Not One of the Usual Suspects: The History of an Anomalous Prescriptive Rule in Spanish

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Abstract: This article draws attention to an anomalous prescriptive rule in Spanish. Although research shows that native speakers use both the indicative and the subjunctive with expressions of emotion in Spanish, textbooks and grammars of Spanish insist that only the subjunctive may be used with these expressions. This creates confusion for students, teachers, and linguists because the rule does not reflect reality. The purpose of this paper is to answer two important questions: 1) What is the origin and history of mood use with expressions of emotion? 2) How did a rule prescribing exclusive use of the subjunctive with expressions of emotion become established? The answers to these questions are enlightening and serve to highlight a unique example of a prescriptive rule with no legitimate claim to being that nevertheless has attained such a degree of influence over the standard language that it effectively limits the creative possibility of nuance.

Key Words: prescriptivism, Spanish grammar, subjunctive

As a category, prescriptive language rules tend to share two features. The first is that the rules are normally derived from one of three sources: (1) a structure that previously existed in the language, (2) a structure based on another language considered “superior” in some way, and (3) for ideological reasons. The second feature that prescriptive language rules tend to share is that they often seek to create or preserve a distinction between categories, rather than allowing two categories to collapse into one. In English, for example, there are rules of use regarding “that” and “which,” “like” and “as,” “who” and “whom,” “lie” and “lay,” among others.

There is a prescriptive rule in Spanish that is anomalous, and in fact suspect, because it shares neither of the two features identified above. It cannot be traced to any of the three sources of prescriptive rules, and instead of striving to maintain a distinction, this rule actually functions to erase one. This particular rule requires the exclusive use of the subjunctive with expressions of emotion. Although research shows that native speakers use both the indicative and the subjunctive in this context in Spanish, textbooks and grammars of Spanish, for both native and non-native speakers, continue to include this rule and insist upon its use. The purpose of this article is to present diachronic evidence from Latin and Old Spanish that clearly shows that the rule is not derived from one of the traditional sources of prescriptive rules that explain and would validate actual use.

The compelling nature of the diachronic evidence, in turn, raises the following question: Where does the rule originate? The answer to this question is enlightening and serves to highlight a unique example of a prescriptive rule with no legitimate claim to being that nevertheless has attained such a degree of influence over the standard language that it effectively limits the creative possibility of nuance by excluding the feature that is the legitimate “heir to the throne.”

Anyone who teaches Spanish is familiar with the prescriptive rule that establishes the exclusive use of the subjunctive with expressions of emotion. It is commonly found in pedagogical texts and grammars of Spanish. Consider the following three excerpts, representing a range of...
texts and grammars that seek to teach standard Spanish. The first represents an explication of the rule common to most elementary Spanish textbooks: “Expressions of emotion are those in which speakers express their feelings: I’m glad you’re here; It’s good that they can come. Such expressions of emotion are followed by the subjunctive mood in the subordinate (dependent) clause in Spanish” (Knorre et al. 413). The second example is a typical explanation found in intermediate and advanced undergraduate texts. This particular text combines a grammar review for students with an emphasis on writing: “The subjunctive is required in Spanish in a dependent clause when the verb in the main clause expresses feelings or emotion: regret, fear, pity, hope, surprise, etc.” (Dominicis and Reynolds 92).

The third excerpt is taken from a respected reference grammar of modern Spanish: “In standard Spanish, the subjunctive is used in sentences of the pattern Emotional Reaction + que + Subordinate Verb. ‘Emotional reaction’ covers a vast range of possibilities including regret, pleasure, blame, displeasure, surprise […]” (Butt and Benjamin 251). Later on in the same section, the use of the indicative in casual speech is recognized but with the following recommendation: “It was stated (above) that the subjunctive is used with expressions of emotion, and foreigners should respect this rule. But when the verb is followed by ‘de que,’ the indicative mood is sometimes heard in relaxed speech when the verb is in the present or past. This tendency should not be imitated by foreign students” (252). And in a footnote in the same section, we find further acknowledgement that the indicative is used with expressions of emotion in real-life speech habits, but with the notation that such use is not recommended in careful speech: “In spontaneous speech in Latin America (and to a lesser extent in some parts of Spain) an emotional reaction to a past, present or habitual event may be expressed by the indicative […] This tendency is rather stronger with verbs followed by de que. Use of the indicative after emotional reactions and value judgments seems to be spreading in familiar speech in Spain, but it is not accepted in careful styles” (252).

Each of the excerpts cited above establishes the exclusive use of the subjunctive with expressions of emotion in standard Spanish, a prescriptive rule commonly found in modern textbooks and grammars of Spanish. While the third example acknowledges that the indicative can be found with expressions of emotion, the authors clearly state that such use is not recommended. This particular prescriptive rule, then, establishes a standard for language use. The use of the indicative with expressions of emotion is either prohibited by implication in statements such as “the subjunctive is required with expressions of emotion” or—as we see in the third example—is acknowledged in rare instances, but its use is considered “non-standard” and therefore proscribed.

