Grace Theological Journal 7.1 (1986) 3-19.

[Copyright © 1986 Grace Theological Seminary; cited with permission;

digitally prepared for use at Gordon College from Biblicalelearning.org]

**THE CLASSIFICATION OF**

**SUBJUNCTIVES: A STATISTICAL**

**STUDY\***

JAMES L. BOYER

*Besides providing statistical information not easily available else-*

*where and offering supporting elements within each classified use,*

*this study seeks to explore two related subjects which are clarified by*

*this inductive study. They are (1) the parallel between the ἱνα + sub-*

*junctive construction and the infinitive, and (2) the occurrence of*

*future indicatives in many instances where aorist subjunctives might*

*have appeared. Both of these are significant to the exegete.*

\* \* \*

INTRODUCTION

IT is not within the intended scope of this article to deal with the

theoretical question of the primary significance of the subjunctive

mood or with the question of its historical origin and development. I

begin with the basic understanding that the subjunctive mood ex-

presses some doubtfulness, contingency, or uncertainty by reason of

futurity. My purpose is to classify the various constructions in which

\*Informational materials and listings generated in the preparation of this study

may be found in my "Supplemental Manual of Information: Subjunctive Verbs." Those

interested may secure this manual through their local library by interlibrary loan from

the Morgan Library, Grace Theological Seminary, 200 Seminary Dr., Winona Lake,

IN 46590. Also available is "Supplemental Manual of Information: Infinitive Verbs."

This augments my article "The Classification of Infinitives: A Statistical Study" GTJ 6

(1985) 3-27. I plan to prepare other supplemental manuals as time permits, beginning

with one on participles.

This study is one of several published in GTJ on related aspects of the grammar of

the Greek NT: (1) "Project Gramcord: A Report" (1 [1980] 97-99); (2) "First Class

Conditions: What Do They Mean?" (2 [1981] 75-114); (3) "Second Class Conditions

in New Testament Greek" (3 [1982] 81-88); (4) "Third (and Fourth) Class Conditions"

(3 [1982] 163-75); (5) "Other Conditional Elements in New Testament Greek" (4 [1983]

173-88); (6) "The Classification of Participles: A Statistical Study" (5 [1984] 163-79);

and (7) "The Classification of Infinitives: A Statistical Study" (6 [1985] 3-27).

4 GRACE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

the subjunctive appears in the Greek NT, providing statistical informa-

tion about these structures in general, and about many of the elements

which appear in them. The system of classification is the traditional

one found in most grammars.

THE SUBJUNCTIVE IN INDEPENDENT CLAUSES

*Hortatory Subjunctive*

Usually named first of these independent or main verb uses of

the subjunctive is the hortatory subjunctive, in which "the speaker

is exhorting others to join him in the doing of an action",l as in

I John 4:7: Ἀγαπητοί, ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους / 'Beloved, let us love

one another’.2 Thus it serves to supply the deficiency of the imperative

mood which like English has no first person forms.3 It is almost

always in the plural (66 of 69 occurrences); the three exceptions seem

to express a slightly different sense. Rather than an exhortation ad-

dressed to self there is an invitation to someone else to permit the

speaker to do something, as in Luke 6:42 (= Matt 7:4); Ἀδελφέ,  
ἄφες ἐκβάλω τὸ ἐν τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ σου / 'Brother, let me

take out the speck that is in your eye'. The other example of a first

person singular is Acts 7:34, with similar meaning.

The example just given also illustrates another frequent char-

acteristic of the hortatory subjunctive: the use of an introductory

imperatival word immediately before the subjunctive. The words so

used in the NT (and their frequencies) are ἄφες (3), ἄφετε (1), δεῦτε

(3), and δεῦρο (1).4 The first two are aorist imperatives but function

as mere hortatory particles. The last two are adverbial particles, with

the ending inflected as if to show their imperatival nature. All four

function elsewhere as equivalents of a full imperative.5

Deliberative Subjunctive

The subjunctive is also used in deliberative questions, in which a

person asks himself or another what he is to do,6 as in Matt 6:31 τί

1 H. P. V. Nunn, *A Short Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge

University, 1951) 82.

2 Unless stated otherwise the translation of biblical examples is from *NASB*.

3 A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of*

*Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 93.

4 This usage also characterized this construction in classical Greek, using ἄγε, φέρε,

or δεῦρο. It continues in modern Greek in ἄς (shortened from ἄφες).

5 BAGD, 125, 176.

6 Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, vol. 3 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* by J. H.

Moulton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963) 98.

BOYER: THE CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJUNCTIVES 5

φάγωμεν / 'What shall we eat?' Not all examples are deliberative,

however, and BDF expands the title to "the Doubtful [Dubitative] or

Deliberative Subjunctive7 (cf. Matt 23:33: πῶς φύγητε; / 'How shall

you escape?'). The use of the subjunctive in these sentences points to

the doubtful, hesitating quality of subjective consideration.

Normally questions in the subjunctive use first person, singular

or plural (57 of 102), but when these questions are quoted indirectly

the first person may change to second or third. Even beyond this

there are a few instances where the deliberation is not with one's self,

but advice is being asked from another party. Mark 6:24 (τί εἰτή-

σωμαι; / 'What shall I ask for?') does not mean that Herodias is

deliberating with herself--rather she is asking her mother's advice.

Matt 27:22 is a similar case.

