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Autor(en): **Auer, Anita**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **SPELL : Swiss papers in English language and literature**

Band (Jahr): **36 (2018)**

Heft 36: **The Challenge of Change**

PDF erstellt am: **22.06.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-787124>

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Jane Austen's Sensitivity to the Subjunctive as a Social Shibboleth¹

Anita Auer

Over the last fifty years, the language of Jane Austen has received much attention, especially as she lived at the time when “correct” English grammar was codified, but education opportunities were still variable across social layers and regarding gender. Her language use, in manuscript and print, therefore allows for the study of the influence of eighteenth-century normative grammars. In his work on Austen's language, Phillipps (155) makes some interesting claims about her use of the subjunctive, i.e. a linguistic feature that underwent change during the Modern English period. He suggests that (a) Austen was sensitive to “correct” language use and aspired to it, (b) her sensitivity is reflected in the corrections carried out in different editions of her novels, and that (c) she used the subjunctive more frequently than can be found in present-day novels. To verify these suggestions, this paper investigates Austen's subjunctive use in her novels and letters.

Key words: Jane Austen, subjunctive, mood, normative grammar, historical sociolinguistics

¹ I want to thank the editors and the anonymous reviewer for their useful comments on a previous version of this paper. Any remaining shortcomings are my own.

1. Introduction

K. C. Phillipps' monograph *Jane Austen's English* (1970), which constitutes the earliest comprehensive study of Jane Austen's language (for more recent studies, see Page, Tieken-Boon van Ostade's *In Search of Jane Austen*, and Bray), contains the following statement about Jane Austen's use of the subjunctive mood:

Jane Austen seems to have used the subjunctive in appropriate contexts when she thought about it; a good deal oftener than it would be found in a modern novel. A 'correct' use of the subjunctive was something to which she clearly aspired; we see this from corrections in later editions of her work, done in her lifetime. It seems natural enough that Mr Darcy's housekeeper should maintain that she could not meet with a better master "if I *was* to go through the world" (*PP* 249); this is the reading of the first (1813) edition. But in the second (1813) and third (1817) editions, the subjunctive form *were* appears. Similarly in this quotation from the second (1816) edition of *Mansfield Park*, where the first (1814) edition has *was*: Whether his importance to her *were* quite what it had been (*MP* 417). (Phillips 155)

Phillipps makes some interesting claims in the latter quote, namely (1) the suggestion that Jane Austen was sensitive to "correct" language use and that she aspired to it, (2) that this sensitivity with respect to subjunctive use is reflected in the corrections carried out in different editions of her novels, and (3) that Jane Austen used the subjunctive more frequently than can be found in present-day novels. All of these claims are illustrated and most likely also based on a couple of changes of past indicative forms into past subjunctive forms, i.e. "whether his importance to her *was* quite what it had been" into "whether his importance to her *were* quite what it had been." This scarcity of empirical evidence immediately poses a number of questions: How frequently did Jane Austen in fact use the subjunctive in her novels? How does Austen's subjunctive use compare to that of other authors of novels, both contemporary and present-day? How much say did Jane Austen have in the publication process of her novels, i.e. can changes in language in different editions of her novels be attributed to her or to an editor? Based on the latter question, if it were the case that changes had been carried out by an editor, what does this tell us about Jane Austen's actual language use and her sensitivity to "correct" language use?

This essay seeks to address the above-listed questions by investigating Jane Austen's subjunctive use in her novels and letters and by viewing the results in the context of the standardisation of the English lan-

guage and the history of education, and, in particular, Jane Austen's education, her view on language as well as her involvement in the publication of her novels.

2. The aspiration to "correct" language use in Jane Austen's lifetime

In Jane Austen's lifetime (1775-1817) state-supported education did not exist. Female education in higher social classes was carried out at home either by the parents or a tutor, or in a boarding school. In any case, it was largely confined to practical and religious training that would prepare the young ladies for their domestic role. The teaching of classical languages and literature largely appears to have been a masculine privilege. Jane Austen and her sister Cassandra were briefly taught by a Mrs. Cawley in 1783 and from 1785 to 1786 they attended the Abbey Boarding school in Reading (cf. Ross 9-10; see also Nokes, Tomalin, and Le Faye, *A Family Record*). Apart from that, Jane Austen was educated at home. Note that grammars of English such as Robert Lowth's *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762), which has been ascribed a normative status and is by many considered a key publication and a model for other grammars (see for instance Tieken-Boon van Ostade, *Grammars*), had already been published when Jane Austen received her education. Devlin claims that "We can be sure that she [Jane Austen] had read Locke's *Thoughts* and Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son*; we know that she read Dr Johnson ('my dear Dr. Johnson'), Blair's *Rhetoric* and Sherlock's sermons, but we can be certain of very little else" (49). While this suggests that Jane Austen was familiar with Dr. Johnson's works, it is not clear whether this includes Johnson's dictionary, which is prefaced by an English grammar. It is therefore also not possible to elicit what kind of English grammar models Jane Austen was taught, if she was taught any at all.