In stark contrast to what is prescribed in most grammars and textbooks of Spanish, the use of both subjunctive and indicative with expressions of emotion is well attested in the research. Scholarship that acknowledges the use of both moods with expressions of emotion in Spanish overwhelmingly questions the validity of the prescriptive rule establishing the exclusive use of the subjunctive with expressions of emotion. The use of the indicative with expressions of emotion is not considered non-standard by linguists who have called attention to its use. Terrell and Hooper were among the first to argue that Spanish does permit both the indicative and the subjunctive with expressions of emotion and that mood choice in this context is meaningful. In addition, Bolinger, DeMello, and Lope Blanch present convincing data showing that native speakers use both the indicative and the subjunctive with expressions of emotion. In his study of mood choice in Puerto Rican Spanish, Lantolf found the following percentages in use of the indicative after certain expressions of emotion: se sorprendió que (34%), se alegró de que (38%), Qué bueno que (54%).

In his review of what he aptly terms the “Great Mood Debate,” Whiteley (134) has convincingly argued that of all subjunctive domains, the subjunctive with expressions of emotion is the most difficult to explain and is not triggered by syntactic formulas as much as by the individual speaker’s judgment of the proposition under consideration.

My own research in Costa Rica (Modern Spanish) indicates that this is so. Native speakers
of Spanish with little formal academic training, hence speakers who would be less influenced by a prescriptive grammar rule, show strong patterns of use of both indicative and subjunctive with expressions of emotion. In interviews with native speakers in which I included a variety of expressions of emotion, speakers consistently used indicative and subjunctive with *Estoy triste que* and *Me emociona que*. The first pair of sentences with *estoy triste que* are given here:

(1a) Estoy triste que ya no vea (subj) más a mi amigo.
(1b) Estoy triste que ya no veo (indic) más a mi amigo.

“I am sad that I no longer see my friend.”

This difference was commonly described as follows: the sentence with the indicative conveys the finality of no longer seeing the friend (in fact, one participant commented that perhaps the friend had died), while the subjunctive suggests that there is still the possibility of seeing the friend.

The other pair of sentences that provoked reaction was the pair introduced by *Me emociona que*. The first pair of sentences is given here:

(2a) Me emociona que todos están (subj) de acuerdo contigo.
(2b) Me emociona que todos están (indic) de acuerdo contigo.

“I am moved that everybody agrees with me.”

The use of the subjunctive in 2b seemed to indicate that it was a surprise that everyone was in agreement, but with the indicative the nuance conveyed an expectation that everyone would agree with the speaker. Also interesting was the participant who responded to this sentence in past time: “*Me emocionó que todos mis amigos me habían/hubieran dado tantos regalos* “I was moved that all of my friends had given me so many gifts,” by saying that the subjunctive indicated that the friends had not really given so many gifts as the speaker had desired.

There is a great deal of data from various studies that shows the use of both moods with expressions of emotion. Moreover, there is no research that proves the prescriptive rule, that is, that the subjunctive is the only mood used with expressions of emotion. It is only within the prescriptive grammar that this claim is made. Based on the evidence provided in the research, the use of the indicative with expressions of emotion appears to be legitimate. What I draw your attention to here is the contrast between what is acknowledged in the research and what is prescribed by formal grammar rules. In short, there is a contradiction between what we teach and what native speakers actually do. On the one hand, we have a prescriptive rule that establishes the exclusive use of the subjunctive with expressions of emotion, and on the other hand we have evidence that native speakers use both moods.

This discrepancy between what is required by the rule and what native speakers actually do raises the following questions: 1) What is the origin and history of mood use with expressions of emotion? 2) How did a rule prescribing exclusive use of the subjunctive with expressions become established?

The first is a necessary question because proving that both moods have always been used with expressions of emotion establishes a strong historical motive for current use. The implication underlying Butt and Benjamin’s statement that “the use of the indicative after emotional reactions [...] seems to be spreading in familiar speech in Spain” is that the employment of such represents an innovation. Historically, this is not the case, which should be a convincing argument for always placing a linguistic structure within its historical context.

The second question is also fundamental because it seeks to ascertain the reasoning that motivated the creation of the rule. As stated above, there are three principal reasons for creating prescriptive grammar rules. First, many are established because they represent an earlier stage of the language. For example, in English “like” is being replaced with “as” in constructions such as “Do like I tell you.” The use of “like” over “as” created a controversy among grammarians in the
1950s in the United States when a cigarette ad affirmed, “Tastes good like a cigarette should.” The extension in use of “like” has been resisted by many because it represents a deviation from an earlier established use (Pulgram 124).

Second, others become rules because they reflect an aspect considered “superior” from another language. An example of this is the prohibition in use of the object pronoun “me” in a sentence with the verb “to be.” For instance, one is not supposed to say “It is me,” but rather “It is I.” The reason for this rule is not based on the structure of English but on Latin. As artificial as it may seem today (and rightly so), the use in Latin of the predicate nominative with the verb “to be” was historically cited as the reason compelling the same use in English.

Third, some prescriptive rules are established for ideological reasons. The use of both he and she or his and her in sentences such as “Each student should bring his/her book to class” has replaced the historically prescribed use of his for ideological reasons.