These may be simple questions or introduced by an interrogative

pronoun or adverb, such as τί (54), τίς (1), πῶς; (18), ποῦ (6), ὅπου

(2), πόθεν (1), and ποίος (1). Five times the indirect question is pre-

ceded by the substantivizing article.

The deliberative question (as the hortatory subjunctive) may be

preceded by an introductory word, i.e., θέλεις, θέλετε, or βούλεσθε

(as in classical). If these are thought of as proper verbs the subjunctive

clause then would be an object clause replacing the frequent infinitive

object. But the absence of a conjunction and the parallel with the

introductory hortatory particles make it at least possible to consider

these as compressed, deliberative, double questions, as in Matt 20:32

τί θέλετε ποιήσω ὑμῖν / 'What do you want? What shall I do for

you?'8 (In 1 Cor 4:21 the editors of the *UBSGNT* even punctuate the

sentence as two questions.)

There are other ways to express the deliberative question. (1) The

future indicative is used, as in Luke 22:49; Rom 3:5; 4:1; 9:14. In

Luke 11:5 the future indicative is used first,. followed by two sub-

junctives, each connected with the future indicative by καί. (2) Even

the present indicative is used, as in John 11:45. (3) A paraphrastic

a construction using δεῖ or δύναμαι plus an infinitive may also be used,

as in Matt 12:34; Acts 16:30.

*Aorist Prohibition*

Strange as it may seem to the beginning Greek student, the use

of the subjunctive instead of the imperative in aorist prohibitions is

native to Greek from earliest times. Robertson says, "It seems clear

7 BDF, 185.

8 My translation; *NASB* renders this subjunctive as if it were an infinitive object

clause: 'What do you wish me to do for you?'

6 GRACE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

that originally both in Sanskrit and Greek prohibition was expressed

only by the subj. Hence the growth of the imperative never finally

displaced it.”9 In the NT as in classical Greek these negative com-

mands are almost always in the subjunctive mood when they use the

aorist tense. The exceptions are few10 and there seems to be no clear

difference in sense. All of them are third person, but there are also 6

examples where third person aorist prohibitions are in the subjunctive

mood.

Since these subjunctives are substitutes for the imperative, a con-

sideration of them will be included in a later study of that mood.

Here it may be sufficient to point out that they sometimes occur with

an introductory ὅρα or ὅρατε, as in classical and parallel to intro-

ductory words with hortatory and deliberative subjunctives. The

prohibition is introduced by μή or one of its compounds.

*Emphatic Future Negation*

The sense of this construction is clear; the most emphatic way to

say that something shall not happen in the future is to use οὐ μή with

the subjunctive mood. But it is not so clear by what process this

construction arose, nor why it means what it does. The subjunctive

does not naturally express such certainty, and the doubling of the

simple negative might seem to make an affirmative, but the case is

not so simple. The grammarians review the theories with varying

conclusions.11 I prefer to think of it as a form of litotes; i.e., the

second negative (μή) negates the subjunctive verb and together they

express a doubtful idea; the first negative (οὐ) negates the doubtful

clause introduced by μή. As a whole the clause communicates that

"there is no doubt about it; it is not an uncertain matter."

The first negative in two instances is a strengthened form of οὐ

(οὐχί, Luke 18:30; οὐδέ, Rev 7:16); in two it is preceded by a doubling

οὐδέ (Luke 10:19; Heb 13:4).

This category of subjunctive use is not limited to the independent

or main clause classification. It may appear anywhere an indicative

might appear, in ὅτι substantive clauses (11), in relative clauses (9), or

in object clauses (1). In Mark 13:2 it occurs both in the main clause

and in the subordinate relative clause.

9 Robertson, *Grammar*, 841.

10 There are 8 aorist imperatives with μή as compared with 88 subjunctives. One is

in Matt 6:3; the other 7 are in 3 parallel passages of the synoptic gospels, Matt 24: 17-

18 = Mark 13:15-16 = Luke 17:31.

11 Cf. Robertson, *Grammar*, 929; J. H. Moulton, *Prolegomena*, vol. I of *A Gram-*

*mar of NT Greek* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906) 188ff.

BOYER: THE CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJUNCTIVES 7

Not strictly within the present scope of study but closely related

to a major item to be dealt with later is the occurrence of this con-

struction with the future indicative instead of the subjunctive.12

*Doubtful Assertion or Cautious Statement*

Is the subjunctive ever used in the New Testament to express

doubtful assertion--what we express in English by "I may do it"? It

would seem to be a natural sense; but the answer is not clear. Classical

Greek grammars speak of such a use; for example, "the present sub-

junctive with μή may express a doubtful assertion, with μή οὐ a

doubtful negation."13 Turner says it is "rare in the NT" and cites

three possible examples. Matt 25:9 has a variant reading μήποτε οὐκ

ἀρκέςῃ which then could be read 'Perhaps there might not be suf-

ficient for us and you'. The edited text has instead the οὐ μή + sub-

junctive construction, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you

too'. The second example is 1 Thess 5:15 which seems most naturally

to be a simple prohibitive subjunctive, 'See that no one repays another

with evil for evil'. If it is indeed a subjunctive of cautious statement

the meaning might be, 'Look, someone might repay with evil', a

rather unlikely choice. The third example is 2 Tim 2:25, an admittedly

difficult sentence: μήποτε δώῃ αὐτοῖς ὁ θεὸς μετάνοιαν / 'if perhaps

God may grant them repentance'. This translation in *NASB* could be

proper for a subjunctive of cautious statement, but *NASB* marginal

note points to Acts 8:22 as a parallel in sense, where the grammatical

structure is entirely different. Turner translates the phrase 'perhaps

God will give'. BAGD makes it elliptical, involving an imbedded

deliberative question: '(seeing) whether God may perhaps grant'.15 At

any rate, this may possibly be the only example of a subjunctive of

doubtful assertion in the NT.

