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**Autor:** Morrissey, Michael D.  
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## The Past, the Polite, and the Unreal: Deferential Tense Usage in the "Cid"

In his grammatical analysis of the *Cantar de Mio Cid*, Menéndez Pidal describes the use of the present and past (-se form) subjunctive, and of the imperfect indicative and conditional, as deferential alternatives to the imperative and present indicative respectively<sup>1</sup>. The present paper hopes to show that 1) in spite of Mendeloff's argument to the contrary<sup>2</sup>, the present subjunctive, as well as the past subjunctive, did in fact have this meaning, and that, furthermore, the latter indicated a greater *degree* of deference than the former; and that 2) the deferential use, as well as certain other "modal" uses, of these three tenses, have a common basis, a basis which also reveals their close historical relationship.

### *Present Subjunctive*

Menéndez Pidal's description of the use of the present subjunctive in affirmative second person commands "para atenuar la fuerza imperativa"<sup>3</sup> echoes Meyer-Lübke's observations, although the latter gives examples only from Old French and Provençal where he states explicitly that the present subjunctive replaces the imperative "in der höflichen Anrede"<sup>4</sup>. An example of this usage in the *Cid* is v. 2634: "Oyas [vs. oye], sobrino, tú, Félez Muñoz!<sup>5</sup>". Mendeloff, however, on the basis of a textual analysis of representative medieval texts, argues that the Old Spanish present subjunctive in fact occurs "indiscriminately and interchangeably with the true imperative"<sup>6</sup>. Of the total of 212 affirmative commands in the second person in the *Cid*, for example, he found no correlation of usage in terms of the social situation, and many cases of "true concurrence, that is, where both forms occur within the framework of single, uninterrupted utterances, all related factors remaining constant." For example, when the Cid is instructing Muño Gustioz to take his message to King Alphonse, he says: "Lieves [subjunctive] el mandado a Castiella al rey Alfons; / por mi bésale [imperative] la mano ... (vv. 2903-2904)."

<sup>1</sup> RAMON MENÉNDEZ PIDAL, *Cantar de Mio Cid: Texto, Gramática, y Vocabulario*, Madrid 1944, vol. I, § 156, 163, 167.

<sup>2</sup> HENRY MENDELOFF, *A Note on the Affirmative Commands in Old Spanish*, *Philological Quarterly* 44 (1965), 110-113.

<sup>3</sup> MENÉNDEZ PIDAL, *op. cit.*, vol. I, § 156.

<sup>4</sup> W. MEYER-LÜBKE, *Grammatik der Romanischen Sprachen*, Leipzig 1899, vol. III, § 118.

<sup>5</sup> MENÉNDEZ PIDAL, *op. cit.*, vol. III.

<sup>6</sup> MENDELOFF, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

Mendeloff's conclusion, however, is based on two false assumptions. First of all, he assumes that the use of the present subjunctive, if it was in fact a deferential alternative to the imperative, should be predictable, given simply the identity of the speaker and hearer. But many complex factors may be involved in the motivation of a speaker to use a deferential form. For example, Mendeloff finds (p. 111) the Cid's use of the present subjunctive in demanding redress of grievances on the part of the Infantes de Carrión "particularly striking, since attenuation of his demand would be unthinkable under the circumstances...": "Destos averes que vos di yo, / si me los dades, o dedes dello razón (vv. 3216–3216b)." On the contrary, the use of a deferential form (*dedes*) in these circumstances is quite understandable, not necessarily as an indication of respect for the Heirs themselves, but for the formality of the circumstances—a trial. This also explains the past subjunctive in v. 2233 (*tomassedes*), spoken by Minaya when addressing the Heirs during the same trial, a usage which Mendeloff doesn't deal with, but which is probably even more deferential than the present subjunctive (see discussion below). Secondly, the adduction of instances of "true concurrence" as proof of the non-meaningful variation of the two forms is based on the assumption that a speaker must always use one of them, exclusive of the other, with a particular hearer. But there is no more reason to assume this than there is to assume, for example, that a speaker either must always accompany a command to a given individual with *por favor* (or *please*), or else never do so—obviously an absurd hypothesis. Both of these assumptions, no doubt, were influenced by the situation which obtains in the case of the deferential pronouns in the modern Romance languages, since here the usage (of *tú* ~ *Vd.*, French *tu* ~ *vous*, etc.) is pretty well predictable in terms of who is addressing whom, and consistent (although, even here, there was some inconsistency in the medieval languages). But, again, why should we assume that the verbal forms should reveal such overt and strict patterning as the modern pronominal forms, any more than we would expect this of expressions like *por favor*?