The two questions posed above directly address the contrast between the well-documented use by native speakers of both moods with expressions of emotion and the rule prescribing only the subjunctive. The answers to these questions present the entire state of the matter, from the development of the structure itself and the later formulation of the rule. Distinguishing between the diachronic development of the structure and the appearance of the rule is significant because an examination of the historical development of the structure gives us one set of facts, while an investigation of the rule and how it came to be established presents us with an entirely different perspective.

The History of the Syntactic Development of Expressions of Emotion in Spanish

As stated above, many prescriptive rules find their origin in a structure that was utilized in an earlier stage of the language, but has since undergone change. For the particular prescriptive rule described in this paper, this necessitates a careful study of Old Spanish and Latin. An analysis of the grammar from Old Spanish and Latin does not reveal an exclusive use of the subjunctive with expressions of emotion, but as will be shown below, shows the use of both moods with this type of construction. This finding not only proves that the prescriptive rule in question does not capture an earlier stage of the language, but rather it also shows that it is not possible that the rule came about in imitation of a feature of Latin, the language most likely to be considered “superior” in form to Spanish.

The Syntax of Expressions of Emotion in Latin

Looking for evidence of mood use with expressions of emotion in Latin is not as straightforward as one might hope, because the syntax of subordination in Latin was radically different from that of modern Spanish and there is no neatly articulated rule in the grammar of Classical Latin that addresses expressions of emotion as a semantic category.

The primary subordinating structure in Classical Latin was not the quod clause, which in later Latin was going to grow stronger and eventually become the primary subordinating structure in Romance (and is discussed at greater length later in the paper), but the accusative + infinitive construction. In this structure, there is a main verb that governs a subordinate structure in which the subject of the subordinate clause carries the accusative case ending and the verb is in the infinitive. For example:

(3) Dicit te errare (Accusative + infinitive)
"He says that you are wrong."

Cuzzolin has found that in Classical Latin, expressions of emotion in Latin appear most often in the Accusative + Infinitive construction (201). Because the verb governed by the expression of emotion is in the infinitive and is not conjugated, the feature of mood, in addition to other
features, is eliminated. Note the use of the accusative + infinitive construction from early Latin in the following examples from Plautus (254–184 BCE):

(4) contrivi diem, dum astro advocatus quoidam cognato meo; quem hercle ego litem adeo perdidisse gaudeo.
   “I lost the whole day, while I stood around as a witness for my relative; as a matter of fact, I rejoice that he lost the lawsuit.” (Williams 568)

(5) hac ibo, caninam scaevam spero meliorem fore.
   “I’ll go this way. I hope it will be better with the dog on the left.” (Williams 973)

The following inscription from Pompeii, which may be dated no later than 79 A.D., also shows the accusative + infinitive after verb admiror “I am surprised” and may indicate the strength of the accusative + infinitive construction after expressions of emotion in the spoken language at this time.

(6) Admiror pariens te non cecidisse ruinis qui tot scriptorum taedia sustineas.
   “I am surprised, wall, that you have not fallen into ruins, who must bear the garbage of so many writers.” (Pulgram 218)

When one finds an expression of emotion in Latin, it is normally with the accusative + infinitive construction. The other reason that makes it difficult to identify the origin of the modern Spanish use of subjunctive and indicative with expressions of emotion is that there is no neatly articulated rule in the grammar of Classical Latin that addresses expressions of emotion as a semantic category.

While one can identify several uses of the subjunctive in Latin which correlate directly to similar uses in Spanish (the jussive subjunctive, for example), one does not find expressions of emotion as a category requiring the subjunctive. There are, however, two uses of the subjunctive in Latin that could be considered starting points for the use of the subjunctive and indicative with expressions of emotion in modern Spanish. These are the subjunctive used with verbs of fearing and the use of the subjunctive to express reservation on the part of the speaker.

Verbs expressing fear were recognized as a category requiring the use of the subjunctive in Latin when they governed a dependent clause that began with ne or ut. Three frequently used verbs were metuo, vereor and timeo, all best translated “I fear” or “I am afraid.” Some examples that show the subjunctive in the subordinate clauses with verbs of fearing are:

(7) Orator metuo ne languescat (subjunctive) senectute.
   “I fear the orator grows feeble from old age.” (Cat. M. 28 as cited in Greenough, et. al. 365)

(8) Vereor ut tibi possim (subjunctive) concedere.
   “I fear that I cannot grant you.” (De Or. I. 35 as cited in Greenough, et. al. 365)

(9) Metuo et timeo ne hoc tandem propalam fiat (subjunctive)
   “I fear and dread that this may at length come out.” (Plaut. Mil.Glor. 1348 as cited in Woodcock 145)

In addition to the subjunctive used with expressions of fear, in Latin the subjunctive could also be used to express reservation on the part of the speaker. This particular use of the subjunctive required a subordinate clause that utilized the conjunction quod. This subordinating structure, while not used as frequently as the accusative + infinitive construction, did require a conjugated verb in the dependent clause. Although potentially confusing to those new to a
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discussion of Latin grammar, it must be pointed out that there were two types of quod clause in Latin, the substantive quod clause, which functioned as a noun and the causal quod clause which functioned adverbially. There were specific rules regarding mood choice for each clause.

