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The Old Polish (and Old Czech) dubitative irrealis and its implications

Abstract: Old Polish and Old Czech texts show a wider range of irrealis marking in complement clauses with speech-act and epistemic stance verbs in comparison with contemporary Polish, where this marking is restricted to negative polarity contexts and the complementation of verbs with an inherently negative meaning like *wątpić* ‘doubt’. The article offers an analysis of this marking type, which went out of use in the Middle Polish period, when it was ousted by constructions with dubitative complementisers like *jakoby*. An analogous development can be observed in Old Czech. The Old Polish and Old Czech facts raise questions about the nature of the more widely attested irrealis uses in the scope of overt or implicit negation. In the case of the latter, irrealis use is often ascribed to the action of negation, which suspends veridicality or assertivity. The facts discussed in the article suggest that negative polarity contexts merely facilitate the manifestation of the dubitative irrealis without being a condition on its use. Certain languages, including Old Polish and Old Czech, show a wider use not licensed by negation, which points to an implicational pattern: dubitative irrealis manifests itself at least, but not exclusively, in the scope of negative polarity. The dubitative irrealis in complementation sheds doubt on veridicality-based interpretations or realis vs irrealis distinctions.

Keywords: dubitative; irrealis; complementation; veridicality

1. Introduction*

The article deals with a certain type of irrealis complementation with speech act verbs and verbs of epistemic stance found in Old Polish (and also attested in Old Czech). It is illustrated in (1):

(1)	<i>Ten</i>	<i>bieży</i>	<i>á</i>	<i>chłop</i>	<i>woła,</i>	
	DEM.NOM.SG.M	flee.PST.3SG	and	yokel.NOM.SG	shout.PRS.3SG	
	<i>nići</i>	<i>pánie</i>	<i>nići</i>	<i>/ Ten</i>	<i>zewre</i>	<i>szkápíe</i>
	wire. NOM.PL	lord.VOC.SG	wire. NOM.SG	DEM.NOM. SG.M	press. FUT.3SG	nag.DAT
	<i>boki,</i>	<i>mniemat</i>	<i>by</i>	<i>rzekł</i>	<i>bijcie.</i>	
	flank.ACC.PL	think.LF.SG.M	IRR	say.LF.SG.M	flog.IMPER.2PL	

‘As he fled, the yokel shouted: *nici, panie, nici* (“Wires, Sir, wires!”). He [the squire] pressed his horse’s flanks, [as] he thought [the yokel] had said *bijcie* (“Flog him!”).’ (Mikołaj Rej, *Zyemiánin co w sieć wpadł*, from *Figliki*)

This is an instance of the dubitative use of the irrealis mood in complementation, the function of which is to express doubt as to the reality of what is contained in the complement clause. The variety illustrated in (1) has not survived into modern Polish and has apparently received almost no attention in the literature. In the present article I will discuss this Old Polish (and Old Czech) variety of the dubitative irrealis in the context of the usage types still extant in the modern languages and also best represented in other languages of Europe, including the other Slavonic languages. This will give occasion to a brief but somewhat deeper discussion of irrealis functions in complementation. Apart from these general matters, the article also deals with specific questions of Polish historical grammar.

* I wish to thank two anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments, which have given occasion to several improvements. For the remaining shortcomings of the article I am solely responsible.

The structure of the article is as follows: In Section 2 I will first elaborate on irrealis moods in dubitative function, and on their range of usage types in this domain of irrealis marking. In Section 3 I will then discuss the Old Polish dubitative irrealis in somewhat greater detail, without attempting an account that would be exhaustive within the limits imposed by the Old Polish corpus available to us. Section 4 deals with the theoretical interpretation of the dubitative irrealis, while Section 5 contains a few concluding remarks.