It seems safe to assume that the motivation for both Menéndez Pidal's and Meyer-Lübke's hypothesis that the present subjunctive was used as a deferential command was at least partly provided by the fact that this is a familiar interpretation of the same form in early Latin (as Pidal says, "...como en latin *cautus sis*..."), in both affirmative (jussive) and negative (prohibitive) commands, but especially in the latter:

...el subjuntivo presente es la fórmula prohibitiva más atenuado y cortés [vs. the perfect subjunctive or imperative] ...Lo emplean generalmente las personas de baja categoría social para dirigirse a sus superiores, en especial los esclavos al hablar a sus dueños<sup>7</sup>.

Although this meaning of the present subjunctive command, according to Löfstedt<sup>8</sup>,

<sup>7</sup> M. BASSOLS DE CLIMENT, *Sintaxis histórica de la lengua latina*, Barcelona 1948, vol. II, § 234.

<sup>8</sup> LEENA LÖFSTEDT, *Les expressions du commandement et de la défense en latin et leur survie dans les langues romanes* (*Mémoires de la Société Néophilologique de Helsinki* 29), Helsinki 1966, p. 113–122, 126–137.

had disappeared by classical times, the same problem of interpreting the Old Spanish forms must also exist for the Latin forms. If, for example, it is true, that the usage became unpredictable in terms of social relations (slave-owners), this does not necessarily mean that any semantic distinction disappeared altogether, nor that the distinction was not still one of deference. Furthermore, as Moignet points out in the case of Old French, the occurrence of a present subjunctive for an expected imperative may have several possible explanations, including archaizing stylistic tendencies, or metrical demands, any one of which might be involved in any particular occurrence<sup>9</sup>. And, although Moignet doesn't mention deference as one of the possible meanings of the subjunctive command, it is significant that both he and Löfstedt, as well as Cuervo, for old Spanish<sup>10</sup>, explain at least some of the occurrences of this form as "optative subjunctives":

Ce voisinage immédiat des subj. potentiel et optatif est, croyons-nous, en plus de la rareté du subj. prés. jussif, la raison ou au moins une des raisons pour lesquelles les grammairiens, depuis Donat, ont attribué le sens d'un commandement atténué au subj. prés. jussif<sup>11</sup>.

What this reveals is the failure to recognize that an optative expression can be used as a command, and that an "optative command" is an attenuated command. It is quite apparent in modern usage that one of the ways to soften the abruptness of a command is to express it as a wish or desire. This takes the onus, as if were, off the listener by implying, albeit hyperbolically, that his execution of the speaker's desire is not taken for granted, thus preserving his sense of autonomy. For example, the Spanish sentence *Quisiera que me hagas esto*, or English *I'd like you to do this for me*, are commands, just like *Hazme esto* or *Do this for me*, the difference being an affective one of courtesy or discretion. In English and modern Spanish, of course, the optative expression is constructed differently than the simple imperative, but in Latin, and also in Old Spanish (where introductory *que* was not obligatory), since such an expression could be constructed with the subjunctive alone, it would be formally identical to a jussive subjunctive.

Finally, the hypothesis that the present subjunctive functioned, at least some of the time, as a deferential command in the medieval languages is strengthened by evidence of this usage in the modern languages where the subjunctive-imperative distinction survives. According to García de Diego, for example, the "imperativo atenuado" or "suplicante" survives in the colloquial Spanish of Burgos, in sentences like *Me dejéis sitio*<sup>12</sup>. And, in Romanian, although the usual meaning of the subjunctive command, versus the imperative, involves the relative futurity of the action en-

<sup>9</sup> GÉRARD MOIGNET, *Essai sur le mode subjonctif en latin postclassique et en ancien français*, Paris 1959, p. 305-306.