According to the rules of Classical Latin, only the causal quod clause could be used with the indicative or the subjunctive, with use of the subjunctive indicating reservation on the part of the speaker. A substantive quod clause (or noun clause) functioned as either a subject or an object of the main verb and appeared only with the indicative because the information presented in the quod clause is considered factual, not hypothetical. An example of a substantive quod clause expressing emotion and taking the indicative is as follows:

(10) Bene mihi evenit, quod mittor (indicative) ad mortem.
   “It is well for me that I am sent to death.”

A causal quod clause, as described above, could take either indicative or subjunctive, depending on the intention of the speaker. This use of the subjunctive is called “the subjunctive to express reservation.” When the reason given is that of the speaker, the indicative is used. When the reason is considered that of another person or if the speaker wishes to express a reservation, then the subjunctive is used. Bennett (185) gives the following example of the subjunctive used to express reservation:

(11) Socrates accusatus est quod corrumpet (subjunctive) juventutem.
   “Socrates was arraigned on the grounds that he was corrupting the young.”

The subjunctive to express reservation was used to let the hearer know that the speaker or writer did not necessarily agree with the information he/she was reporting. For instance, as in the preceding example, one could say “Socrates was arraigned on the grounds that he was corrupting the young.” If the writer agreed that Socrates was indeed guilty of corrupting young people, then the indicative was used. Use of the subjunctive, however, conveys the notion that the guilt was being implied by the accuser and not by the speaker.

The use of the subjunctive to express reservation on the part of the speaker is not uncommon in Latin in causal quod clauses, some of which incorporate expressions of emotion.²

(12) molestèque te ferre, quod me propter valetudinem tuam, cum ad urbem accessissem, non vidiissis (subjunctive).
   “You were vexed that owing to your indisposition you had missed seeing me when I approached the City walls.” (Williams, Epistolae adfamiliares, IV:1,1)

It is possible that the subjunctive vidiissis conveys the sense that Cicero is separating himself from the reason for his friend’s annoyance, perhaps to emphasize that the writer (Cicero) was not aware of his friend’s annoyance until he heard about it from someone else.

At this point one may question the relevance of the quod clause to this discussion, if it was used less frequently than the accusative + infinitive construction. It is important to note that in later Latin the quod clause gradually grew stronger at the expense of the accusative + infinitive construction and it appears that speakers chose to use the quod clause precisely because they could exploit the semantic nuance created by mood choice. After all, the accusative + infinitive construction could never permit mood choice.

What is even more significant for our study here is that the rise in use of the quod clause occurs first with expressions of emotion. Cuzzolin has shown that by the second century A.D., there was a greater frequency in the use of quod and quia after verba affectuum (i.e. verbs of emotion) and argues that this occurred because of the desire on the part of speakers to utilize the nuance of +/-subjectivity (208). By using the indicative they conveyed agreement with the idea, while use of the subjunctive allowed speakers to state an idea but at the same time distance
themselves from it. The only way for speakers to exploit this nuance was through verbal mood, and it therefore became necessary to implement a subordinating structure that took a finite verb form, namely the *quod* clause.

It is worthwhile to note that it can be difficult to classify a *quod* clause accurately following an expression of emotion. In the Latin sentence *gaudeo quod venisti* ("I am glad that you came") the *quod* clause may be functioning in one of two ways; it may be of the substantive type, with a translation "I am glad that you came" or it may convey a causal sense, in which case the translation would be "You came and therefore I am glad." According to the rules of Classical Latin, the second interpretation (i.e., causal) is the only one that can occur with both the indicative and the subjunctive, but with a corresponding shift in meaning. There is only a fine semantic line between a clause functioning causally ("I’m glad because you are here") and one functioning substantively ("I’m glad that you are here"). It is not difficult to see how a causal sense could become attached to a substantive *quod* clause following an expression of emotion and thereby opening a way for both moods to be used with this structure.

The important point here is that the *quod* clause in later Latin began to encroach upon the accusative + infinitive construction. This increase in use of the *quod* clause corresponded to a decrease in the use of the accusative + infinitive construction, a structure in which it was impossible to convey the feature of mood. At some point in very late Latin or (one could argue) early Romance, the *quod* clause became the primary subordinating structure.

Cuzzolin argues that this change in the syntax of subordination can be seen in later Latin. It began with verbs of emotion or factive verbs and then spread to semi-factive verbs, those which denote mental action (find out, discover, know, realize, etc.). From semi-factive verbs, the change in subordination from the accusative + infinitive construction to the *quod* clause then spread to assertive verbs (i.e. verbs such as admit, affirm, suppose, believe, etc.) that assert rather than presuppose their complement. Cuzzolin writes: "The reason for such a change, in my opinion, was the possibility of recovering the modal content of the subordinate sentence offered by the conjunctive clause and neutralized by Acl, and preserving in this way the subjective attitude typical of the true factive predicates" (209).