THE SUBJUNCTIVE IN DEPENDENT CLAUSES

By far the more frequent use of the subjunctive mood is in de-

pendent or subordinate clauses.16

12 There are 13 examples: Matt 15:6; 16:22; 26:35; Mark 13:31; 14:31; Luke 21:33;

John 4:14; 6:35; 10:5; Gal 4:30; Heb 10:17; Rev 9:6; and 18:14. Variant readings would

provide more.

13 H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar for Schools and Colleges* (New York: American

le is Book Co., 1916) 297.

14 Turner, *Syntax*, 98.

15 BAGD,519.

16 81.5%, or 1513 instances to 344 in "main verb" clauses. Even this is not an

accurate representation, for as I have shown above in dealing with the independent

8 GRACE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

*In Final (Purpose/ Result) Clauses*

The largest group of dependent subjunctives is found in final

clauses those expressing purpose or result, or, as they are referred to

in some grammars, telic or ecbatic.17 One example is Rom 5:20: νόμος

δὲ παρειςῆλθεν ἵνα πλεονάςῃ τὸ παράπτωμα / 'And the Law came

in that the transgression might increase'. These clauses are introduced

by a variety of conjunctive expressions: ἵνα (405), ἵνα μή (91), ἵνα

μηδέ (l), ἵνα μηδείςj (2), ἵνα μήποτε (1) (total with ἵνα 500); μή (3),

μή πως (5), μήποτε (25) (total with μή 33); ὅπως (33), ὅπως ἄν (5),

ὅπως μή (3) (total with ὅπως 41). These are all consistent with older

Greek usage, except that the i!na clause is greatly extended because it

so often serves as a paraphrasis for the infinitive,18 and ὅπως has lost

ground.

The same lack of distinction between purpose and result is to be

seen in these clauses as with the infinitives of purpose,19 though in

most cases the context makes the sense clear. The vast majority are

true purpose clauses (97%). There are four examples where the sense

clearly seems to be result,20 one of which is especially difficult to

understand if it expresses purpose: John 9:2: ['Ραββί, τίς ἥμαρτεν, . . .

ἵνα τυφλὸς γεννεηθῇ; / 'Rabbi, who sinned. . . that he should be born

blind?' In 12 instances21 I have considered the matter undecided, al-

though I would lean toward their being result. The list of those cases

which are not clearly purpose or result could be greatly expanded.

Another parallel with the infinitive of purpose is the frequent use

of these subordinate purpose clauses after intransitive verbs of motion,

and almost without exception the same verbs are involved (ἀναβαίνω,  
καταβαίνω and ἔρχομαι and its compounds). Also transitive verbs

(like ἀποστέλλω and πέμπω) use the subjunctive purpose clause and

the infinitive of purpose interchangeably.

*In Substantival or Noun Clauses*

These noun clauses will be treated next because they are closely;

related to the final clauses--they are not second in frequency of

uses, many of them were found within subordinate clauses, particularly in the delibera-

tive where the question is being quoted indirectly and in emphatic negation which may

appear in any clause.

17 38%, or 574 of 1513.

18 BDF, 196-202.

19 Cf. my article, "The Classification of Infinitives: A Statistical Study," *GTJ* 6

(1985) 10-12.

20 John 9:2; 1 Cor 7:29; Phil 1:26; and 1 Thess 5:4.

21 Matt 23:26, 35; Luke 9:45; 11:50; 12:36; 16:26 (2); John 4:36; 6:5; Rom 11:11;

2 Thess 3:14; and 2 Tim 1:4.

BOYER: THE CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJUNCTIVES 9

occurrence.22 Indeed, they are identical with the final clauses in form,

using the same conjunctive phrases and the same subjunctive mood.

Until NT Greek was recognized as a part of Koine Hellenistic Greek

rather than of older, classical Greek, grammarians and commentators

went to great pains to insist that these must be interpreted as telic.

Now they are recognized as a legitimate idiom of the language of that

time and are treated separately.

The following conjunctive phrases are used in these nominal

clauses: ἵνα (198), ἵνα μή (15), ἵνα μηδείς (2) (total with ἵνα 215); μή

(16), μή που (1), μή πως (4), μήποτε (3) (total with μή 24); ὅπως (14).

Like the final clauses from which they were derived, these nominal

clauses most frequently function in places where infinitives could have

been used.

As Subject

There are 19 subjunctives in subject nominal clauses. Ten are

subjects of an impersonal verb (συμφέρει [9] or λυσιτελεῖ [1]), as in

John 16:7: συμφέρει ὑμῖν ἵνα ἐγὼ ἀπέλθω / 'it is to your advantage

that I go away'. Four are subjects of the copulative verb ἐστίν

(whether expressed [3] or understood [1]), as in Matt 10:25: ἀρκετὸν  
τῷ μαθητῇ ἵνα γένηται ὡς ὁ διδάσκαλος αὐτοῦ / 'It is enough for the

disciple that he become as his teacher'. Five are subjects of a passive

verb (δίδωμι [2], γράφω [2], or ζητέω [1], as in 1 Cor 4:2: ζητεῖται ἐν  
τοῖς οἰκονίμοις ἵνα πιστός τις εὑρεθῇ / 'It is required of stewards

that one be found trustworthy'. Elsewhere the infinitive is used com-

monly.