<sup>10</sup> ANDRÉS BELLO - RUFINO J. CUERVO, *Gramática de la lengua castellana*, ed. N. ALCALÁ-ZAMORA Y TORRES, Buenos Aires 1960, p. 459 N 96.

<sup>11</sup> LÖFSTEDT, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>12</sup> VICENTE GARCÍA DE DIEGO, *Gramática histórica española*, Madrid 1951, p. 347.

visaged, sometimes the distinction is only a matter of courtesy, as in *Să poftiți cu mine* 'Please come with me,' which is more polite than *Poftiți cu mine* or *Veniți cu mine*, a fact which, although not mentioned in the standard grammars<sup>13</sup>, is confirmed by native speakers. Furthermore, although the present subjunctive command in modern Provençal, according to Camproux, as in Romanian, "indique proprement l'éventualité, c'est-à-dire un futur, présenté avec tout ce qu'il peut y avoir de fortuit dans l'idée de futur"<sup>14</sup>, it is interesting to note that the semantic link between the expression of futurity and of deference shows up also in the use of the future indicative as a command form—as, for example, in French *Je suis en retard, tu m'excuseras*<sup>15</sup>.

### *Past Subjunctive*

Menéndez Pidal also mentions the use in the *Cid* of the *-se* form of the past (imperfect) subjunctive in commands "para dar al mandato un tono de ruego cortés"<sup>16</sup>. Of the three occurrences of this usage in the second person in the poem, all occur under very formal circumstances: "Fossedes mi huesped, si vos ploguiesse, señor (v. 2046)", spoken by the Cid, when he meets with the king; "Dexássedes-vos Çid de aquesta razon (v. 3293)", spoken by Fernando Gonzalez, one of the Heirs of Carrión, during his trial, to the Cid, protesting his accusations; "dovos estas dueñas, – amas son fijas dalgo, – / que las tomássedes por mugieres ... (vv. 2232–2233)", spoken by Minaya, when he formally gives the Cid's daughters in marriage to the Heirs. In the last example, depending on how *que* is interpreted, the second line could be translated as 'take them for wives', or 'so that you might take them for wives', but in either case, the choice of the past subjunctive, rather than the imperative or present subjunctive, surely indicates a concession of the speaker to the formality of the circumstances.

Evidence of the past subjunctive as a deferential command elsewhere in Romance tends to substantiate this interpretation. It is apparently not attested in Latin, but, according to Löfstedt, "le subjonctif imparfait exprime un jussif [affirmative command] poli" in Old Provençal and Old French, as well as in Old Spanish<sup>17</sup>. In the negative, the past subjunctive command is attested in Old Italian (and still in some modern dialects) and Catalan, as well, although it is not clear from Löfstedt, nor from Rohlfs (her source), that the usage is specifically deferential, in this case<sup>18</sup>. But in both positive and negative commands, as in the case of the present subjunctive, this

<sup>13</sup> For example, KR. SANDFELD, *Syntaxe roumaine*, Paris 1936, vol. I, § 291; GRIGORE NANDRIȘ, *Colloquial Rumanian*, London 1953, p. 160, § 12.5.

<sup>14</sup> CHARLES CAMPROUX, *Etude syntaxique des parlers gévaudanais*, Paris 1957, p. 95.

<sup>15</sup> LÖFSTEDT, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>16</sup> MENÉNDEZ PIDAL, *op. cit.*, vol. I, § 156.

<sup>17</sup> LÖFSTEDT, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

<sup>18</sup> For Italian, G. ROHLFS, *ItGr.* II, § 611; for Catalan, G. ROHLFS, *Das romanische HABEO-Futurum und Konditionalis*, *Archivum Romanicum* 6 (1922), 151.



usage persists in modern Provençal, where, as Camproux explains: "Le subjonctif imparfait ajoute une nuance de prière, de supplication, de recommandation, c'est-à-dire au fond, une nuance qui insiste sur l'irréalité possible de l'exécution de l'ordre"<sup>19</sup>. For example, he translates *Mi la coupessiat pas* as 'Je vous en prie, ne me la brisez pas (mais hélas, je sais que vous allez me la briser)'.