He also notes, but does not analyze, the increase in use of the subjunctive mood after the *quod* clause, as over time, the opposition ceases to exist between the accusative + infinitive construction and *quod* + clause. The new opposition is between the *quod* + indicative structure vs. *quod* + subjunctive structure (Cuzzolin 209, Vincent 70).

One may ask at this point how the *quod* clause is related historically to the modern *que* clause of Spanish? Harris argues that in Romance, the subordinating conjunction *quid* slowly took over the role of the primary subordinating conjunction from *quod*, as the two forms became homophonous in Western Romania. He contends that the Spanish complementizer *que* is a descendent of the Romance subordinating conjunction *quid* (224).

It appears then that the modern Spanish construction expression of emotion + *que* + subordinate clause finds its origin in the Latin *quod* clause, both substantive and causal. It is especially noteworthy that expressions of emotion appear to have been one of the catalysts for such a dramatic shift in the syntax of subordination. What is important for our argument here, though, is that in later Latin, expressions of emotion increasingly govern subordinate clauses because they allow speakers flexibility in creating nuance through mood choice. This cannot be understated in light of the present situation in Spanish. Historically, this construction was used in later Latin with both the indicative and the subjunctive and its very existence appears to have derived from the change in meaning possible with mood choice. We turn now to the evidence in Old Spanish.

**Mood Choice and Expressions of Emotion in Old Spanish**

In Old Spanish there is quite a bit of evidence showing expressions of emotion with both the indicative and subjunctive in the verb of the subordinate clause, a feature of Old Spanish that has
not gone unnoticed (Butt and Benjamin; Ferrell, Latin to Spanish; and Lope Blanch). Regarding mood use with expressions of emotion, there is one notable difference between Latin and Old Spanish. Verbs of fear no longer comprise a special category in Old Spanish. In contrast to Latin which required the subjunctive with verbs of fear, Old Spanish shows the use of both the indicative and the subjunctive with verbs of fear. There are a variety of Old Spanish texts that show the use of both the indicative and the subjunctive with expressions of emotion (Ferrell, Latin to Spanish). Examples from three of these texts are included here: Calila e Dimna (1251), I.1.6 translation of the Vulgate New Testament into medieval Spanish (1254–1270), and the Celestina (1499–1506).

Calila e Dimna (1251) is a fascinating collection of medieval stories translated from Arabic into Old Spanish. In this text there are forty-eight (48) expressions of emotion that take a noun clause. Thirty-six (36) of these take the indicative in their noun clause and only twelve (12) govern the subjunctive. The emotional expressions that govern noun clauses in the indicative cover five semantic groups: hope (10), amazement/wonder (1), happiness (1), and fear (24). The twelve that are followed by the subjunctive also have a semantic range of five domains, three of which overlap with the indicative. For the subjunctive these five domains are: hope (2), non-amazement/ wonder (1), pleasure (1), regret (1) and fear (7). Some examples of the indicative after expressions of emotion are given here:

(13a) et yo he esperança qu’ él será mejor servido que de otros algunos. (Blecua and Lacarra 129)
(13b) et ovo esperança que enartaría a Catra. (Blecua and Lacarra 273)
(13c) pues mayor maravilla será que pesquisará esta cosa et non lo justiciará. (Blecua and Lacarra 311)
(13d) alégrate que fecho me as grand bien, et siempre lo feziste así. (Blecua and Lacarra 219)

Expressions of emotion conveying fear are the most numerous of all the emotional expressions followed by the indicative and account for almost two-thirds of the data found in Calila e Dimna. Consider the following examples:

(14a) ca si él entendiere que esto tienes a coraçon, témome que lidiará contigo. (Blecua and Lacarra 153)
(14b) et que te non descubra lo que sope de las cosas, porque temo que morrés. (Blecua and Lacarra 155)
(14c) et temióse que se irian ante que lo viesen. (Blecua and Lacarra 237)
(14d) et ha miedo que lo tomarán los omnes et lo criarán en sus casas. (Blecua and Lacarra 296)

The I.1.6 translation of the Vulgate New Testament into medieval Spanish (1254–1270) is another example of a pre-fourteenth-century text in which the indicative is used more often than the subjunctive with expressions of emotion. This particular text yields a total of 15 instances of emotional expressions that govern a noun clause. Of these 15, 12 show the indicative in their noun clause and three show the subjunctive. The indicative forms occur in five semantic groups: amazement (3), pain/sorrow (3), fear (4), hope (1) and pleasure (1). The subjunctive covers a smaller semantic range in this text with fear (2) and displeasure (1). Several examples with the indicative are given here:

(15a) e aquella hora vinieron sos diciplos, e maravillavan se que fablava con la mugier. (Montgomery, Nuevo 157)
(15b) duelo me destas yentes que tres días a que travaian comigo e no an que comer. (Montgomery, El evangelio 48)
La Celestina exemplifies late-fifteenth- or early-sixteenth-century literature. In it there are 28 instances of noun clauses that appear after expressions of emotion. Of these 12 take the indicative and 16 take the subjunctive. The indicative covers four semantic groups: pleasure (4), fear (2), happiness (1) and hope (4). The subjunctive extends over five semantic groups: pleasure (4), fear (5), non-amazement (4), joy (1) and happiness (2).