Grundy (189) argues that, unlike her brothers who studied the classical literary canon at school, Jane Austen did not inherit an obvious, precisely defined literary tradition. Her reading, which was extensive in the fields of history and *belles lettres*, was desultory. One result of this lack of comprehensive and systematic knowledge of one literary tradition can be found in the fact that Austen does not confer authority on her fictional work by quoting great writers. Nevertheless, books play an important role in Austen's novels for "the daily uses that people make of their reading," which is reflected "in conversation, argument, and the shaping of imaginative characters" (Grundy 190).

The period during which Jane Austen lived and wrote her novels has been much investigated by language historians because the written English language was codified and thus standardised in spelling books, grammars, and dictionaries at the time. Within that context, it is interesting to investigate Jane Austen's sensibility to grammatical issues and in particular the subjunctive mood.

3. The development of the subjunctive mood in Late Modern England

As indicated in Section 2, grammarians in the Late Modern English period (1700-1900) were concerned with codifying the English grammar and recommending certain "correct" linguistic features while stigmatising others, as e.g. pied piping versus preposition stranding (cf. Yañez-Bouza) and the use of *you were* versus *you was* (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, *You Was* 91-95; Laitinen 208; Auer, *Nineteenth-Century English* 162-65). As regards the inflectional subjunctive, certain grammarians such as Johnson (Preface), Priestley (15), Lowth (52), Buchanan (174-75; see quote below), and Brittain (128; see quote below) were aware of the gradual decline of subjunctive usage in the history of English and commented on it, and some even advocated a revival of the inflectional subjunctive in their grammars. A couple of illustrative quotes are provided below:²

The Subjunctive Mood differs but little, in English Verbs, from the Indicative Mood: yet as there is some difference, and that difference established by the practice of the politest Speakers and Writers, however unattended to by others; it will become me to place that difference before you. (White 9)

The Mood, [. . .] formerly used by the purest Writers, and by some called the Conjunctive Mood, [. . .] is entirely neglected by modern Writers; who instead of Writing, if thou burn, tho' he refuse, unless he repent, whether he acknowledge it, &c. the Indicative, and write, if thou burnest, though he refuses, unless he repents, whether he acknowledges it, &c. (Buchanan 174-75)

The Subjunctive mood seems, indeed, daily falling into disuse; each respective conjunction sufficing to express all that this mood implies. It is, however, often retained, especially in poetry and oratory; to avoid the too fre-

² For a detailed account of descriptions of the subjunctive mood in Late Modern English grammars see Auer, *The Subjunctive* Chapter 2).

quent and hissing sound of *s*. So, that, in general, if the sound permits it, the indicative may be used. (Brittain 128)

The statements made by some grammarians, as illustrated by White's quote above, clearly indicate that the subjunctive mood was considered a social shibboleth, i.e. the use of this linguistic feature distinguished "polite" speakers and writers from those that did not belong to the educated elite (cf. Auer, *The Subjunctive* 61).

From a usage point of view, by the Late Modern English period, i.e. the time during which Jane Austen lived, the inflectional subjunctive had become almost identical in form to the indicative. In the present tense it is only possible to tell a difference in the third person singular of verbs, i.e. while the indicative in the present tense carries the agreement suffix *-s* (*she writes*), the inflectional subjunctive lacks this suffix (*she write*). Even though the verb *to be* marks an exception in that the subjunctive form differs from the indicative form in all persons, most existing studies on the subjunctive as well as this study are restricted to the third person singular in the present tense for comparative purposes. As linguists today, as well as eighteenth-century grammarians, have agreed that the functions of the subjunctive have largely been taken over by modal auxiliaries or the indicative mood (see for instance Jespersen 623; Denison 160; Traugott 148; see also Auer, *The Subjunctive*), the inflectional subjunctive is best compared to these two competitors. The modal auxiliaries that serve as competing forms are *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *must*, *shall*, *should*, *will* and *would*. The three competing options in the present tense are illustrated below, notably based on Jane Austen's manuscript novels:³

a) *Inflectional subjunctive:*

At the same time do not forget my real interest; – say all that you can to convince him that I shall be quite wretched if he remain here; – you know my reasons – Propriety & so forth. [ms. *Lady Susan*, p. 132]

b) *Modal auxiliaries:*

If the old Man would die, I might not hesitate; but a state of dependance on the caprice of Sir Reginald, will not suit the freedom of my spirit; – and if I resolve to wait for that event, I shall have excuse enough at present, in having been scarcely ten months a Widow. [ms. *Lady Susan*, p. 125]

³ Source: <http://www.janeausten.ac.uk/>

c) *Indicative:*

Miss Manwaring is just come to Town to be with her Aunt, & they say, that she declares she will have Sir James Martin before she leaves London again. [ms. *Lady Susan*, p. 142]

In the past tense the difference between indicative and subjunctive forms is even more difficult to determine, which is why the data in the past tense is usually restricted to the verb *to be*, as illustrated below:

d) *Past subjunctive:*

I charged her to write to me very often, & to remember that if she were in any distress, we should be always her friends. [ms. *Lady Susan*, p. 150]

e) *Past indicative:*

Her folly in forming the connection was so great, that tho' Mr. Johnson was her Guardian & I do not in general share her feelings, I never can forgive her. [ms. *Lady Susan*, p. 119]

Before investigating Jane Austen's subjunctive use in some detail, I will present the overall development of the subjunctive form during the Late Modern English period and beyond based on the multi-genre ARCHER corpus, which reveals some interesting results with regard to both the present and the past subjunctive (see account above; cf. Auer, *The Subjunctive* 70). The discussion is restricted to adverbial clauses, which are introduced by the following conjunctions: *if, though, tho', before, whether, ere, unless, however, whatever, except, whatsoever, whomsoever, howsoever, whosoever, whoever, lest, until, till, as if, although, and so that*. The corpus was searched for the conjunctions, and it was then determined whether the conjunctions were followed by the inflectional subjunctive, the indicative, or modal auxiliaries (see examples a-e above).