Menéndez Pidal doesn't raise the question of a possible difference in meaning between the two tenses of the subjunctive, but it is quite plausible that the past subjunctive expressed a greater *degree* of deference than the present<sup>20</sup>. This is exactly consonant with what Camproux calls "l'irréalité possible de l'exécution de l'ordre" expressed by the past subjunctive, as opposed to the lesser degree of doubt indicated by the present. This modal distinction between the two tenses of the subjunctive, which began to supercede the temporal one in classical Latin, in conditional sentences, and in other ("optative" and "potential") independent uses of the subjunctive, survives in modern Spanish in optative expressions like *Ojalá que esté en casa*, versus *Ojalá que estuviese* (~ *estuviera*) *en casa*, where the predication (his being at home), in the first instance, is seen as uncertain, but in the second, as totally unreal and hypothetical. In the case of commands, the element of doubt expressed by both tenses of the subjunctive is used hyperbolically, as a concession of courtesy to the addressee: the command is expressed *as if* there is some doubt about its execution, implying that the reaction of the person addressed is not taken for granted. The past subjunctive, in turn, by emphasizing this doubt, also emphasizes and increases the attenuation of the command.

### Conditional

Pidal cites two examples in the *Cid* of the deferential use of the conditional<sup>21</sup>. In one, it is used to express "una negación cortés": when the king asks the Cid to give his daughters in marriage to the Heirs of Carrión, the Cid responds "Non abría fijas de casar... (v. 2082)". The meaning of this is explained a few lines later, when he says "Hyo las engendré amas e criáste las vos (v. 2086)", and still later, "Vos casades mis fijas, ca non gelas do yo (v. 2110)". This demurring of the Cid to express any prideful claim to authority in the marriage of his daughters demonstrates his obeisance to the king. According to Menéndez Pidal, "se sobreentiende 'si vos no me las pidieseis'", but I think the effect of *abría* is clearer if we understand simply "si vos me las pidieseis": thus, we understand 'if you asked me for my daughters, I wouldn't have any daughters to marry anyway, since you are the real authority in this matter'. In the

<sup>19</sup> CAMPROUX, *op. cit.*, p. 100-101.

<sup>20</sup> Formal distinctions of degree of deference are not at all uncommon; for example, in the pronominal systems of Portuguese (*tu* ~ *você* ~ *o senhor* ~ *Vossa Excelência*), Romanian (*tu* ~ *mata* ~ *dumneata* ~ *dumneavoastră*), etc.

<sup>21</sup> MENÉNDEZ PIDAL, *op. cit.*, vol. I, § 167.

other example, the conditional expresses "un ruego humilde": when Minaya asks the king to allow the Cid's daughters to leave the monastery where he left them and go to him in Valencia, he says: "merçed vos pide el Çid, si vos cadiesse en sabor, / por su mugier doña Ximena e sus fijas amas a dos / saldrién del monesterio do elle las dexó, / e irién por Valençia al buen Campeador (vv. 1351-1354)." As in the first example, *saldrién* and *irién* can be related to a "condicional tácita", such as "si fuese posible", but the protasis could also be identified as "si vos cadiesse en sabor" in v. 1351. Whether the protasis is explicit or not, though, the conditional, as opposed to the present indicative, in all three of these examples, clearly is motivated by courtesy, since its effect is to remove the predication from reality, to hypothesize it, and indicate that its realization is dependent on the approval of the person spoken to.