As Object

A very large number of subjunctives appear in clauses which

function as the object of a verb. These will be classified according to

the different types of verbs which have these clauses as objects.

Robertson says that these clauses are "found with verbs of striving,

beseeching, commanding, fearing.”23 I will follow that pattern, but

supplement it by calling attention to the close parallels with object

infinitives.

*With Verbs of Striving*. The first category includes verbs which

express effort to bring about an action ('to attempt', 'to accomplish',

'to cause', 'to plan', etc.), as in John 11:53: ἀπ' ἐκείνης οὖν τῆς  
ἡμέρας ἐβουλεύσαντο ἵνα ἀποκτείνωσιν αὐτόν / 'So from that day

22 There are 251 instances (17%), making them fourth in frequency.

23 Robertson, *Grammar*, 991.

10 GRACE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

on they planned together to kill Him'. There are 28 which use a i!na

clause as object: ποιέω\* ('to cause', 7), ἑτοιμάζω (3), τίθημι ('to

appoint', 3), ἀγαλλιάω (2), ἀγγαρεύω (2), βουλεύω (2), διατίθημι (2),

πείθω ('to persuade', 2), συμβουλεύω\* (2), ἀνασείω (1), ζηλόω (1),

and ζητέω\* (I); (total 28). Compare this group with the second

category of complementary infinitives. Those marked with the asterisk

also use the infinitive object (three more [listed below] have cognates

which use the infinitive).

*With Verbs of Wishing*. Θέλω is the only verb of wishing which

uses the ἵνα clause as object, e.g., I Cor 14:5: θέλω δὲ πάντας ὑμᾶς  
λαλεῖν γλωσσαις, μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε / 'Now I wish that

you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy'.

Θέλω is used this way 8 times; there are 3 elliptical constructions in

which θέλω probably should be supplied. This usage is parallel to my

first category of complementary infinitives which includes θέλω with

other verbs of similar meaning. Note that in the example cited the

same verb has both an infinitive and a ἵνα clause complement.

*With Verbs of Permitting*. Ἀφίημι more frequently uses a

complementary infinitive construction, but the ἵνα clause can express

the same sense, as in Mark 11:16: καὶ οὐκ ἤφιεν ἵνα τις διενέγκῃ   
σεκῦος διὰ τοῦ ἱεροῦ / 'And He would not permit anyone to carry

goods through the temple'. In the other example included in this

classification, δίδωμι (Mark 10:37) occurs in the sense of "to give [the

privilege] to [do something], to grant, to permit." The ἵνα clause

describes the gift which they were seeking permission to have. This

use parallels the third category of complementary infinitives.

*With Verbs of Beseeching*. There are 64 subjunctives in this

category. As object clauses of these verbs they express the content of

the thing asked or sought and are thus a kind of indirect discourse, as

in Col 1:9: προσευχόμεμνοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι ἵνα πληρωθῆτε τὴν ἐπί-

γνωσιν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ / 'to pray for you and to ask that you

may be filled with the knowledge of His will'. The following con-

junctions are used: ἵνα (49), ἵνα μή (6), and ὅπως (9). The verbs

which use this construction are παρακαλέω\* (21), προσεύχομαι\* (16),

ἐρωτάω\* (15), δέομαι\* (6), αἰτέομαι\* (2), and 4 other instances where

there is ellipsis requiring that "pray" or "ask" be supplied.

*With Verbs of Commanding*. The object clause uses the sub-

junctive (also a form of indirect discourse) to express the content of

the command 33 times, as in Luke 4:3: εἰπὲ τῷ λιθῷ τούτῳ ἵνα   
γένηται ἄρτος / 'tell this stone to become bread'. The verbs with

which the subjunctive is so used are εἶπον\* ('to command', not simply

'to say') (6), ἐπιτιμάω (6), διαστέλλω (4), γράφω\* (4), λέγω\* (3),

BOYER: THE CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJUNCTIVES 11

ἀπαγγέλλω\* (1), βάλλω (1), διαμαρτύρομαι\* (1), ἐμφαίνω (1), ἐν-

τέλλω\* (1), ἐξορκίζω (1), κηρύσσω\* (1), παιδεύω (1), παραγγέλλω\*

(1), and συντίθημι (1). The conjunction is almost always i!na (28), or

one of its negatives, ἵνα μή (2), ἵνα μηδείς (2), or ὅπως (1).

It should be noted that this object clause with a subjunctive verb

is used only when it would have been a command or request in a

direct quotation, or in the imperative mood. It is not used with an

indirectly quoted simple statement, which would usually be ὅτι with

the indicative. The infinitive of indirect discourse may be used with

either statements or commands. Thus ἵνα with the subjunctive is

equivalent to some infinitives, ὅτι with the indicative is equivalent to

some infinitives, but a ἵνα clause is never equivalent to a ὅτι clause.