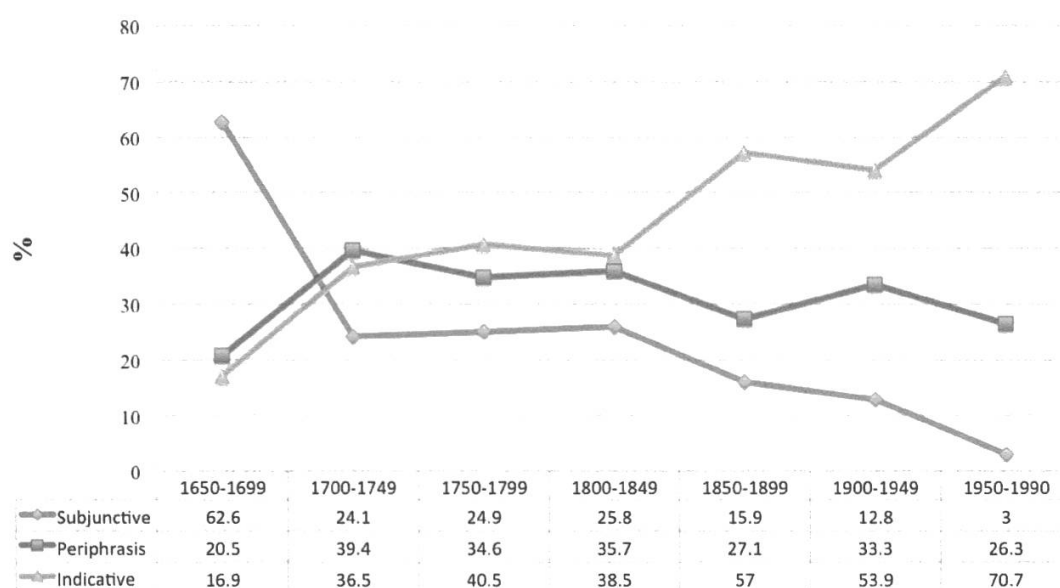


Figure 1. *The diachronic development of the present subjunctive* (cf. Auer, *The Subjunctive* 70)

The present subjunctive development in Figure 1 clearly shows that the form swiftly declined from 1650 onwards, with its functions being taken over by both the indicative and the modal auxiliaries. From 1700-1749 to 1800-1849, we can observe a stabilisation in the present subjunctive use, notably c. 25%, which is followed by a further decline and near-disappearance in the present day. In Auer (*The Subjunctive* 71), I suggest that “[f]actors that gradually led to an increase in usage can be considered to be the enormous influx of grammar books in the country and the determination of social climbers to become part of the ‘polite British society’ by acquiring the correct and polite English grammar.” It is noteworthy that Jane Austen wrote during the observed period of stabilisation of the present subjunctive.

As regards the past subjunctive and therefore the variation between indicative *was* and subjunctive *were* in the third person singular following the previously listed conjunctions, the investigation of the ARCHER corpus reveals a fairly frequent use of subjunctive *were* in 1650-1699, notably at 70.3%. In line with the present subjunctive development, subjunctive *were* then rapidly declines to 34.8% in 1700-1749 and 20.8% in 1750-1799. Thereafter, notably in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, the use of the form stabilises and even increases slightly in the second part of the nineteenth century, notably 27.4%. In the period 1900-1949, subjunctive *were* decreases to 20% and then increases again to 40% in 1950-1990.

It is thus both for the present and the past subjunctive that we can observe a stabilisation of the forms during the lifetime of Jane Austen.

4. Jane Austen's use of the inflectional subjunctive

Even though, as previously observed, we cannot know for certain how Jane Austen was taught English grammar and whether she was familiar with certain grammar books, Phillipps' comment above does suggest that Jane Austen was aware of the subjunctive as a social shibboleth and therefore aspired to use this particular linguistic feature. This assumption as well as whether Jane Austen's usage is in line with the temporary stabilisation of the subjunctive forms will be tested below.⁴

4.1. The Jane Austen text collection

In order to investigate Jane Austen's subjunctive use and to draw conclusions regarding her sensitivity to this particular linguistic feature as a social shibboleth, three sets of texts have been selected. First, available manuscript material written by Jane Austen will be investigated. The texts to be studied with respect to the subjunctive usage are taken from Kathryn Sutherland's digital edition of *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts*, which is freely available online (accessed in March 2011).⁵ This project, which brings together fiction written in Austen's own hand, covers the writer's development from her childhood (1787, aged 11/12) to her death in 1817 (aged 41). The manuscript material will thus serve as a test case regarding subjunctive usage in comparison to her published novels and letters. The second set of texts to be studied are published editions of Jane Austen's highly acclaimed novels *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), *Northanger Abbey* (1818), *Persuasion* (1818), *Sense and Sensibility* (1818) (ed. by R.W. Chapman) as well as her shorter and/or unfinished novels *Lady Susan* (1794), *The Watsons* (1804), and *Sanditon* (1817). Third, R. W. Chapman's edition (ed. 1995) of Jane Aus-

⁴ It needs to be pointed out that the multi-genre corpus ARCHER does contain data by Jane Austen, which has not been excluded in the study by Auer (*The Subjunctive*). As it only concerns a small sample, i.e. 2 letter samples (1800, 1815) and a sample from the novel *Persuasion*, this would not have had a major effect on the overall findings (see also footnote 11).