### *Imperfect Indicative*

Menéndez Pidal cites one example of the deferential imperfect in the *Cid*, a usage which, referred to by later commentators as "el imperfecto de cortesía"<sup>22</sup>, or "presente opinativo"<sup>23</sup>, "atenúa cortesmente la enunciación de un juicio". When Martín Antolínez reminds Raquel and Vidas that he deserves a commission (*calças*) for arranging the pawning of the Cid's coffers, he says: "Yo, que esto vos gané, bien mereçia calças (v. 190)." Szertics gives some other examples of this usage from the *Romancero*—for example, "— Dígasme tu, caballero, como *era* la tú gracia?" and "Oh mi primo Montesinos! lo que agora yo os *rogaba*, / que quando yo fuere muerto y mi ánima arrancada, / vos llevéis mi corazón adonde Belerma estaba"<sup>24</sup>. The problem in interpreting these forms is that, in the modern languages, what we call the "imperfecto de cortesía", "imparfait de politesse", etc., is used only with a few verbs expressing wish or desire, as in *Quería preguntarle...*, *Qué deseaba Vd.?*, etc. But it is quite possible that, in Old Spanish, the imperfect indicative could be used as an autonomous modal inflection, a function which today is restricted to the conditional. If this is true, it would explain, as relics of this older usage, not only the "imperfecto de cortesía", but also what Szertics calls the "imperfecto desrealizador" of children's fantasies (e.g., *Yo era el rey, tú la reina*)<sup>25</sup>, the colloquial use of the imperfect in the apodosis (and, more rarely, the protasis) of conditional sentences (e.g., *Yo, si fuera el Papa, negaba la licencia*)<sup>26</sup>, and its "potential" use in sentences like *No. A los dos pasos nos encontrábamos con algún conocido* 'No. At the second step we would meet

<sup>22</sup> JOSEPH SZERTICS, *Tiempo y verbo en el romancero viejo*, Madrid 1967, p. 93, and A. M. BADÍA MARGARIT, *Ensayo de una sintaxis histórica de los tiempos*, *Boletín de la Real Academia Española* 28 (1948), 295.

<sup>23</sup> GARCÍA DE DIEGO, *op. cit.*, p. 344.

<sup>24</sup> SZERTICS, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>25</sup> SZERTICS, *op. cit.*, p. 68. What in French is called «l'imparfait préludique».

<sup>26</sup> ROBERT K. SPAULDING, *Syntax of the Spanish Verb*, Liverpool 1958, § 110.

someone we knew'<sup>27</sup>. What all of these imperfects have in common is their affinity with the conditional—in fact, they are usually described as "replacements" of the conditional, since there is very little, if any, semantic difference between them in these uses (*Quería ~ querría preguntarle...*, *Yo era ~ sería el rey*, *Nos encontrábamos ~ nos encontraríamos con algún conocido*, etc.).

*Merecería*, then, probably would have been easily substitutable for *merecía* in v. 190, the meaning being that he *would* deserve a commission, *if* Raquel and Vidas should offer him one, implying, again, as a matter of courtesy, the dependency of the statement on the will of the addressees. This functional similarity between the imperfect and the conditional, as Sziertics points out<sup>28</sup>, is evident also in many instances of the special use of the imperfect in the *Cid*, and, more extensively, in the *Romancero*, which Menéndez Pidal rather enigmatically calls "el solecismo peninsular"<sup>29</sup>, but which Sziertics quite rightly interprets, at least in many cases, as the same "imperfecto desrealizador" as in *Yo era el rey*. This, I think, is the best interpretation of these two examples of the *Cid*: "mio Çid vos saludava... (v. 1482)", and "Besávavos las manos mio Çid lidiador (v. 1322)", when Minaya greets Abengalbón and King Alphonse, respectively, on behalf of the Cid. The meaning, then, is 'He would greet you', and 'He would kiss your hands', *if* he were present, which he is not. As in the case of the deferential conditional and imperfect, the predication is unrealized, hypothesized, only here the implied condition of its realization is not the approval of the listener, but the presence of the Cid. Of course, other explanations of these imperfects have been offered, such as the influence (*contagio*) of surrounding "narrative imperfects"<sup>30</sup>, or the use of the "estilo indirecto libre"<sup>31</sup>. The latter theory would argue that *saludava* and *besava* in the examples above, although obviously part of a direct quotation of what Minaya actually is supposed to have said ("mio Çid..."), actually appear as they would in indirect narration, with omission of the introductory verb *dijo*, in which case the best translation of v. 1482 would be: 'Minaya said that the Cid greeted (sent his greetings to) him (the king)'. This interpretation seems implausible, however, and unnecessary, at least in these examples.