The mood is significant--nominal clauses use the subjunctive when

they refer to something indefinite, doubtful, subjective, potential, or

future.24

*With Verbs a/Fearing, Apprehension.* A group of verbs which

express fear, warning, or apprehension, often in English followed by

'lest', may express the ground for that apprehension by a nominal

clause with a subjunctive verb,25 as in Acts 5:26: ἐφοβοῦντο γὰρ τὸν  
λαόν, μὴ λιθασθῶσιν / 'for they were afraid of the people, lest they

be stoned'. The conjunction characteristically used is μή (15), but

these occur also: μήποτε (3), μή πως (4), μή που (1), and even ἵνα (3)

and ἵνα μή (1) occur with βλέπω. The verbs used are βλέπω ('watch

out for') (11), φοβέομαι\* (10), ἐπισκοπέω (2), προσέχω\* (2), and

σκοπέω (1). In one instance the governing verb should be supplied,

probably with βλέπω.

As Limiting or Epexegetic

A nominal clause with a subjunctive verb often explains or limits

another substantive (a use termed 'epexegetic' when used of an infini-

tive). The substantive so described may be noun, an adjective, or a

pronoun.

*Limiting a Noun*. The ἵνα clause can define the meaning or

application of a noun, as with ἐξουσία in Mark 11:28: τίς σοι ἔδωκεν  
τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἴνα ταῦτ ποιῇς / 'who gave You this authority to do

24 This has also been seen in indirect questions; they normally use the indicative,

but when they are deliberative in nature they preserve the subjunctive.

25 The indicative also is used with this construction. "Μή in an expression of

apprehension is combined in classical with the subjunctive if the anxiety is directed

towards warding off something still dependent on the will, with the indicative of all

tenses if directed towards something which has already taken place or is entirelyindependent of the will" (BDF, 188).

12 GRACE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

these things?' The conjunctions used are ἵνα (30) and ὅπως (4). This

usage is parallel to the epexegetic infinitive, and 8 of the 16 nouns so

described also use the infinitive construction.

*Limiting an Adjective*. The subjunctive can be used in a clause

to limit an adjective, as in John 1:21: οὗ οὐκ εἰμὶ [ἐγὼ] ἄξιος ἴνα  
λύσω αὐτοῦ τὸν ἱμάντα τοῦ ὑποδήματος / 'The thong of whose sandal

I am not worthy to untie'. The adjective ἄξιος is related to 'untying'.

The conjunction is always ἵνα (6). Three of the 4 adjectives so limited

also occur with the epexegetic infinitive (the fourth occurs in its

negative form).

*Limiting a Pronoun*. A subjunctive clause can also limit a pro-

noun, as in John 11:3: αὕτη δέ ἐστιν ἡ αίώνιος ζωή, ἵνα γινώσκωσιν  
σε / 'And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee'. The ἵνα

clause stands in apposition to and is explanatory of the pronoun

αὕτη. The conjunctions used are ἵνα (28), ἵνα μή (1), and μή (1). The

pronoun in each case is οὗτος. This same construction also uses the

infinitive frequently.

*In Indefinite Clauses*

"Ordinary relative clauses simply define more exactly a definite

antecedent, and take the construction and negative of simple sen-

tences.”26 Thus the mood is indicative and the negative used is οὐ.

But when the antecedent is indefinite the relative is accompanied

characteristically by the indefinite modal particle ἄν or ἐάν and the

mood is subjunctive. These indefinite relative clauses are usually ex-

pressed in English by adding '-ever' to the relative: who*ever*, when-

*ever*, wher*ever*, etc. Strictly speaking the term includes the clauses

introduced by the relative adverbs of time, place, etc., and in this

larger connotation they comprise the second largest category of sub-

junctive usage.27 For clarity, I will deal with them in several cate-

gories, using the term 'indefinite relative clauses' for those introduced

by a relative pronoun. Those using relative adverbs of time, place,

etc., will be labeled accordingly.

26 Smyth, *Grammar*, 359.

27 J. Greshem Machen, in his *New Testament Greek for Beginners* (New York:

MacMillan, 1950) 175, says "This is one of the commonest uses of the subjunctive,"

and includes among his examples one indefinite relative clause of place. The actual

counts are: indefinite relative 137, indefinite temporal 205, indefinite locational 10,indefinite comparative 6; total 358 or about 24%. Many grammarians term this con-

struction "conditional relative clause," drawing very precise analogies between it and

the various patterns of formal conditional clauses. See my discussion in "Other Con-

ditional Elements," *GTJ* 4 (1983) 183-84, esp. n. 29.

BOYER: THE CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJUNCTIVES 13

Indefinite Relative Clauses

Indefinite relative clauses characteristically use a subjunctive and

are introduced by a relative pronoun with the indefinite particle, as in

1 John 4:15 ὅς ἐὰν ¨ομολογήσῃ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν ὁ υἰὸς τοῦ θεοῦ /

'Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God'. The pronouns used

are the simple relative ὁς (110), the correlative ὅσος (14), or the

indefinite relative ὅστις (12). The indefinite particles used are ἄν (82)

or ἐάν (51).28 In the 3 cases where an indefinite particle is absent, the

pronoun itself is indefinite.29

Indefinite Temporal Clauses

Clauses expressing time constitute a second type of indefinite

relative clause which uses the subjunctive mood. The time referred to

is indefinite or unknown, always future to the viewpoint of the

speaker, as in Matt 2:13: καὶ ἴσθι ἐκεῖ ἕως ἄν εἴπω σοι / 'and remain

there until I tell you'. There is a great variety of introductory expres-

sions, including conjunctions, temporal adverbs, and improper preposi-

tions with a genitive relative pronoun as object.30 Most of them

include the indefinite particle ἄν or ἐάν. The actual combinations are

as follows: ὅταν (124), ἕως (12), ἕως ἄν (20), ἕως οὗ (14), ἕως ὅτου  
(4), ἄχρι (4), ἄχρι ἧς (1), ἄχρι οὗ (2), ἄχρις οὗ (3), ἅχρις οὗ ἄν (1),

μέχρι (1), μέχρις οὗ (2), ἐπάν (3), ὀσάκις ἐάν (4), ὡς ἄν (3), ἀφ'οὗ

ἄν (3), ἡνίκα ἄν (1), ἠνίκα ἐάν (1), and πρὶν ἢ ἄν (1).