Evidence from the three Old Spanish texts shows the use of both the indicative and the subjunctive with expressions of emotion. The Spanish represented in these texts shows a strong correlation with modern use, namely that both moods are used with expressions of emotion. It is likely that the use of both moods evidenced in Old Spanish has continued unbroken into modern Spanish, at least in oral speech. Modern varieties of the spoken language reflect the older stage of the language in this respect. Considering the examples from Costa Rica presented earlier that show a distinct change in meaning between indicative and subjunctive, it can be argued that a meaningful contrast based on mood choice has been employed since the origin of such clauses in later Latin. If the spoken language has remained relatively unchanged regarding the meaningful contrast between moods, we must consider how a prescriptive rule requiring the use of the subjunctive alone became established.

The Origin of the Prescriptive Rule

Based on their treatment of the subjunctive, Spanish grammars may be divided into two categories. Grammars in the first category are very basic in terms of grammatical information and focus on the morphology of the subjunctive. They tend to treat the subjunctive by listing individual forms. This morphologically or form-oriented grammar begins with Nebrija’s Gramática castellana in 1492 and represents the standard way to present grammatical information about the subjunctive until the mid-eighteenth century. The second type of grammar, which begins with the Royal Spanish Academy Grammar in 1771, moves away from the list of forms and divides subjunctive use according to semantic category, formulating corresponding rules of use that are syntactic.

Antonio de Nebrija authored the first Spanish grammar, Gramática castellana, which appeared in 1492. From a modern standpoint the grammar appears very basic, but considering that it was the first formal grammar of Spanish, it represents quite an achievement. In his grammar, Nebrija identified mood as one of eight features of the verb and gave the following definition of mood: aquello por lo cual se distinguen ciertas maneras de significado en el verbo (Nebrija 134). Nebrija recognized the existence of five moods in Spanish: the indicative by which one indicates what is done (from Latin indicare “to point out”), the imperative with which one issues commands, the optative which expresses desire, the subjunctive which is used to join two verbs in one sentence (from Latin subjungere “to join to, to connect with”) and the infinitive. With his classical training, Nebrija recognized Latin’s linguistically parental role in the development of Spanish, and it is not surprising that he attempted to create within Spanish grammatical parallels that he identified with Latin, such as the optative mood.

While Nebrija described the tenses and forms of each mood in great detail, he never addressed any rules of use. Morphology, or a detailed description of form, is the focus of this first grammar. Nebrija made almost no observations on the syntax of the subjunctive beyond stating that a subjunctive verb is connected to and depends on the appearance of another verb in the sentence. He did at times include the conjunctions si or como with his examples of subjunctive forms and o si with his examples of optative forms, not only indicating the grammatically subordinate position of these two moods within the oración or sentence, but also identifying several of the syntactic contexts in which the forms appear.

Subsequent grammars of Spanish follow the same pattern established by Nebrija. A survey
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of the early grammars of Spanish, from Nebrija (1492) to Texeda (1625) reveals that while the first grammarians identified a variety of moods and tenses within Spanish, their works were limited to descriptions of verb forms. Nebrija, Louvain (Vitil; Gramática), Sanford, and Texeda all focus on the forms of the subjunctive and optative moods. Within these grammars there is an increasing complexity in the creation of modal systems intended to explain the many different uses of the subjunctive. While limited in accuracy and inadequate in their description, they also exhibit a slight increase in the specification of words or phrases that must accompany the subjunctive or the optative. Nebrija and Louvain (Vitil) list only one or two phrases, while Texeda lists six or seven phrases that must occur with the optative and subjunctive moods.

While Correas includes an increasingly more precise semantic and syntactic description of the use of the subjunctive in subordinate clauses, the first bona fide syntactic description of subjunctive use triggered by a verb in the main clause appears in the Royal Spanish Academy’s 1771 grammar. It is still somewhat basic because it is limited to a description of matrix verb phrases that express will or desire, but it appears to be one of the first syntactic descriptions of the subjunctive.

Up to this point, no grammars of Spanish make any mention of subjunctive use with expressions of emotion. Considering that the first syntactic description is limited to verbs that express will or desire, this is not surprising. After the Royal Spanish Academy 1771 grammar, it is possible to trace a slowly growing awareness of different semantic domains of the subjunctive. From the first mention of a particular subjunctive use even remotely resembling an expression of emotion to the actual codification of the rule, four important grammars appear: Mordente (1817), Josse (1837), Bello (1847), and Ramsey (1894). Within these grammars we see a progression of awareness of this use of the subjunctive begin with a rudimentary identification of disparate verbs of emotion and grow to become a firmly established prescriptive rule mandating exclusive use of the subjunctive. We turn to the four grammars now.