2. The dubitative irrealis

In contemporary Polish, complements of verbs expressing epistemic stance (*verba cogitandi*) as well as speech-act verbs with affirmative complements (*verba declarandi*) are basically of the realis type, that is, they have complementisers like *że* ‘that’ and realis (indicative) forms of the verb:

(2)	<i>Ta</i>	<i>mala</i>	<i>naprawde</i>	<i>wierzy,</i>	<i>ze</i>	
	that.NOM.SG.F	little.NOM.SG.F	really	believe.PRS.3SG	that	
	<i>Pan</i>	<i>Bóg</i>	<i>nie ma</i>	<i>nic</i>	<i>innego</i>	
	Lord.NOM	God.NOM	NEG have.PRS.3SG	nothing[GEN]	other.GEN. SG.N	
	<i>do roboty,</i>	<i>jak</i>	<i>tylko</i>	<i>w</i>	<i>mojej</i>	<i>parafii</i>
	for work.GEN	than	only	in	my.LOC.SG.F	parish.LOC.SG
	<i>szukać</i>	<i>misjonarzy</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>Afryki.</i>		
	LOC.SG look.for.INF	missionary.GEN.PL	for	Africa.GEN		

‘This girl really believes God has nothing else on his hands than recruiting missionaries for Africa among my parishioners.’ (Andrzej Szczypiorski, NKJP)

This rule has two notable exceptions: irrealis (subjunctival) complements optionally appear in the scope of negative polarity and with inherently negative verbs like *wątpić* ‘doubt’:

- (3) *Nawet Kosiński nie wierzy, żeby Gorczyca*
 even K.NOM NEG believe.PRS.3SG that.IRR G.NOM
mógł popęlnić błąd.
 may.LF.SG.M commit.INF mistake.ACC

‘Even Kosiński does not believe Gorczyca could make / have made a mistake.’ (Janusz Płoński, Maciej Rybiński, NKJP)

- (4) *Ale wątpię, żebyś go zobaczyła wcześniej,*
 but doubt.PRS.1SG that.IRR him.ACC see.LF.SG.F earlier
niż na sali sądowej.
 than in room.LOC.SG court.ADJ.LOC.SG.F

‘But I doubt whether you will see him earlier than in the courtroom.’ (Radosław Figura, NKJP)

In the absence of these licensing conditions, the use of an irrealis (subjunctival) clause with the lexical types of complement-taking verbs mentioned above is not possible:

- (5) **Nawet Kosiński wierzy, żeby Gorczyca*
 even K.NOM believe.PRS.3SG that.IRR G.NOM
mógł popęlnić błąd.
 may.LF.SG.M commit.INF mistake.ACC.SG

Intended meaning: ‘Even Kosiński believes Gorczyca may make / have made a mistake.’

Such licensing conditions for irrealis complements with epistemic stance and speech-act verbs are well known and have been widely discussed in the literature as they are not restricted to Slavonic but characteristic also of the Romance languages. The following examples illustrating subjunctive use

under negative polarity and with inherently negative verbs are from Catalan (Quer 2010: 228):

(6)	<i>No</i>	<i>creu</i>	<i>que</i>	<i>li</i>	<i>donin</i>	<i>cap</i>	<i>premi.</i>
	NEG	believe. PRS.3SG	that	him.DAT	give.PRS. SBJV.3PL	no	prize

‘S/he does not believe they will give him/her any price.’ (Quer 2010: 227)

(7)	<i>Dubto</i>	<i>que</i>	<i>guanyin</i>	<i>l’escó.</i>
	doubt.PRS.1SG	that	win.PRS.SBJV.3PL	the.seat

‘I doubt that they will win the seat.’

Quer (2010: 227) discusses these as instances of the ‘dubitative’ or ‘potential’ subjunctive, appearing under predicates expressing ‘doubt, uncertainty, ignorance, possibility, probability’ etc. Without licensing conditions like negation or interrogation¹ the embedded predication is interpreted as true, but a negation suspends this commitment to truth.

This explanation of the functioning of subjunctives reflects a view widespread in formal approaches to mood. We could characterise it by saying that the subjunctive is viewed as unmarked with regard to the indicative: it is characterised by lack of commitment, whereas commitment to truth appears when the indicative is used. This lack of commitment is often called non-veridicality (Giannakidou 2009 and other publications; for Slavonic, with a reference to Giannakidou, this notion is invoked in Sočanac 2019). In the same vein, but within a different (functionalist) approach, we could mention Lunn (1989), who operates with the notion of assertability. The latter notion includes propositions denoting non-existent states of affairs as well as propositions that are regarded as true but are presupposed rather than asserted. Differences of detail between individual treatments need not be entered upon here. The gist of the matter is that the introduction of a negation, or a negative implication in the lexical meaning of the complement-taking verb, suspends the veridical or assertive value of the complement. This view