A large number of temporal clauses uses the indicative mood,

including some which are introduced by the same conjunctive phrases

used to introduce the subjunctive. When a temporal clause refers to

definite or known time the normal mood is indicative. When the time

is indefinite or uncertain because it is still future or not yet known the

normal mood is subjunctive.

Indefinite Local Clauses

In a few instances clauses introduced by relative adverbs of place

use the subjunctive, as in Mark 14:14: ὅπου ἐὰν εἰσέλθῃ εἴπατε τῷ  
οἰκοδεσπότῇ / 'wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house'.

The adverbs used are ὅπου (9) and οὗ 1); in every instance it is

followed by the indefinite particle ἐάν (9) or ἄν (1).

28 Cf. Moulton, *Prolegomena*, 423; BDF, 57; and Robertson, *Grammar*, 190-91.

29 ὅστις in James 2:10 (twice); in Heb 8:3 the antecedent of the relative is an

and indefinite pronoun.

30 ἧς, antecedent ἡμέρας; οὗ, antecedent χρόνου (supplied); and ὅτου (gen. of

ὅστις).

14 GRACE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

Indefinite Comparative Clauses

Comparative clauses almost always use the indicative mood, but

two passages (using 6 verbs) have the comparative particle ὠς fol-

lowed by the subjunctive. 1 Thess 2:7 has ὠς ἐάν which clearly is

indefinite and understandably takes the subjunctive. In Mark 4:26 ὡς

is followed by 4 subjunctive verbs and the indefinite particle is missing

in the earliest manuscripts.31 BAGD32 calls this "gravely irregular fr. a

grammatical viewpoint" and suggests textual corruption. BDF points

out the need for "the indispensable ἐάν or ὅταν."33 But Robertson34

argues that ἐάν is not indispensable with the subjunctive (for example,

temporal ὡς in some manuscripts of Gal 6:10) and claims that the

subjunctive alone makes it indefinite.

In Third Class Conditional Clauses

The third largest group (328, or 21.7%) of subordinate subjunc-

tives occurs in the protasis of the simple future condition which char-

acteristically is introduced by ἐάν or ἅν and has its verb in the

subjunctive. The mood reflects accurately the basic significance of

this construction, that of potentiality or indefiniteness by reason of

futurity.35 This construction is usually introduced by ἐάν (241),36 ἐάν

μή (63), ἄν (4), κἄν (13), ἐάνπερ (3) (total with έάν 324); and by εἰ

(1), εἴτε . . . εἴτε (2), ἐκτὸς εἰ μή (1) (total with εἰ 4).37

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

*The* ἵνα  *Clause as an Equivalent to the Infinitive*

It is not within the scope of this study to explain or even to trace

the historical development by which the Greek language ultimately

lost its infinitive before the encroachment of the ἵνα clause; rather I

will survey the situation as it was in the Greek in the NT. As ὅτι with

the indicative increasingly became a substitute for the infinitive in

indirect statements, so ἵνα with the subjunctive became a substitute

for the infinitive in indirect commands and requests. But beyond this,

31 For example, K, B, and D.

32 BAGD,897.

33 BDF, 192.

34 Robertson, *Grammar*, 968.

35 For a full treatment the reader is referred to my previous article, "Third (and

Fourth) Class Conditions," *GTJ* 3 (1982) 163-75.

36 The numbers here indicate the times the subjunctive verb occurs in these con-

structions, not the number of third class conditional sentences.

37 For a discussion of these anomalous constructions see my articles "Third (and

Fourth) Class Conditions," 164 and "Other Conditional Elements," 174-75.

BOYER: THE CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJUNCTIVES 15

the ἵνα clause became an alternative expression for almost every func-

tion of the infinitive. It seems important at this point to demonstrate

this, and to let it impact the interpretive process.

A comparison of the functions of the infinitive with those of the

ἵνα a clause shows their remarkable parallels. Even in older Greek both

were used to express purpose, but in the NT the infinitive increases in

frequency, particularly with verbs of motion. In contrast with this

tendency, the use of the infinitive in its noun-functions shows a sharp

decrease in favor of the ὅτι or ἵνα clause. Every use of the infinitive

demonstrates this. In this section I will examine the relationship

between the ἵνα clause and the infinitive.