After the Royal Spanish Academy grammar of 1771, it becomes quite normal for grammars to divide subjunctive use along semantic lines, with rules of use that govern the syntax of the structure. For example, Mordente’s 1817 grammar divides subjunctive use into three categories that from our perspective seem as awkward as they are incomplete in reaching a comprehensive view of subjunctive use. Again, we must remember that these represent the first attempts to formulate both a semantic and syntactic description of the subjunctive. Mordente’s three categories are: the subjunctive used after a superlative, the subjunctive used after verbs of fear and doubt, and the subjunctive used after certain conjunctions. It is within the second section, verbs of fear and doubt, that we see the first inclination to label verbs of “emotion” as a trigger of subjunctive use. Two comments must be made here. First, Mordente does not use the term “emotion” to describe this use of the subjunctive; the description “emotion” is first used by Bello in 1847. Second, Mordente’s description of this subjunctive use is combined with verbs of doubt, wish, etc. He writes: “A verb preceded by que is always put in the subjunctive after the verbs which express any doubt, wish, command, order, fear, ignorance, or any affection of the mind; and particularly after the following” (Mordente 223).

Following this explanation, Mordente appends a list of verbs that serve as examples: mandar, temer, prohibir, ignorar, desear, dudar, refusar, estar alegre, suplicar and querer. Mordente’s phrase “affection of the mind” combined with the fact that he includes temer and estar alegre in the following list of verbs constitute the first official mention of what will later be more specifically classified as “verbs of emotion,” a category that can trigger the subjunctive.

Josse goes further in developing a more detailed description of this use of the subjunctive by actually identifying individual verbs of emotion: surprise, fear and admiration. Like Mordente, his categorization of subjunctive use is rather broad and he too groups together various uses of the subjunctive under one heading. He writes that “verbs after que must be put in the subjunctive when the preceding verb expresses doubt, surprise, fear, admiration, uncertainty, desire, hope, will, permission, etc.” (81). Although identified individually, Josse’s recognition of surprise, fear and admiration as triggers of the subjunctive proves far less ambiguous than Mordente’s verbs.
that express an “affection of the mind.” Josse also gives an example of this subjunctive use: *Me admiro que no haya llegado,* “I am surprised that he has not arrived” (81).

Bello’s treatment of the subjunctive in his 1847 *Gramática de la lengua castellana* is significant for at least two reasons. He is the first grammarian to begin to divide the uses of the subjunctive according to their specific semantic nuance. For example, he treats volitional uses of subjunctive, as separate from the subjunctive used with clauses of doubt and emotion. While he classifies doubt and “emoción del ánimo” in one category, he is the first grammarian to actually use the word “emotion” to describe this particular use of the subjunctive. He writes: “piden de ordinario el subjuntivo común las palabras o frases subordinadas que denotan incertidumbre o duda, o alguna emoción del ánimo” (161). Bello includes two very clear examples of emotion followed by the subjunctive.

(16) Me alegro de que goces de tan buena salud.
   “I am happy that you are enjoying such good health.”

(17) Sienten mucho tus amigos que te resuelvas a expatriarte.
   “Your friends are very sorry that you are resolved to leave the country.” (161)

Prior to Bello’s analysis, expressions of emotion have not been clearly identified as such. Recall that Mordente spoke a bit ambiguously of “affections of the mind” and that Josse mentioned three specific emotions (surprise, fear and admiration), but did not identify the common denominator, emotion. Bello, then is to be credited with the identification of the category, expressions of emotion. But the story does not end here. While Bello identifies and labels the category, he never writes that the subjunctive is required with expressions of emotion. His observation is that there is a tendency to use the subjunctive after expressions of emotion. So one may ask at this point what is the point of origin of the prescriptive rule? The answer is simple: Marathon Montrose Ramsey.

Ramsey’s popular *Textbook of Modern Spanish*, first published in 1894 and then again in 1934, with a 1956 revised edition authored by Robert Spaulding, is the first to divide subjunctive uses into the categories used in modern pedagogy (doubt, desire, emotion, impersonal expressions, etc.). He gives each use its own numerical heading and formulates explicit prescriptive rules of use. He titles his treatment of the subjunctive use considered here “After expressions of emotion and feeling,” following which appears his explication of the rule with examples. Note his use of the word *require* regarding the use of the subjunctive with expressions of emotion in his formulation of the rule: “By extension of the foregoing usage the subjunctive is required after verbs expressing a feeling about an action of some other person or thing.”

Extraño que V. haya necesitado tanto tiempo.  I am surprised that you have needed so much time.

Celebro que le haya salido tan bien su empresa.  I rejoice that his undertaking has turned out so well for him.

Temo que se lo diga a ella.  I am afraid he will tell it to her.

Siento que Vds. se hayan visto precipitados a aguardame.  I am sorry you have been obliged to wait for me.

Tememos que este retardo sea fatal para nuestros proyectos.  We fear that this delay may be fatal to our plans. (1894 and 1934, 322; 1956, 417).

Ramsey’s contribution to this history is that he articulates a hard and fast rule prescribing only the subjunctive with expressions of emotion. What Bello described as a use of the subjunctive has become with Ramsey an invariable rule of use. The popularity of Ramsey’s text provides the last piece of the puzzle. His grammar was used as a primary reference for subsequent grammars and thus helped establish the authority of the prescriptive rule.