Another example which Menéndez Pidal gives of the "solecismo peninsular" is "como a la mie alma yo tanto vos quería (v. 279)", spoken by the Cid to his wife, just before going into exile. Meyer-Lübke interpreted this as a "Bescheidenheits-imperfectum"<sup>32</sup>, but Sziertics is probably correct in seeing it as "un caso de antici-

<sup>27</sup> SPAULDING, *op. cit.*, § 34.

<sup>28</sup> SZERTICS, *op. cit.*, p. 77-78 and p. 86 N 16.

<sup>29</sup> MENÉNDEZ PIDAL, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 163. A better label is perhaps García de Diego's «presente condicional» (p. 344), or, better yet, «imperfecto condicional».

<sup>30</sup> SZERTICS, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>31</sup> SZERTICS, *op. cit.*, p. 75, and STEPHEN GILMAN, *Tiempos y formas verbales en el «Poema del Cid»*, Madrid 1961, p. 114, N 13.

<sup>32</sup> MEYER-LÜBKE, *op. cit.*, vol. III, § 105.



pación... Se nos figura como si el Cid se viese ya separado de su mujer, y hablase desde el destierro...<sup>33</sup> This, it seems to me, although Sziertics classifies it as an "imperfecto de irrealidad", is quite different from the previous examples: here, the imperfect does not perform a modal function, and hence is not replaceable by the conditional. Surely it is not intended to express any doubt as to the reality of the Cid's love, or of his expression of it—certainly not for reasons of deference. The imperfect here, as an indicator of real past time, serves merely to emphasize the finality of the impending separation, even though it has not yet begun at the moment of speaking.

Historically, it is not surprising that the imperfect in Old Spanish should have had this generalized modal capability, which today is reserved for the conditional. The conditional was, after all, in origin, an imperfect indicative tense (type *amare/amari habebam*), with a meaning of 'future-in-the-past', whose modal use, according to Bassols de Climent, that is, "con valor irreal o potencial", and with present (or "universal"), rather than past, time reference, is not attested until Augustine<sup>34</sup>. This transition of the conditional—that is, of the constructions made up of the imperfect indicative of *habere* + infinitive, which became the western Romance conditional—was encouraged by two factors. First, it had always been possible in Latin to use the indicative, when the verb itself expressed ideas of possibility, obligation, or propriety, which were concepts normally expressed by the subjunctive: for example, *Hic potest quispiam quaerere* 'Here someone may ask' versus *Hic quaerat quispiam*, and, likewise, *Argentum reddere debes* 'You ought to return the money' for *Argentum reddas*. Secondly, as early as Plautus, the imperfect subjunctive began to express the meaning of 'present unreal' (or 'contrary-to-fact'), which originally had been conveyed only by the present subjunctive, a change which took place not only in conditional sentences, but also in "optative" and "potential" subjunctive constructions<sup>35</sup>.

Putting both of these considerations together, we see that this temporal shift affected the indicative, as well as the subjunctive, in the case of those verbs which, by their lexical nature, could express subjunctive ideas in indicative form<sup>36</sup>. With this dual transition—of modality and of time reference—in mind, we are not surprised to find, not only precursors of the Romance conditional in sentences like *Sanare te habebat Deus per indulgentiam si fatereris* 'God would cure you out of kindness, if you confessed'<sup>37</sup>, but the modal use of the imperfect indicative with other verbs, as well—for example, *Illud erat aptius, aequum cuique concedere* 'It would be more

<sup>33</sup> SZERTICS, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>34</sup> BASSOLS, *op. cit.*, vol. II, § 110.

<sup>35</sup> BASSOLS, *op. cit.*, vol. II, § 191.