⁵ The manuscripts can be viewed on the following website: <http://www.janeausten.ac.uk/>

ten's private letters to her sister Cassandra and others, as well as additional letters written by Jane Austen, will serve as a data corpus.⁶ The three sets of texts will briefly be described below.

4.1.1. Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts

The fiction manuscripts retrieved from Sutherland's digital edition, which will be investigated in terms of subjunctive use in Section 4.2, are fair copies of *Juvenilia* (3 volumes, c. 1792-1793) and *Lady Susan* (c. 1805), two draft chapters of *Persuasion* (July 1816), as well as drafts of *The Watsons* (c. 1804/1805) and *Sanditon* (1817).⁷

Juvenilia, Volume the First (MS. Don. e. 7, Bodleian Library Oxford) is a compilation of sixteen of Austen's early works, which represent a variety of genres such as stories, playlets, verses and moral fragments. The final inscription in the fair copy indicates that the transcription was completed on 3 June 1793. The earliest pieces were most likely composed when Jane Austen was aged 11 or 12, i.e. around the time that she left Abbey School in Reading (JAFM website – *Juvenilia: Part 1* – head note). *Volume the Second of Juvenilia* (Add. MS. 59874, British Library, London) contains nine compositions, namely two brief epistolary novels, i.e. *Love and Freindship* and *Lesley Castle*, a spoof *History of England*, and five pieces that are entitled *Scraps*. The dates inscribed in this fair copy suggest that *Juvenilia, Volume the Second* was written between 1790 and 1793, which means that Austen must have been aged 14 to 17 at the time. Sutherland refers to Southam (ed. iv) when stating that the date/s of transcription, if at all distinct from composition, are likely to have been copied out before 6 May 1792, which is when Jane Austen started writing *Juvenilia, Volume the Third* (JAFM website – *Juvenilia: Part 2* – head note). This final volume (Add. MS. 65381, British Library, London) contains two early unfinished novels, which are entitled *Evelyn* and *Catharine, or the Bower* (JAFM website – *Juvenilia: Part 3* – head note).

⁶ I am grateful to Victorina González-Díaz for allowing me to use her Jane Austen text collection (both novels and letters) compiled from the *Oxford English Text Archive* and the web. Thanks also go to David Denison and Linda van Bergen for the plain text (searchable) version of *Jane Austen's Letters to her sister Cassandra and others* (ed. by R. W. Chapman in 1952). I am aware of the existence of newer letter editions, however, for comparative purposes with González-Díaz's work, I have decided to use the same corpora (11).

⁷ Additional information on Austen's works can be found in Sutherland (*Jane Austen's Textual Lives*).

Even though some works contained in the three *Juvenilia* volumes were composed earlier than others, I will take all three volumes together in the subjunctive investigation below and take the transcription dates as points of reference, thus 1792/1793.

The untitled and unfinished manuscript of *The Watsons*, which now exists in two portions (MS. MA 1034, Morgan Library & Museum, New York; no accession number, Queen Mary, University of London), contains *c.* 17,500 words and appears to be the beginning of a novel. *The Watsons* was first published in 1871, but was probably composed during Jane Austen's stay in Bath in 1804/1805 (see Austen-Leigh (*Memoir* [1871: 295], as referred to on JAFM website – *Watsons* – head note).

The fair copy of the novella *Lady Susan* (MS. MA 1226, Morgan Library & Museum, New York), which was given this title only upon publication in 1871, was composed no earlier than 1805. This fair copy may be considered the only complete manuscript of Austen's novels that has survived. Nevertheless, the first published edition (1871) is based on a non-authorial copy (JAFM website – *Lady Susan* – head note).

The two chapters of *Persuasion* (MS. Egerton 3038, British Library, London) are believed to be the only surviving holograph extracts of any of Jane Austen's novels. The first edition of *Persuasion* was published posthumously in 1818. The two draft chapters, which were written in July 1816 (according to the three dates given on the manuscript fragment, i.e. *July 8, July 16. 1816, and July 18.- 1816*), did not make it into print; instead, these two concluding chapters were replaced by a new version that Jane Austen must have written between 18 July and 6 August (memorandum of Cassandra Austen) (JAFM website – *Persuasion* – head note).

The untitled manuscript of the unfinished novel *Sanditon* (no accession number, King's College, Cambridge) contains 120 pages (*c.* 24,000 words), which make up approximately a fifth of a completed novel. The dates inscribed on the manuscript, i.e. *Jan: 27.-1817; March 1.st, and March 18*, suggest that Jane Austen was working on this draft during the period January to March 1817 (JAFM website – *Sanditon* – head note).

