

## At-issueness, subjectivity, and the subjunctive

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When a belief sentence is asserted, the speaker's main point sometimes has to do with the fact that someone holds a certain belief, and it sometimes has to do with the content of that belief. Languages may mark this difference in different ways. For example Simons (2007) suggests that a belief sentence in English with canonical word order, (1a), is ambiguous as to the main point, whereas slifting (1b) marks the content as the main point:

- (1) a. Henry believes that it is raining.
- b. It is raining, Henry believes.

Other languages seem to serve the same function differently. For example, Beyssade & Marandin (2007) point to intonation in French and AnderBois (2016) identifies the topic+clause construction in Yucatec Maya as having similar pragmatic effects.

Reporting on and extending joint work with Alda Mari (ENS, Paris), I address this topic through the lens of mood choice in Italian. Mari & Portner (ms) discuss contrasts like the following:

- (2) a. Credo        che Jean Nicod #è/sia        un filosofo.  
      believe.1SG that Jean Nicod is.IND/SUBJ a   philosopher
- b. Credo        che la Francia perderà/#perda        questa sera.  
      believe.1SG that the France lose.FUT.IND/SUBJ this   night

While 'believe' prescriptively takes the subjunctive in Italian, in fact both moods do occur. The indicative is degraded when the belief concerns a matter of objective fact, as in (2a); the subjunctive is degraded when it concerns a matter which is not understood to be objectively true or false, such as the future contingent (2b). This difference correlates with the fact that 'Who is Jean Nicod?' could be answered directly (*È un filosofo*), whereas it would be unnatural to answer 'Will France win tonight?' flatly with *La Francia perderà* unless one has special expert knowledge (e.g. the match is fixed). Rather, the hedged (2b) (with indicative) is more felicitous.

In the talk, I will address two issues. The first concerns the compositional derivation of the pragmatic difference shown in (2). Mari & Portner show how this difference is derived from the interaction between the normal semantics of mood morphology in Italian and the modal semantics of belief verbs. The second concerns the intuitive concepts of objective versus subjective contents. Focusing on Predicates of Personal Taste, I argue that Kennedy & Willer's (2016, 2020) theory of subjective content can be combined with our analysis of verbal mood to explain why the subjunctive in examples like (3) is only acceptable if the PPT is understood to be objective, in some sense, in the context.

- (3) Gianni crede    che la zuppa è/#sia        buona.  
      Gianni believes that the soup is.IND/SUBJ good

The analysis presented leaves us with a puzzle as to why bare assertions of PPT sentences are not constrained in the way (3) (with subjunctive) is. How can one assert a proposition like the one expressed by (4) which is understood to be subjective in the context?

- (4) La zuppa è        buona.  
      the soup is.IND good

I suggest that the pragmatic rule of assertion is sensitive to the status of its target as objective or subjective, and implicitly modalizes that target, interpreting (4) as (3) if it is subjective in the context.