The ἵνα clause is used as the subject of impersonal, predicative,

and passive verbs, as is the infinitive.38 It is used as the object of

many verbs which often use the complementary infinitive, as, e.g.,

verbs of wishing (θέλω), verbs of striving and doing (δίδωμι, ἑτοι-

μάζω, πείθω, ποιέω, συμβουλεύω, τίθημι, ζηλόω, ζητέω), verbs of

permitting or granting (ἀφιημι, δίδωμι), as well as other verbs of like

kind which do not use the infinitive in the NT. The ἵνα clause also

forms the object of verbs of mental action and communication which

take the infinitive of indirect discourse, such as verbs of beseeching

(αἰτέομαι, δέομαι, ἐρωτάω, παρακαλέω, προσεύχομαι), and verbs of

commanding (ἀπαγγέλλω, διαμαρτύρομαι, εἶπον ['to order, com-

mand '], ἐντέλλω, γράφω, κηρύσσω, λέγω ['tell to'], παιδεύω, παραγ-

γέλλω, and συντίθημι). Note that the ἵνα clause is used in indirect

discourse only with verbs of beseeching and commanding, where the

direct discourse would have been in the imperative. For indirectly

quoted statements ὅτι + indicative can be used in place of the infini-

tive. A clause introduced by ἵνα, ἵνα μή, or μή with a subjunctive

verb is also used as object after verbs of fearing and apprehension

(φοβέομαι, προσέχω) where occasionally the object infinitive occurs.

The substantival ἵνα clause also substitutes for an epexegetic

infinitive, one which limits or qualifies or stands in apposition to

another substantive. Again it is found frequently with the same words

as the infinitive, such as nouns (βουλή, χρεία, χρόνος, ἐντολή,

εὐκαιρία, ἐξουσία, θέλημα, ὧρα), adjectives (ἄξιος,δίκαιος, ἱκανός),

and in apposition to the demonstrative pronoun οὗτος.

Even the so-called "imperatival infinitive" has its counterpart

with the "imperatival ἵνα clause,"39 although both are probably mis-

named and should rather be considered elliptical, with some governing

verb to be supplied from the context.

38 Examples of these and the following will be found above in the various classifica-

tions.

39 Cf. Turner, *Syntax*, 94-95. For my discussion of the imperatival infinitive see

"The Classification of Infinitives: A Statistical Study," *GTJ* 6 (1985) 14-15.

16 GRACE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

That leaves only one infinitive usage without a parallel ἵνα con-

struction, the articular infinitive after prepositions to express various

adverbial relationships. Indeed this is one of the two uses of the

infinitive which in NT Greek shows an increase, the other being the

purpose infinitive.

This very close correspondence between the infinitive and the ἵνα

clause must certainly be taken into consideration in the exegetical

process. For example, 1 John 1:9 (πιστός ἐστιν καὶ δίκαιος ἵνα ἀφῇ

ἡμῖν / 'He is faithful and righteous to forgive') should be understood

so that the ἵνα clause is epexegetic to the two adjectives. It is not a

purpose clause--forgiveness is not the purpose for which God is faith-

ful and just. To see it as result would be clearer ("so that He will. . ."),

but the epexegetic infinitive provides the clearest sense.

*The Ambivalence of the Future Indicative*

*with the Aorist Subjunctive*

A Definition of the Phenomenon

In places where an aorist subjunctive verb might be expected,

occasionally a future indicative is found. This does not happen in the

reverse, however; never does an aorist subjunctive occur where a

future indicative might be expected.40 The future functions normally

as an indicative, but it also functions in certain situations where the

subjunctive (the potential future) might be expected.

Historical Background

Grammarians have attempted to explain this ambivalence by

resorting to a study of the historical development of the language.41

Several factors have been suggested. (1) Historically the future indica-

tive may have originated from the aorist subjunctive. (The aorist

subjunctive functioned as a simple future in Homer, for example.)

(2) There was always some duplication and confusion in form between

the two, either in actual identity of spelling (e.g., λύσω, for both fut.

ind. and aor. subj.) or in similarity or identity of sound between the

long and short thematic vowel (e.g., λύσει and λύσηι [later written

λύςῃ], or λύσομεν and λύσωμεν). (3) This confusion is often demon-

strated in variations between manuscripts of the same text. (4) The

40 For example, there are 4 places where εἰ is followed by a subjunctive verb; in

none of these can it be explained as a substitute for a future indicative (εἰ in 1 Cor 14:5and Rev 11:5; εἴτε in 1 Thess 5:10). See my discussion of these in "Other Conditional

Elements," *GTJ* 4 (1983) 175. In each instance the element of future contingency is

present and the subjunctive is the expected mood. It is the conditional particle that

needs explanation.

41 BDF, 183, 186-88; Robertson, *Grammar*, 924-28, 984.

BOYER: THE CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJUNCTIVES 17

basic significance of the subjunctive is always futuristic; its connota-

tion of doubtful assertion or potentiality is by reason of futurity-it is

uncertain because it has not happened. Even when the subjunctive

was used to describe an event which was only a possibility to the

speaker at that time, the verb would often be changed to the indicative

after the fact.

Survey of the Occurrences

Since a list of subjunctives such as has been the basis of this

study is compiled from form rather than function the instances where

a future so functions are not included. And a list of future indicatives

would have to be subjected to the same type of study as I have

attempted here on subjunctives in order to discover which categories

of usage are parallel. I have not yet done this, so I have attempted to

find these ambivalent future indicatives from the other end--by search-

ing the constructions which normally take the subjunctive in order to

find instances where the future is found instead. It would be too

much to expect that I have found them all.

This ambivalence occurs in most of the classified functions of the

subjunctive. Among the main-clause uses it may be found in delibera-

tive questions42 but it clearly is present in the emphatic negation

category as well: οὐ μή + future indicative.43

This ambivalence between aorist subjunctives and future indica-

tives occurs most frequently in places where the subjunctive would be

expected in subordinate clauses. It is rare in conditional44 and relative

clauses,45 as well as temporal indefinite relative clauses. It normally

by uses the subjunctive verb but twice the future indicative is found.46 It

42 A few possible examples found were Luke 22:49; John 3:12; Rom 3:5; 4:4; 9:14;

even a present indicative is found in John 11:47. But not all future questions are

deliberative; those so described usually show an element of anxiety or perplexity. The

examples just cited may be matter of fact examples of a simple future question.

