i>

It is, however, important to point out that, if the subjects in many of the above clauses had been plural (*you all*, plural *they*), second-person singular (singular *you*), or singular *they*, subjunctive and indicative forms would have been identical.

**B.** The use of *be*-passives instead of indicative *is/are*-passive, participle constructions.

Table 2. Subjunctive *Be*-passives

Example	Context	Subjunctive	Indicative
10	“It is <b>desirable that</b> shipments <b><i>be delayed</i></b> where possible to do so without formal action” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	<i>be delayed</i>	<i>are delayed</i>
12	“Ms. Cuneo <b>suggested that</b> the poster <b><i>be forwarded</i></b> to HRES to judge the appropriateness of the term [...]” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	<i>be forwarded</i>	<i>is forwarded</i>
13	“[...] unprotected by a cordon of adults <b>determined that</b> he <b><i>not be harmed</i></b> .” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	<i>be harmed</i>	<i>is not harmed</i>
14	“If human beings did not eat grains as a significant calorie source for most of our evolution, why are you so <b>insistent that</b> they <b><i>be eaten</i></b> in ‘moderation?’” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	<i>be eaten</i>	<i>are eaten</i>
16	“ <b>It is important that</b> our campaign <b><i>be represented</i></b> in each county” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	<i>be represented</i>	<i>is represented</i>

C. The use of *were*, regardless of the person in question, to indicate conditionality or hypotheticality.

Table 3. Subjunctive ‘were’

Example	Context	Subjunctive	Indicative
17	“Even if that <i>were</i> so, I cannot just leave the shop [...]” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008-).	<i>were</i>	<i>was</i>
18	“Phyllis had always acted as if she <i>were</i> the oldest, primarily because her personality was like a drill sergeant’s [...]” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008-).	<i>were</i>	<i>was</i>

Similar to Table 1, if the subjects in Table 3 had been plural, second-person singular, or singular *they*, subjunctive and indicative forms would have been structurally indistinguishable.

D. The use of past-perfect, participle constructions to signal counter-factuality.

Table 4. Subjunctive Had + PP constructions

Example	Context	Subjunctive	Indicative
19	“If she <i>had served</i> it to me raw like in a salad, I would have gobbled it up” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	<i>had served</i>	<i>had served</i>
20	“Now, if I <i>had known</i> going in, if they <i>had told</i> me, I would have been mentally prepared” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	<i>had told</i> <i>had known</i>	<i>had told</i> <i>had known</i>

Although sentences (19) and (20) are understood as being contrary-to-fact, it is clear that there are no discernible structural differences between subjunctive and indicative, past-perfect forms. Subjunctive meanings are inferred, only because the situations being discussed are untrue as related to a particular past point in time (i.e., counterfactual).

### 3.2 Alternatives to the Subjunctive: Indicative and Modal Auxiliaries

Examples (9) through (22) demonstrate that, whereas the present subjunctive expresses volitivity (whether future or hypothetical), its past counterpart tends to signal counter-factuality. However, in many modern-day Englishes, it is the case that many of these environments will instead opt for the indicative or some modal auxiliary (e.g., *may*, *might*, *shall*, *should*, *will*, *would*, *can*, *could*, etc., Skevis, 2014). The sentences to follow demonstrate this possibility.

i. **Desiderative Clauses:** e.g., *desire that*, *it is desirable that*, *prefer that*, *it is preferable that*, etc.

23) “His **desire that** his book *should sit* on the shelves of those libraries [...]” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

24) “[...] and it is highly **desirable that** drilling operations *should be undertaken* for this purpose” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

ii. **Directive Clauses:** e.g., *recommend that*, *suggest that*, *demand that*, *require that*, etc.

25) “The Humane Society of The United States and The National Animal Control Association **recommend that** each animal in a shelter *should have* 15 minutes of hands-on care each day” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

26) “[...] Thus, they **suggested that** I *should pay* them around, say, \$600” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008-).

iii. **Personal Adjectival Expressions:** e.g., *to be determined that*, *to be insistent that*, etc.

27) “A council [...] **determined that** priests *would* instead *wear* the frock coat” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

28) “This year, he was quite **insistent that** he *should get* to pick out his own costume” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

iv. **Impersonal Adjectival Expressions:** e.g., *it is vital that*, *it is essential that*, *it is important that*, *it is advisable that*, etc.

