

## The Subjunctive in Present-day English: Revival or Demise?

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### *Abstract*

*The paper reviews and illustrates the uses of the subjunctive in BrE and AmE. Bevier (1931: 2017) argued that the subjunctive is a 'disappearing feature of the English language'; Foster (1968: 220) remarks that 'the subjunctive mood of the verb is a rather feeble and restricted device in modern English' and Harsh (1968:89) concludes that the 'inflected subjunctive forms decline to the point of non-existence in present-day English'. According to Givón (1993: 274), towards the end of the twentieth century 'the old grammatical category of subjunctive has almost disappeared'. More recently, Peters (2004: 520) concluded that the 'subjunctive is a pale shadow of what it used to be'. The aim of this paper is to investigate recent changes in the use of the subjunctive mood, an inflectional category of the verb. The empirical data reported in this paper show that AmE is leading world English in the revival of the mandative subjunctive. The paper also focuses on the variation between the were-subjunctive and the indicative in the subordinate clause of a conditional sentence. The use of would + be instead of the were-subjunctive in counterfactual if-clauses is largely confined to informal, spoken English. In AmE this use is met with strong prescriptive reaction, one side-effect being a tendency towards a hypercorrect use of were in non-counterfactuals.*