These fiction manuscripts will thus be compared to Jane Austen's printed texts, i.e. to the extent possible. This comparison is bound to give some insight into Jane Austen's language use and possible changes that may have been carried out.

4.1.2. Jane Austen's Printed Novels

One of the questions I raised in the introduction was how much of a say Jane Austen had in the publication process of her novels. In order to shed light on this issue, we need to take a look at the publication history of Austen's novels. Southam ("Texts and Editions" 51) appropriately describes the history of Jane Austen's texts as "relatively uncomplicated". Of Austen's six acclaimed novels no manuscript has survived, except for one fragment, i.e. two chapters that were planned to mark the ending of the novel *Persuasion*. This thus means that the published texts available for comparison with manuscripts are very limited. Out of the six novels, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Mansfield Park* were the only three of which second editions were published during Jane Austen's lifetime. According to Southam ("Texts and Editions" 51), "the only revisions certainly attributable to the author relate to the incomes in *Sense and Sensibility* and an area of naval detail in *Mansfield Park*."

Jane Austen started writing *Sense and Sensibility* in 1795, *Pride and Prejudice* in 1795, and *Northanger Abbey* in 1798. A first step to get an early version of *Pride and Prejudice* published was taken by Austen's father in November 1797 but this attempt was not successful (Southam, ed. 4). Similarly, *Susan*, which may be considered an early version of *Northanger Abbey*, even though sold to the London publisher Benjamin Crosby in 1803, was never published. The first of Austen's novels to be printed was *Sense and Sensibility*, which was published "on commission," i.e. at Austen's expense, by Thomas Egerton in October 1811. Due to the success of the novel, Egerton suggested to publish a second edition, which came out in October 1813. As mentioned above, some revisions were made to the 1813 edition. As Southam states, "either Egerton or Austen herself, took the opportunity to make corrections and three significant changes" ("Texts and Editions" 52).

Table 1 provides an overview of Jane Austen's potential involvement in the editing and printing of her novels.

The overview in Table 1 suggests that Jane Austen could have potentially only been involved in the editing / publication of few of her novels, notably *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park* and *Sense and Sensibility*, but there is no firm proof that she was involved and that she corrected English grammar. Nevertheless, it will be interesting to see how the subjunctive was used.

Edition investigated here	Background information	Jane Austen's involvement in the publication of her novels
<i>Pride & Prejudice</i> (1813)	first and second edition published in 1813, third edition in 1817	first or second edition – copyright sold to Egerton, no record that JA had any involvement with later editions
<i>Mansfield Park</i> (1814)	first edition 1814 (Egerton), second edition 1816 (Murray)	“Austen corrected mistakes in her use of naval language; and throughout the novel the punctuation was changed, how much by Austen and how much by the new printers – a different one was employed for each volume – is uncertain.” (Southam 52)
<i>Emma</i> (1816)	first and only edition (Murray), published at the author's expense	no knowledge of JA's involvement with editing / the publication
<i>Sanditon</i> (1817)	first published in 1925	JA did not finish the novel, no involvement in the publication process
<i>Northanger Abbey</i> (1818)	one edition, published by Murray in a four-volume set	published after Jane Austen's death, no control by JA
<i>Persuasion</i> (1818)	one edition, published by Murray in a four-volume set	published after Jane Austen's death, no control by JA
<i>Sense & Sensibility</i> (1818)	first edition 1811 (Egerton), published at the author's expense; second edition in 1813	JA could have potentially been involved (cf. Southam 52)
<i>Lady Susan</i> (1871 [1794])	probably written in 1794 but first published in 1871	no control by JA
<i>The Watsons</i> (1871 [1804])	writing started in 1804 (not completed) but first published in 1871	no control by JA

Table 1. *Jane Austen's involvement in the printing of her novels, based on Southam (“Texts and Editions” 51-54)*

4.1.3. The Letters⁸

The entire collection contains 171 out-letters, of which 96, i.e. 56.1%, are addressed to Jane Austen's sister Cassandra (see footnote 5). The letters to Cassandra were written over the period of 21 years, from 1796 to 1817.⁹ It is this particular collection of Austen's letters that was edited by R. W. Chapman (second edition, 1952). In order to ensure that the data is philologically accurate, I have compared samples from Chapman's edition with Deirdre Le Faye's 1995 letter edition. The latter edition, which is based on Chapman's collection, states in the preface that "the printed version reflects as closely as possible Jane Austen's own spelling, capitalization, and punctuation [. . .]." Based on the samples that were compared and showed not to differ in spelling, it may be assumed that Chapman also tried to stay as close to the original as possible.

The study of Jane Austen's subjunctive use will be based on the method outlined in Section 3 above. This allows for a comparison to the ARCHER findings, both with regard to the present subjunctive and the past subjunctive.

4.2. Jane Austen's sensitivity to the subjunctive

With respect to the inflectional subjunctive and its competitors in adverbial clauses, a distinction in presentation and discussion will be made between (a) third person singular present forms and (b) third person past subjunctive versus past indicative (*were* vs. *was*).