<sup>36</sup> BASSOLS, *op. cit.*, vol. II, § 164.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted by BASSOLS, *op. cit.*, vol. II, § 110, from Augustine, as the first attested modal use of the construction HABEBAT + infinitive.

fitting to yield each one his rights'<sup>38</sup>, which bears a striking resemblance to one of Menéndez Pidal's examples of the "solecismo peninsular": "Non era maravilla si quisiesse el rey Alfons, / fasta do lo fallássemos buscar lo iríamos nos (v. 1950–1951)" 'It would be no marvel if King Alphonse (had) wanted us to go wherever we might find (have found) him'. What seems to be suggested by the frequency of these imperfects in Old Spanish is that the use of the indicative for the subjunctive with verbs (or verbal expressions) like *est aptius*, *posse*, *debere*, *velle*, and *habere*, was extended to other verbs, like *merecer* (v. 190), and even to those expressing actions, like *saludar* (v. 1482) and *besar* (v. 1322). Indeed, if the interpretation suggested here of these forms in the *Cid* is correct, such an assumption seems unavoidable.

One last point needs to be made. The deferential use of the imperfect, either in attenuated statements of opinion, as in v. 190 ("presente opinativo"), or of desire (García de Diego's "presente desiderativo"), as in *Quería preguntarle...*, is typically "explained" as if it were an indication of real past time, rather than of present unreality—for example, Badía Margarit:

En general, puede decirse que con el imperfecto de cortesía el hablante rehuye la fuerza del presente, ofreciendo el hecho como sucediendo en el pasado, con el objeto de presentarlo de la manera menos inoportuna posible...<sup>39</sup>.

Szertics, on the other hand, does imply a connection between the "imperfecto des-realizador" and certain others of its uses ("atenuación", "anticipación", "idealización", "gradación"), including the "imperfecto de cortesía", since he includes them all in a chapter entitled "Imperfecto de irrealidad", but he doesn't make this relationship clear. Bassols de Climent compares the Latin use of the imperfect in a sentence like *Istuc volebam ego ex te percontarier* 'I wanted to ask you about that' with the modern equivalent (*Quería...*), and even with the medieval "solecismo peninsular"<sup>40</sup>, but fails to see its relationship with, on the one hand, the *conjunctivus modestiae* (*Istuc velim...*), and, on the other, the modern conditional (*Querría...*). This relationship is the historical one outlined above—that the imperfect indicative, at least with certain verbs (including *velle*), came to acquire the capability of expressing the (normally subjunctive) idea of present unreality, a situation which led, in the case of *habere*, to its emergence as the autonomous modal inflection we call the (western) Roman conditional. In this perspective, we can describe the deferential function of the imperfect in exactly the same way we describe it in the case of the conditional: neither indicates real past time in this usage, but, rather, both serve to "unrealize" or "conditionalize" the predication of the verb, implying, as a concession of courtesy to the addressee, that its realization is contingent on his approval.

<sup>38</sup> Cited, with translation, by JOSEPH ALLEN – JAMES GREENOUGH, *Latin Grammar*, Boston 1874, § 60.2.

<sup>39</sup> BADÍA MARGARIT, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

<sup>40</sup> BASSOLS, *op. cit.*, vol. II, § 71.

### *Conclusion*

The conclusion to all of this is, in a word, that the various uses we have described of these tenses have a common denominator, which also reveals their historical relationship. The common denominator is, first of all, the element of doubt or unreality, which, in the case of a subjunctive command, or of an opinion or desire expressed in the imperfect indicative or conditional, indicates a deferential "suspension" of the reality of the assertion, which is thus understood to be somehow contingent on the approval of the addressee. Secondly, the inflection which, in more typical uses of the past subjunctive and imperfect indicative, is associated with past time reference, indicates, in the case of the deferential imperfect, as well as in its other "modal" uses—including, at least in some cases, the "solecismo peninsular"—present (or "universal") unreality or potentiality, and, in the case of the past subjunctive command, a greater degree of uncertainty or unreality, and therefore of deference, than the present. Historically, this temporal shift reflects a change which began in early classical Latin; the modal shift, which accounts for the use of indicative tense (the imperfect) to express a normally subjunctive idea (unreality), is also traceable to an early tendency which, although restricted in Latin to certain verbs—one of which (*habere*) emerged as an autonomous modal inflection (the conditional)—seems to have been generalized in Old Spanish, at least to the extent of allowing us to interpret many of the seemingly anomalous imperfects in the *Cid* and, later, in the *Romancero*, on this basis.

Cornell University

*Michael D. Morrissey*