29) “**It is essential that** she *should sit* the exam this semester’ (which is not subjunctive, [...] nor informally the

standard indicative—‘It is essential that she sits the exam this semester’”) (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

30) “Right now I think **it is important that** I *am* there to regulate his stress levels [...]” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

v. **Conditional and Concessional Statements:** e.g., *even if that, if statements, lest, for fear that, etc.*

31) “[...] would you do it **even if that** new path *might lead* you to your death” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

32) “I think **if** he *was* a nice guy and he *was* interested in pursuing a relationship with you, he would have tried to calm you down as far as you feeling afraid in your texts” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

vi. **Counterfactual Statements:** e.g., *if, contrary-to-fact statements*

33) “Okay, and then **if** he *would have charged* me, you’d be complaining about that” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

34) “**If** he *would have decided* to fight this, what would you have done?” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

vii. **Formulaic Statements:** e.g., *exhortations, prayers, etc.*

35) “**May** God *forgive* the people who have been so mean and critical to you over the years [...]” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

36) “**May it suffice** to say, however, that the many, many people who care passionately for the planet, found it an exercise in climate-change denialism” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).

Examples (23) through (36) demonstrate that, in spite of subjunctive being the standard in volitive and desiderative clauses, variation with indicative or modal auxiliaries is common to authentic speech. Table 5 below contrasts the use of these alternatives with the standard use of the subjunctive.

Table 5. Alternatives to the subjunctive

Example	Context	Alternative Item Type	Alternative Construction Used	Possible Subjunctive Equivalent
23	“His <b>desire that</b> his book <i>should sit</i> on the shelves of those libraries [...]” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	modal	<i>should + verb</i>	<i>sit</i>
24	“[...] and it is highly <b>desirable that</b> drilling operations <i>should be undertaken</i> for this purpose” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	modal	<i>should + passive construction</i>	<i>be undertaken</i>
25	The Humane Society of The United States and The National Animal Control Association <b>recommend that</b> each animal in a shelter <i>should have</i> 15 minutes of hands-on care each day” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	modal	<i>should + verb</i>	<i>have</i>
26	“[...] Thus, they <b>suggested that I should pay</b> them around, say, \$600” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	modal	<i>should + verb</i>	<i>pay</i>
27	“A council [...] <b>determined that</b> priests <i>would</i> instead <i>wear</i> the frock coat” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	conditional	<i>would + verb</i>	<i>wear</i>
28	“This year, he was quite <b>insistent that</b> he <i>should get</i> to pick out his own costume” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	modal	<i>should + verb</i>	<i>get</i>
29	“ <b>It is essential that</b> she <i>should sit</i> the exam this semester’ (which is not subjunctive, whatever Brus might think) or informally the standard indicative - ‘It is essential that she sits the exam this semester’” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008-).	modal	<i>should + verb</i>	<i>sit</i>
30	“Right now I think <b>it is important that I am</b> there to regulate his stress levels, since babies cannot do” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	indicative	<i>am</i>	<i>be</i>
31	“[...] would you do it <b>even if that</b> new path <i>might lead</i> you to your death” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	modal	<i>might + verb</i>	<i>were to lead/led</i>
32	“I think <b>if he was</b> a nice guy and he <i>was</i> interested in pursuing a relationship with you, he would have tried to calm you down as far as you feeling afraid in your texts” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	indicative	<i>was</i>	<i>were</i>
33	“Okay, and then <b>if he would have charged</b> me, you’d be complaining about that” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	conditional	<i>would + present-perfect-3PL</i>	<i>had charged</i>
34	“ <b>If he would have decided</b> to fight this, what would you have done?” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	conditional	<i>would + present-perfect-3PL</i>	<i>had decided</i>
35	“ <b>May God forgive</b> the people who have been so mean and critical to you over the years [...]” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	modal	<i>may + verb</i>	<i>God forgive</i>
36	“ <b>May it suffice</b> to say, however, that the many, many people who care passionately for the planet, found it an exercise in climate-change denialism” (The Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2008).	modal	<i>may + verb</i>	<i>suffice it to say</i>

In section 3, we saw that, in spite of the subjunctive being the ‘grammatical’ (i.e., prescriptive) default in volitional, desiderative, and hypothetical contexts, present day Englishes have the indicative and modal auxiliaries as productive alternatives. In section 4, we will discuss how focus, agentivity, and modality affect *hope*’s receptivity to the subjunctive.

#### 4. Subjunctive ‘Hope’ Clauses

Through native-speaker consultations (and being a native speaker of English, myself), it was observed that, though described as maximally indicative, ‘hope’ clauses may at times be accepting of the subjunctive, depending on both

the structure of the particular ‘hope’ construction, as well as the presence or absence of an additional expression of modality. With reference to the examples provided in section (2), we will take a look at how these two factors influence the mood of the subordinate clause. For ease of reading, examples (5) through (8) have been re-numbered below as, (37), (38), (39), and (40).