⁸ It is noteworthy that Tiekens-Boon van Ostade in her monograph *In Search of Jane Austen*, which is based on manuscript letters, also focuses on the subjunctive use (194–200). Unfortunately, it was not possible to use the findings for comparative purposes as the method applied is different from the one used here. More precisely, while Tiekens-Boon van Ostade has also used conjunctions as search terms (notably not entirely overlapping with the ones used in Auer, *The Subjunctive* and here), she only provides tokens of inflectional subjunctive forms and does not provide a systematic comparison with competing forms, i.e. indicative forms and modal auxiliaries, which is the focus of the current study. As a consistent method is required for the comparison with the ARCHER findings (Auer, *The Subjunctive*) as well as the comparison between the inflectional subjunctive and its competing forms, I provide a separate analysis of the subjunctive and its competitors here.

⁹ For a discussion of Jane Austen's use of the subjunctive across her life-span, see Tiekens-Boon van Ostade, *In Search of Jane Austen* 199.

First, Jane Austen's fiction manuscripts will be looked at (see Table 2) as this text collection reveals her actual (unedited) language use.

Manu- scripts	Juvenilia (1792/1793)	The Watsons (1804/1805)	Lady Susan (1805)	Persua- sion (2 ch.; 1816)	Sanditon (1817)	Total
Pres. Subj.	-	1 (5.3%)	6 (17.7%)	-	-	7 (4.5%)
Modal Aux.	40 (54.1%)	10 (52.6%)	15 (44.1%)	6 (85.7%)	8 (36.4%)	79 (50.6%)
Pres. Indic.	34 (45.9%)	8 (42.1%)	13 (38.2%)	1 (14.3%)	14 (63.6%)	70 (44.9%)
Total (present)	74	19	34	7	22	156
Past Subj.	13 (41.9%)	3 (37.5%)	5 (41.7%)	3 (50%)	5 (35.7%)	29 (40.8%)
Past Indic.	18 (58.1%)	5 (62.5%)	7 (58.3%)	3 (50%)	9 (64.3%)	42 (59.2%)
Total (past)	31	8	12	6	14	71

Table 2. *The subjunctive and its competitors (present and past) in Jane Austen's fiction manuscripts*

The study of the manuscripts' language reveals that Jane Austen rarely used the inflectional subjunctive in the present tense. In fact, she clearly preferred modal auxiliaries and indicative forms in the third person singular in adverbial clauses. To compare the total numbers (column on the right), there are only 7 instances (4.5%) of the present subjunctive as opposed to 79 instances (50.6%) of modal auxiliaries and 70 instances (44.9%) of indicative forms. Interestingly enough, the subjunctive forms are found in only two texts, namely 1 instance in *The Watsons* (1804/1805) and 6 instances in *Lady Susan* (1805). The subjunctive examples in sentences 1-5 will be illustrated below:

(1) You know how glad we are to have any of you with us; – if it be for months together. [*The Watsons*, p. 8/6]

(2) Thoughtful & pensive in general her countenance always brightens with a smile when Reginald says anything amusing; & let the subject be ever so serious that he may be conversing on, I am much mistaken if a syllable of his uttering, escape her. [*Lady Susan*, p. 65]

- (3) She shall have all the retribution in my power to make; – if she value her own happiness as much as I do, if she judge wisely & command herself as she ought, she may now be ^{easy} ~~at peace~~. [*Lady Susan*, p. 106]
- (4) At the same time do not forget my real interest; – say all that you can to convince him that I shall be quite wretched if he remain here; – you know my reasons – Propriety & so forth. [*Lady Susan*, p. 132]
- (5) This Event, if his wife live with you, it may be in your power to hasten. [*Lady Susan*, p. 144]

It has been claimed by Strang that the subjunctive has largely become a function of the verb *to be* from the fifteenth century onwards. It is thus striking that Jane Austen, when on rare occasions she chose the present subjunctive over the indicative and modal auxiliaries, used the subjunctive form with lexical verbs, notably, *escape*, *value*, *judge*, *command*, *remain*, *live* (all of which are found in *Lady Susan*), rather than the verb *to be*, which can only be found in the single example from *The Watsons*. It remains to be seen whether Jane Austen's published novels and letters reveal similar results.

As regards the competition between past subjunctive (*if he were*) and past indicative forms (*if he was*) in Austen's manuscripts, the data show that Jane Austen used the past indicative more frequently than the past subjunctive, i.e. 42 instances (59.2%) of indicative forms versus 29 instances (40.8%) of subjunctive forms. A comparison between the present and the past tense results indicates that Jane Austen, if she was in fact aspiring to "a 'correct' use of the subjunctive" (cf. Phillipps 155), was clearly more inclined to use the past subjunctive rather than the present subjunctive. We now turn to the question of whether this distribution is also reflected in Jane Austen's published novels.

As most of Austen's novel editions were published posthumously, these data will not allow us to find out to what extent they are representative of her language use. Nevertheless, the novel data can reveal similarities and/or stark differences to the manuscript material. The findings of the corpus-based investigation are presented in Table 3.