¹ Interrogative contexts licensing subjunctive are characteristic of Romance but are not found in Slavonic, which is why I do not discuss them further.

contrasts with a competing one in which irrealis moods (subjunctives, conditionals) are considered to be marked with regard to the unmarked realis (indicative). This could be regarded as the traditional structuralist view, ultimately going back to Jakobson (1931), but it is also widespread in typology, cf. Croft (2003: 156), who introduces the concept of ‘typological markedness’ (on the discussion concerning markedness in mood see also Mauri & Sansò 2016: 175–176). The unmarked realis view is the more acceptable one from a functionalist or usage-based point of view, especially if the grammaticalisation aspect is taken into account: more often than not, it is irrealis forms that show formal markers which have a grammaticalisation history, while realis forms are marked for tense, person etc. but lack a formal marker of mood; they are therefore realis by default, as lacking any kind of mood marking. The Slavonic irrealis is a prototypical instance of this situation: the irrealis, a form without tense features (though it has an anteriority form), has a positive marker, originally an irrealis auxiliary now usually reduced to an irrealis marker *by/bi* with or without added person markers (for a detailed overview cf. Panzer 1967: 16–46). For this marked mood we can characterise a number of usage types which differ somewhat from one Slavonic language to another. The label ‘realis’ is assigned to a set of inflectional forms whose functions are usually discussed in terms of tense, aspect, transitivity etc. but not mood, as they are realis by default. Formal and semantic markedness often go together, but as meanings evolve, the possibility of a markedness reversal always has to be reckoned with.² The question of markedness in mood calls for a broader discussion, but here I will discuss it only with reference to complements of verbs of epistemic stance like ‘think’, ‘believe’ etc. and speech-act verbs like ‘say’.

In the context of the complementation types under discussion here, the unmarked-subjunctive hypothesis runs into complications when we take

² A markedness reversal must be posited, for instance, in those Indo-European languages (Greek, Sanskrit) where new subjunctives arose from presents ousted from their original position by innovative (aspectually marked) formations, a process explored by Kuryłowicz (1964: 136–139). Kuryłowicz (1964: 141–142) similarly derives the IE optative in *-yē-* from an original aorist in *-ē-*, an account that has not gained general acceptance. Here it must be pointed out that such residual tense forms carried over to the mood system undergo subsequent functional extensions *qua* mood forms, which can be interpreted as positive mood marking taking the place of the original tense-marking function.

into account languages where the dubitative subjunctive is not restricted to the above-mentioned licensing conditions. There are subjunctives positively signaling doubt. For Portuguese, for instance, Becker (2010: 196) notes the use of the dubitative subjunctive in complement clauses in those cases “where the speaker wants to signal his personal reservation with regard to the content of the complement clause”:

(8)	<i>É</i>	<i>falaz</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>opinião</i>	<i>dos</i>	<i>que</i>
	be.PRS.3SG	misleading	the	opinion	of.those	that
	<i>pretendem</i>	<i>que</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>português</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>tenha deturpado</i>
	claim.PRS.3PL	that	the	Portuguese	RFL	have.PRS.SBJV. 3SGcorrupt.PTCP.PST
	<i>ao</i>	<i>contato</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>falares</i>	<i>rudes.</i>	
	with.the	contact	of	dialect.PL	rude.PL	

‘The opinion of those who claim that the Portuguese language was corrupted in its contact with the rude local dialects, is misleading.’

There is no explicit or implicit negation here. The verb *pretender* ‘claim’ implies an epistemic stance on the part of a person whose utterance is reproduced, and this epistemic stance need not coincide with that of the speaker. The fact that the subjunctive can be used to introduce a second layer of epistemic stance does not support the assumption of this mood as a default obtaining in the absence of epistemic stance. Rather, it makes more sense to operate with a positive meaning of doubt as one of the realisations of irrealis semantics. This does not mean we need to subscribe to the now largely discarded view of an overarching meaning of ‘irreality’ (Bybee 1998 was among the first to argue forcibly against this), although this view is in no way worse than that of an overarching meaning of non-veridicality. Irrealis is a cluster of recurrent positive constructional meanings, one of which is dubitativity. This meaning can also be expressed by means of specialised complementisers of the type of Polish *jakoby*, to be mentioned below; or by means of clause-final particles, as discussed, e.g., for Chadic by Frajzyngier (2016: 266–267). It is, it should be repeated, a constructional meaning, not

a meaning of the irrealis as such. The mechanism of the rise of this constructional meaning is a point to which we will return below.