**37) My hope would be that she *get* here on time. > ??My hope is that she *get* here on time. > \*I hope (that) she *get* here on time.**

**38) Their hope would be that she *go* to college. > ??Their hope is that she *go* to college. > \*They hope (that) she *go* to college.**

**39) Our hope would be that she *buy* the house, rather than rent it. > ??Our hope is that she *buy* the house, rather than rent it. > \*We hope (that) she *buy* the house, rather than rent it.**

**40) My hope would be that she *go* with the latter option. > ??My hope is that she *go* with the latter option. > \*I hope (that) she *go* with the latter option.**

With respect to all four examples, we see that the construction:

Possessive Adjective (PA) + *hope* + Modal Auxiliary + *be* + *that* + Subjunctive Proposition

is the form that best allows for the subjunctive. Following this structure is:

??PA + *hope* + *be* + *that* + Subjunctive Proposition,

which, although not unacceptable, is considered somewhat unnatural. Finally, we have the construction:

\*Subject + *hope* + *that* + Subjunctive Proposition,

which is inflexibly ungrammatical. We, thus, see that for ‘hope’ phrases to be even minimally accepting of the subjunctive, the structure *PA* + *hope*... needs to be present. Why, however, might this be? Well, if we compare *PA* + *hope* to the *subject* + *hope* construction, there is a greater distance between the speaker and *hoped*-for proposition as related to the former. Put differently, the adjectival structure is more impersonal than is the verbal construction (e.g., *Our hope is that x* vs. *We hope that x*). In the case of the latter, the focus is on the subject (i.e., the ‘hoper’), whereas in the former, the focus is on the particular desire. Therefore, our first observation is that decreased agentivity (or focus on the subject) helps to create a subjunctive-receptive environment. In addition to *PA* + *hope*, the presence of a modal auxiliary (such as ‘would’) appears to be necessary. With a modal auxiliary present (e.g., *would*, *might*, *may*, *could*, *can*, etc.), the distance between the speaker and their commitment to the proposition expands even further. This means that the *hoped*-for proposition is interpreted as being even more removed from said speaker or subject, which, consequently, implies a lesser commitment (i.e., the speaker/subject is perceived as less invested in the possible materialization of the desire). With this increased distance (with respect to the speaker’s expectations regarding the proposition’s (possible) fulfillment), the ‘hope’ expression becomes more similar to desideratives like ‘want’ or ‘prefer’, in that, the proposed desire is interpreted as less rational and more visceral. We can test this theory by examining if such a statement can appropriately be followed by “I can’t help it” (see Portner & Rubinstein, 2012). Let’s do this by re-analyzing example (5), re-numbered again as (41).

**41) Scenario: Mary is expected to be at an important meeting at 3:00 p.m. sharp. She lives an hour away from the meeting place. It is currently 2:30 p.m. and she left home only five minutes ago. It is, therefore, impossible for Mary to get to the meeting on time.**

- a. My hope would be that she gets/get here on time. I know that that’s impossible, but I can’t help it.
- b. My hope is that she gets/??get here on time. I know that that’s impossible, but I can’t help it.
- c. I hope that she gets/\*get here on time. ??I know that that’s impossible, but I can’t help it.

As pertains to (41a), the “I can’t help it” phrase appears to be acceptable. In terms of (41b), although not as natural-sounding as the former, “I can’t help it” is still an acceptable addition. However, in the case of (41c), the same phrase seems out of place. This coincides with our previous discussion regarding the relationship between the speaker/subject, their commitment to the proposition, and, consequently, how intellectual or visceral the ‘hope’ is thought to be. Whereas, the construction *PA* + *hope* + *Modal Auxiliary* puts forth a more neutral and uncommitted subject (which corresponds with the distance and hypotheticality associated with the subjunctive), *Subject* + *hope* + *that* presents one who is more dedicated and aligned with desire’s potential transpiring (i.e., an intelligence-based declaration, characteristic of commitment and defensibility and, thus, the indicative).

## 5. Concluding Remarks

The present paper centered on the acceptability of the subjunctive in normatively, indicative-taking ‘hope’ clauses.



Our discussion explains how the structure of the particular expression of ‘hope’ (e.g., *I hope that x* vs. *My hope is that/would be that x*), as well as the addition of a modal element (e.g., *would, might, may, could, can*), can lessen the speaker or subject’s perceived investment in or commitment to the materialization of the proposition. In other words, the more irrealis (i.e., conditional, hypothetical, unreal, uncertain) the ‘hope’ statement is interpreted to be (as manifested by a diminished sense of speaker commitment to the proposition’s possible fulfillment), the lesser the chance that said statement will be considered the product of cautious and thoughtful reasoning. As a result, the default use of the indicative (a mood which is typically representative of factuality and/or commitment to truth) may be substituted with that of the subjunctive (a mood generally associated with non-facts, non-truths, and a lack of speaker investment).

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