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There is no subjunctive in English

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The western classical tradition identifies three moods: indicative, subjunctive, imperative. Protagoras split the indicative into interrogative and declarative. Palmer 2001, 2003 argues for only two: indicative and subjunctive. Given any of these classifications of mood, English has no category of mood and so has no subjunctive. Instead it has certain clause-types which express hypotheticality and which can be subsumed to the Irrealis branch of the apparently universal category Realis–Irrealis; the same Irrealis branch to which subjunctives, optatives, jussives and the like can also be subsumed. There are some mood-like operators in English which represent the primary illocutions of major (and traditional) clause-types such as **T**[Φ], declarative, **Q**[Φ], interrogative, and **I**[Φ], imperative. A very small set of just two English hypotheticals contrast with these three major clause-types and I discuss these under the rubric of ‘independent hypotheticals’, **H**[Φ]. Otherwise, English hypotheticals, often described as subjunctives or optatives (even in works like Huddleston and Pullum’s 2002 *Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*) all fall within the scope of the major clause-types (e.g. **I**[**H**[*Should Tom call*], *tell him I’ll get back to him tomorrow*]). I will discuss conditional hypotheticals, the complements of mandative predicates (e.g. *We demand that you attend the meeting*), and hypotheticals in the scope of some other clause types.

References

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