The usage type illustrated in (8) and those in (6) and (7) belong to the same group of usage types. The tendency to resort to irrealis marking to express doubt as to the reality of the content of a complement clause may be of various strength in individual languages, and certain contexts favour its use more than others, but it is the same tendency that manifests itself everywhere. There is probably an implicational relationship between the usage types: if a language uses the irrealis to mark doubt as to the content of a complement clause, it will certainly have this use at the very least in the scope of negative polarity and with *verba dubitandi*. A language may also go beyond this and use irrealis marking without these facilitating contexts being present. Individual Romance language show either the narrower, or the wider use. Within one language, changes from one situation to another may be expected to occur; one of them will be discussed here, for Polish. It is with Old and Middle Polish uses analogous to (8) that I will deal further on.

However, before moving on to Polish, we must note a difference between the Slavonic and Romance mood systems: Western Romance languages have a split-irrealis system, that is, within the wider typological domain referred to by the cover term irrealis (Palmer 2001, van der Auwera & Schalley 2004) they have two marked moods – subjunctive and conditional. While the subjunctive is characteristic of complement clauses and requires lexical and syntactic licensing, the conditional inherently expresses counterfactive or potential meaning. Northern Slavonic (that is, West and East Slavonic) have one irrealis mood corresponding to the Romance subjunctive and conditional (Garde 1964). The forms formally corresponding to it in South Slavonic are basically conditionals only, a complementiser-marked subjunctive of the Balkan type having developed alongside it (cf. Ammann & van der Auwera 2004). In modern Polish, the same irrealis mood, traditionally called conditional, can either be marked on the complementiser, as in (3) or (4), in which case we could speak of complementising mood; or it can be marked as ‘inherent’ or ‘complement-internal’ mood on the verb, as in (9), where the irrealis form *mógl=by* denotes a potential event contingent on a condition that is not overtly expressed :

(9) <i>Nawet</i> even	<i>Kosiński</i> K.NOM	<i>wierzy,</i> believe.PRS.3SG	<i>że</i> that	<i>Gorczyca</i> G.NOM
<i>mógł=by</i> may.LF.SG.M=IRR	<i>popęlnić</i> commit.INF	<i>błąd.</i> mistake.ACC.SG		

Intended meaning: ‘Even Kosiński believes Gorczyca could (in unspecified hypothetical circumstances) make a mistake.’

In Old and Middle Polish there was no regular formal contrast between (3) and (9) as there is in the contemporary language, which is the reason why will have to mention the distinction between complementising and complement-internal mood below.

3. The Old Polish dubitative irrealis

In Old Polish, the range of the dubitative irrealis was wider than it is now. It also occurred in the type of contexts illustrated by Portuguese example (8). The following examples are taken from one of the longest Old Polish texts, the 15th-century *Rozmyślanie Przemyskie*. The examples are chosen so as to reflect diversity in the use of complementisers: alongside *by*, the subjunctive mood marker also doubling as a complementiser (cf. Holvoet 2025), we find the specialised complementiser *aby*, which contains the subjunctive mood marker:

(10) <i>bo</i> for	<i>ssa</i> be.PRS.3PL	<i>mnymaly,</i> think.LF.ANIM.PL	<i>by</i> IRR	<i>myły</i> gentle.NOM.SG.M
<i>Kristus</i> Christ.NOM	<i>był</i> be.LF.SG.M	<i>nyeprawdzyvy</i> unjust.NOM.SG.M	<i>v</i> in	<i>ssaǰzye</i> judgement.LOC.SG
<i>albo</i> or	<i>nyemyloszyerny</i> incompassionate.NOM.SG.M			