43 Matt 15:6; 16:22; 26:35; Mark 13:31; 14:31; Luke 21:33; John 4:14; 6:35; 10:5;

the Gal 4:30; Heb 10:17; Rev 9:6; 18:14.

44 Luke 19:40; Acts 8:31. There are also examples of other tenses in the indicative

after ἐάν present (I Thess 3:8) and perfect (I John 5:15). Cf. my article "Other

Conditional Elements," *GTJ* 4 (1983) 175.

45 In relative clauses the indicative is normal, and only in the category called

'Indefinite Relative' would the subjunctive be expected. But the term 'indefinite' may be

a bit confusing. For example, it is not merely that the relative has an indefinite

antecedent (in Matt 7:24)--the pronoun is the indefinite relative ἐάν but the mood is

indicative, as it is also in 10:32 where the future indicative occurs naturally in an

exactly parallel passage. (But cf. Matt 7:12 where the indefinite particle ἐάν appears

along with a verb in the subjunctive.) This construction looks at the action itself as

indefinite or uncertain by reason of futurity.

46 Luke 13:28; Rev 4:9. The imperfect is also used (Mark 3:11), as well as the

present (Mark 11:25) and the aorist (Mark 11:18).

18 GRACE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

is primarily in the clauses introduced by ἵνα, ἵνα μή, and ὅπως where the

future indicative more frequently takes the place of the aorist sub-

junctive.47 It occurs in both the final and nominal clauses introduced

by these words.

Is there a Distinction in Meaning?

All that has been said thus far would not lead one to expect any

difference in meaning between the future indicative and aorist subjunc-

tive in these clauses--the difference would seem to be formal, not

semantic. But some have insisted upon a distinction in meaning. One

of my students in a Greek exegesis class called to my attention the

view that in 1 Pet 3:1 the future indicative means that the purpose

was guaranteed fulfillment, since the indicative is the mood of actu-

ality. The believing wife who lives a godly life before her unbelieving

husband is assured that she will win her husband. Is this claim valid?

How can it be checked?

Since the claim is based on a grammatical principle, it can be

checked. When the grammars are checked for theoretical statements

about the indicative mood, there are claims that it is the mood of

certainty, of actual statement, etc.; but there is no claim which applies

that principle to this situation. Instead there are explanations such as

those reviewed above, but there is no suggestion of a difference in

meaning.

A study of all the contexts where the idiom occurs is more

decisive, and such a study demonstrates that there are some contexts

where the purpose was actually accomplished, although there is no

indication that it was guaranteed. In most instances, predictably, there

47 After ἵνα Mark 15:20; Luke 14:10; 20:10; John 7:3; Acts 21:24 (2); Rev 3:9 (2);

6:4, 11; 9:4, 5; 13:12; 14:13; after ἵνα μή Gal 2:4; I Pet 3:1; Rev 8:3; 9:20; 22:14; after

μή: Luke 11:35; Col 2:8; and after ὅπως Matt 7:8; Mark 14:2; Heb 3:12.

In addition there are a number of places where the clause contains one or more

subjunctives normally, with a καί and a future indicative following: Matt 5:25; 13:16;

Rom 3:4 (after ὁπως); Eph 6:3; Rev 2:10. This is capable of two explanations; either itis another ambivalent use of the future and the verb is simply another dependent on the

conjunction, or it is a new beginning, an additional comment in which the future

indicative stands independently. The latter seems to fit the sense better in most cases.

There are also a number of places where these clauses use indicative verbs

other than the future: aorist (Luke 24:20, after ὅπος Gal 4:17; I Thess 3:5); perfect

(Gal 4:11); present (I Cor 4:6; Gal 4:11). These are outside our present consideration,

but it may be noted that of those using the aorist and perfect 3 are in contexts

expressing apprehension where even older Greek used μή with indicative (cf. BDF,

188) and the other communicates the proper sense although the structure may seem to

be irregular. The two showing present indicatives do appear to be standing where

subjunctives would be expected. At least they illustrate that in Hellenistic Greek the

correspondence between the conjunction and the mood are somewhat relaxed.

BOYER: THE CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJUNCTIVES 19

is no indication whether the purpose was realized or not. But there

are a number of instances where the purpose was *not* realized, and

obviously was not guaranteed. For example, in Luke 20:10 the owner

of the vineyard sent his servant ἵνα . . . δύσουσιν / 'in order that they

might give him some of the produce'. In Gal 2:4-5 false brethren

sneaked in to spy ἵνα ἡμᾶς καταδουλύσουσιν οἷς οὐδὲ πρὸς ὥραν  
εἴξαμεν / 'in order to bring us into bondage. But we did not yield. . .

even an hour'. (See also Gal 4:17 and Mark 14:2.) These examples

demonstrate that the principle "usage determines meaning" is as true

in syntax as it is in lexicography.

This material is cited with gracious permission from:

Grace Theological Seminary

200 Seminary Dr.

Winona Lake, IN 46590

www.grace.edu

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: [ted.hildebrandt@gordon.edu](mailto:ted.hildebrandt@gordon.edu)  
 for biblicalelearning.org.