It is important to note Ramsey’s translations of the examples he gives of uses of the
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subjunctive with expressions of emotion. Looking just at the English, the different emotions represented are surprise, joy, fear and sorrow. This is particularly worthy of attention because following Ramsey, grammars of Spanish written in English through the 1930s are apt to continue this same explanation. Not only do the majority of Spanish grammars that follow Ramsey treat the subjunctive after expressions of emotion as a separate use of the subjunctive with its own heading, they tend to use the word “require” and the uses of emotion are the same four listed in Ramsey 1896. Consider the following examples:

(18) Use of the subjunctive mood in noun clauses after emotional verbs (joy, sorrow, fear, hope, surprise, etc.) (Seymour and Carnahan).

(19) After verbs and expressions denoting emotion (such as surprise, sorrow, joy, hope, fear), the subjunctive is used in the dependent clause except when the subject of both clauses is the same (Knickerbocker).

(20) The subjunctive is used after verbs expressing an emotional condition (joy, sorrow, regret, fear, etc.) (Leavitt and Stoudemire).

(21) The subjunctive is used after verbs of feeling or emotion such as joy, sorrow, fear, anger, or shame, when the principal and the dependent verbs have different subjects (Pittaro and Green).

Ramsey’s grammar is significant because the idea that the subjunctive is always used with expressions of emotion appears to have been locked in with his treatment and formed one of the primary references for subsequent grammars that continued to promulgate the prescriptive rule requiring subjunctive use with expressions of emotion in Spanish.

It is important to note that Espinosa and Wonder’s Gramática analítica (1976) does recognize that both the indicative and the subjunctive can be found with expressions of emotion in Spanish and provides two very strong examples. They argue that the use of the indicative expresses [-attitude] on the part of the speaker, while the subjunctive expresses [+attitude]. In all of the grammars and textbooks of Spanish that were reviewed for this paper, Espinosa and Wonder are the only authors that recognize and validate the use of both moods with expressions of emotion. The fact that subsequent grammars and textbooks make no mention of this and insist on the use of the subjunctive alone with expressions of emotion shows the tremendous pressure exerted by the first grammars and textbooks of Spanish and a general unwillingness to re-think the rules that have been handed down to us.  

Conclusion

A review of the influential prescriptive grammars of Spanish indicates that Ramsey was the first to formulate the rule prescribing only the subjunctive with expressions of emotion and that the popularity of his grammar made it a primary reference for subsequent grammars, insuring this particular rule a place in the prescriptive grammar of Spanish. But how do we explain the creation of a prescriptive rule that mandates a feature that has never been a part of oral speech? The answer is as simple as it is unsettling. It is that standard language rules often present an artificially neat syntax that is absent in the oral language. Cheshire and Stein call this “naïve language engineering” and accurately surmise that “the syntax of the standard variety often seems to result from an explicit attempt by grammarians to tidy up inherent fuzziness and indeterminacy of spoken syntax” (6). This is the most likely explanation of the situation discussed in this paper. Requiring only the subjunctive with expressions of emotion results in an efficient way of dealing with a particularly tricky structure. The difficulty of precisely describing the semantic nuances of mood choice with expressions of emotion is neatly avoided with a rule that requires only the
substantive. But this is a prescriptive rule that unnecessarily limits those who learn it. In fact, one could say it is not even Spanish to follow this rule: It is not Spanish in its history, either from Latin or Old Spanish. This rule is mostly an impostor which prohibits the creation of nuance and semantic interplay that are hallmarks of mood use in Spanish.

NOTES

1Vir (nominative) est agricola (nominative). “The man is a farmer” (McWhorter 1998).
2This is an important point. Expressions of emotion in Spanish that require the subjunctive in the subordinate clause (according to the prescriptive rule) are substantive, or noun clauses. These clauses in Latin required the indicative, not the subjunctive, because they represented something factual, not hypothetical. Causal clauses on the other hand, which are normally found with the indicative today in Spanish, are the ones that in Latin could take the subjunctive, if the speaker chose to express reservation concerning the ideas stated.
3In addition to the decline in use of the accusative + infinitive construction, the subordinating conjunction ut disappeared completely from Romance. Vincent argues that one consequence of the complete eradication of the particle ut was that the subjunctive was no longer dependent on a preceding subordinating conjunction, and speakers were free to assign a greater semantic role to it. He contends that this establishes “a pattern whereby the subjunctive and the indicative alternate according to the semantic circumstances” (70).
4In order to facilitate the identification of each citation from the I.3.6 manuscript, I include here the book, section, chapter and verse for each citation: (15a) John VI, 4:27; (15b) Matthew XV, 15:32; (15c) Luke IIII, 2:48; (15d) John II, 11:15.
5Peacock (1979) and Danesi (1982) argue convincingly for a reassessment of prescriptive grammar rules found in second-language textbooks because it is not uncommon for imprecise or incorrect rules to form part of the traditionally accepted grammar core. These rules negatively impact students who end up learning incorrect forms.

WORKS CITED

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