Novels	Lady Susan 1794	The Watsons 1804	Pride & Prejudice 1813	Mansfield Park 1814	Emma 1816	Sanditon 1817	Northanger Abbey 1818	Persuasion 1818	Sense & Sensibility 1818	Total
Subj. pres.	6 (19.4%)	0	4 (2.7%)	8 (4.9%)	11 (5.8%)	0	10 (12.7%)	3 (3.7%)	4 (3.4%)	46 (5.5%)
Perip.	12 (38.7%)	8 (53.3%)	87 (58.8%)	105 (64.4%)	100 (52.9%)	5 (31.3%)	46 (58.2%)	58 (71.6%)	81 (69.2%)	502 (59.8%)
Indic. pres.	13 (41.9%)	7 (46.7%)	57 (38.5%)	50 (30.7%)	78 (41.3%)	11 (68.7%)	23 (29.1%)	20 (24.7%)	32 (27.4%)	291 (34.7%)
Total present	31	15	148	163	189	16	79	81	117	839
Subj. past	7 (63.6%)	3 (50%)	34 (45.3%)	44 (55.7%)	63 (66.3%)	5 (41.7%)	11 (22.4%)	31 (59.6%)	27 (38%)	225 (50%)
Indic. past	4 (36.4%)	3 (50%)	41 (54.7%)	35 (44.3%)	32 (33.7%)	7 (58.3%)	38 (77.6%)	21 (40.4%)	44 (62%)	225 (50%)
Total past	11	6	75	79	95	12	49	52	71	450

Table 3. *The three-way distribution (third person singular present tense) in Jane Austen's novels*

Table 3 shows that Jane Austen did not use the inflectional subjunctive in adverbial clauses very often in her novels – only 5.5% (46 instances) as opposed to 59.8% modal auxiliaries (502 instances) and 34.7% indicative (291 instances). The distribution is thus fairly similar to that in Austen's manuscript texts. In the published novels the form is not used at all in *The Watsons* (1804) and *Sanditon* (1817). In comparison to the competing forms, *Lady Susan* (1794) contains the highest percentage figure of subjunctive forms with 16.7% (6 instances), followed by *Northanger Abbey* (1818) with 12.7%. In fact, a comparison between Austen's *Lady Susan* manuscript and the published novel reveals that exactly the same sentences contain the subjunctive forms (see examples 1-5 above), all of which are lexical verbs. Even though the first published edition of *Lady Susan* (1871) is based on a non-authorial copy (see above), the sentences with subjunctive forms are exactly the same as those found in Austen's autograph manuscript. This clearly indicates that there was no editorial interference with regard to the subjunctive in this particular case. Con-

sidering the other published novels cannot be compared to autograph material, an insight into Austen's subjunctive use may be gained by investigating (a) the lexical verb vs. *to be* distribution and (b) how the Jane Austen novel results relate to contemporary and present-day usage.

As for the distribution of lexical verbs and *to be* in all the novels containing the present subjunctive in the third person singular in adverbial clauses, 22 instances of *to be* are contained, i.e. 47.8%, as opposed to 24 lexical verbs (52.2%), which are *have* (3), *get* (2), *live* (2), *marry* (2), *remain* (2), *speak* (2), *continue* (1), *command* (1), *cost* (1), *escape* (1), *fall* (1), *grow* (1), *judge* (1), *make* (1), *take up* (1), *think* (1), and *turn* (1). While, in contrast to the results in *Lady Susan*, the distribution between lexical verbs and *to be* is more balanced in total, this outcome differs greatly from an investigation of other LModE fiction as contained in *A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers* (ARCHER).¹⁰ The fiction samples in ARCHER clearly prefer *to be* to lexical verbs. There are 75.9% of *to be* as opposed to 24.1% of lexical verbs. Jane Austen's use of the present subjunctive may thus be seen as more archaic in comparison to her contemporaries, i.e. based on the fact that she preferred lexical verbs to *to be*, which had become the more frequently used verb choice since the fifteenth century. As concerns a comparison to present-day usage of the subjunctive, considering that the form has almost disappeared (see Figure 1), Jane Austen has used the subjunctive form more frequently (cf. Auer, *The Subjunctive* 82).

As regards the past subjunctive use, i.e. subjunctive *were*, in adverbial clauses in Jane Austen's novels, the comparison of the total in Table 4 reveals 50% indicative *was* and 50% subjunctive *were*. This suggests equal variation between the past subjunctive and the past indicative forms overall in Jane Austen's published novels. The most striking imbalance can be observed in *Northanger Abbey* (1818) where subjunctive *were* only makes up 22.4%, followed by *Sense and Sensibility* (1818) with 38%. In comparison to the ARCHER data (cf. Auer, *The Subjunctive* 77-78), Austen's past subjunctive use in her published novels is much higher than the findings for the period 1800-1850, which was 25.6%.

If we compare the overall distribution to the past subjunctive use in the autograph material, we notice that the use of past subjunctive forms in Austen's manuscripts is lower by almost 10%. Interestingly enough, the *Lady Susan* manuscript contains fewer past subjunctive forms than the edited version, notably 41.7% in the manuscript version versus

¹⁰ It is noteworthy that ARCHER contains one sample from *Persuasion*, which does however not contain any present subjunctive forms.

63.6% in the edited version. This may be taken as an indication that somebody must have carried out some changes.¹¹

Novels	Lady Susan 1794	The Watsons 1804	Pride & Prejudice 1813	Mansfield Park 1814	Emma 1816	Sanditon 1817	Northanger Abbey 1818	Persuasion 1818	Sense & Sensibility 1818	Total
Subj.	7 (63.6%)	3 (50%)	34 (45.3%)	44 (55.7%)	63 (66.3%)	5 (41.7%)	11 (22.4%)	31 (59.6%)	27 (38%)	225 (50%)
Indic.	4 (36.4%)	3 (50%)	41 (54.7%)	35 (44.3%)	32 (33.7%)	7 (58.3%)	38 (77.6%)	21 (40.4%)	44 (62%)	225 (50%)
Total	11	6	75	79	95	12	49	52	71	450

Table 4. *Past subjunctive versus past indicative (were vs. was) in Jane Austen's published novels*

In Table 5, a comparison of the subjunctive use in Jane Austen's published novels and her letters reveals that Austen's use of the inflectional subjunctive in the present tense in her letters is even lower than in her novels, i.e. 4.7% in the letters as opposed to 5.4% in the novels. It is noteworthy that while the predominant form in the novels is the periphrasis, i.e. the modal auxiliaries, with 59.9%, in the letters, the indicative is the most frequently used form with 63.4%.

	Austen's published novels	Austen's letters
Subjunctive	45 (5.4%)	12 (4.7%)
Periphrasis	502 (59.9%)	82 (31.9%)
Indicative	291 (34.7%)	163 (63.4%)
TOTAL	838	257

Table 5. *The three-way distribution (third person singular present tense) in Austen's novels and letters*

As for the past subjunctive (Table 6), in both the published novels and the letters, the distribution is fairly equal, i.e. around 50% of subjunctive *were* and indicative *was*.

¹¹ The topic of the editors' influences on Austen's language has also been discussed in relation to two versions of *Mansfield Park* (cf. edition by Sutherland and Tiekens-Boon van Ostade, *In Search of Jane Austen* 214-21).

	Austen's published novels	Austen's letters
Subjunctive	225 (50%)	17 (47.2%)
Indicative	225 (50%)	19 (52.8%)
TOTAL	450	36

Table 6. *Past subjunctive versus past indicative (were vs. was) in Austen's novels and letters*

As already pointed out with regard to the printed novels, Jane Austen's past subjunctive use exceeds the average use at the time, which was much lower at 25.6%.

5. Concluding remarks

This essay set out to examine and empirically test Phillipps's suggestion (155) that Austen was aware of the subjunctive as a social shibboleth, and that, more generally, Austen was sensitive to "correct" language use. With regard to the subjunctive, this was, according to Phillipps, reflected in the corrections that were carried out in the different editions of her novels. These points will be discussed in turn here. As regards Jane Austen's subjunctive use in her novels, it is striking that the manuscript novels only contain very few present subjunctive forms (4.5%), notably as opposed to c. 40% of past subjunctive forms. What is striking though is that Austen mostly used the subjunctive form with lexical verbs rather than *to be*, which had mostly become associated with the subjunctive mood at the time. The present subjunctive use in Austen's published novels reflects the findings of the manuscript novels, i.e. there are very few present subjunctive forms (5.5%). Here the distribution between *to be* and lexical verbs is approximately half and half, which is still not representative of the distribution in contemporary novels and other genres, where *to be* is clearly favoured with the subjunctive (cf. Auer, *The Subjunctive* 83-84).

The comparison between Lady Susan's manuscript and the published version shows complete agreement with regard to the present subjunctive forms, i.e. no changes have been carried out. This is however not the case with the past subjunctive where the published version contains more subjunctive forms, therefore indicating that an editor must have interfered; after all, the novel was only published in 1871 and thus long after Austen's death.

A comparison of the subjunctive use in Jane Austen's published novels and her letters reveals that the present subjunctive use in her letters is even lower than that in her novels, while the past subjunctive use in her letters – albeit slightly lower – almost matches the use in her novels.¹²

Finally, how much say did Jane Austen have in the publication process of her novels and can changes in language in different editions of her novels be attributed to her or to an editor? As most novels were published posthumously, it is difficult to make comparisons. As previously pointed out, it is striking that no changes have been made with respect to the present subjunctive from manuscript to the posthumously printed novel, however, an editor added some past subjunctive forms to the printed version.

The findings presented in this essay suggest that Jane Austen was not aware of the subjunctive as a “correct” form of language to be adhered to, i.e. in comparison to contemporary subjunctive use. In any case, it would appear that the past subjunctive – rather than the present subjunctive – was considered a politeness form and possible social shibboleth, i.e. the eighteenth-century ideology of politeness was linked to class membership and the use of what became “standard English” (cf. Watts 162). Not only was this form found more frequently in Jane Austen's language (in comparison to the present subjunctive), it was also the form that editors made changes to, i.e. converting indicative *was* to subjunctive *were* in adverbial clauses. I did not consider the subjunctive use (present and past) of different characters in Austen's novels, but the low number of subjunctive occurrences would have most likely not allowed us to make strong claims about the subjunctive as a social shibboleth. Linked to this, it would be interesting to consider the latter matter with regard to Late Modern English novels that feature characters from different social layers of society, for instance the works by Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Dickens; after all, Austen's characters are largely representative of the middling sorts. Novels by Gaskell and Dickens may therefore be a better testing case for the use of the subjunctive as a social shibboleth.

¹² For a discussion of Phillipp's claim in relation to Austen's language use in her letters, see Tieken-Boon van Ostade, *In Search of Jane Austen*.

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