‘for they thought gentle Christ was unjust and incompassionate in his judgement.’ (*Rozmyślanie Przemyskie*, 464)

- (11) *a ony o tem nycz nye wyedyely*
 but they about this nothing NEG know.LF.PL.ANIM
- mnymayacz aby on schedl v postpolstwy*
 suppose.CVB that.IRR he walk.LF.SG.M in company.LOC
- dzyeczynnem albo s przyaczyelmy*
 child.ADJ.LOC.SG.M or with friend.INS.PL

‘But they knew nothing about this, supposing that he was walking about in the company of children or with friends.’ (Rozmyślanie Przemyskie, 143)

In these two instances (with *by* and *aby*), the dubitative irrealis is easy to identify. In the case of *izby*, the dubitative irrealis is somewhat more difficult to keep apart from other types of irrealis use. The reason is that *izby* contains the segment *iz*, which can be used in itself as a realis complementiser. As a result, *izby* could be used, in Old Polish, in cases of what I have characterised above as complement-internal irrealis use. In (12) we are dealing with an instance of the dubitative irrealis (complementising mood), but in (13) the irrealis marked on *chcieć* is unconnected with complementation and would also be used in a simple clause: when used on a desiderative verb, the irrealis has an attenuative value (as in *chciałbym* ‘I would like’).

- (12) *Nyektorzy mynyą yschby ta swaczba*
 some.ANIM.PL think.PRS.3PL that.IRR that.NOM.SG.F wedding.
 NOM.SG
- była svyatego Yana evanyelysty*
 be.LF.SG.F holy.GEN.SG.M John.GEN Evangelist.GEN

‘Some think it was the wedding of St John the Evangelist.’ (Rozmyślanie Przemyskie, 206)

(13) <i>Archelaus [...]</i>	<i>rzekl,</i>	<i>yschby</i>	<i>tesch</i>	<i>chczyal</i>
A.NOM	say.LF.SG.M	that.IRR	also	want.LF.SG.M
<i>panowacz</i>	<i>nad</i>	<i>zydowską</i>	<i>zyemia</i>	
reign.INF	over	Jewish.INS.F.SG	land.INS.SG	

‘Archelaus [...] said he would also like to reign over the Jewish land.’
(modern Polish: *że chciałby też panować*, not: **żeby chciał też panować*) (Rozmyślanie Przemyskie, 111)

The surface similarity between the complement clauses in (12) and (13) is caused by the fact that in Old Polish the subjunctive marker consistently moved to Wackernagel position (the position after the complementiser) in complement clauses; in modern Polish, it clusters with the complementiser *że* only if complementising mood (irrealis mood as a complementising strategy) is involved, while otherwise occurring on the verb. There is now a clear difference between *żebym chciał* ‘that I should want’ and *że chciałbym* ‘that I would like’.

The use of the dubitative subjunctive is quite frequent with *mniemać*, *mnimać* although this verb does not lexically specify a view considered erroneous by the speaker. Among all 30 occurrences of *mnimać* with a clausal complement in the *Rozmyślanie Przemyskie* (all listed in SłSt IV 300), only three have an indicative clausal complement. Of these three occurrences, one is with the 1st person *mnimam*, a situation in which the complement clause reflects the speaker’s opinion, so that one does not expect dubitative marking:

(14) [<i>Kako szye yedno po drugyem dzyalo,</i>]					
<i>mnymam,</i>	<i>yze</i>	<i>tako</i>	<i>możemy</i>	<i>baczycz</i>	<i>podług</i>
think.PRS.1SG	that	so	may.PRS.1PL	conclude.INF	according.to
<i>rozmaytego</i>	<i>dolyczyenya</i>	<i>doctorow.</i>			
various.GEN.SG.N	argument.GEN.SG	doctor.GEN.PL			

‘[How one thing happened after the other,] I think we may conclude as follows from the various arguments of the doctors.’ (Rozmyślanie Przemyskie, 705–6)

This leaves us with no fewer than 27 subjunctival complement clauses, of which 2 are introduced by *by*, 19 by *aby*, and 6 by *izby*. Only 5 out of 27 occur with a negation; 4 of these are prohibitive constructions with the imperatives *nye mnyamay*, *nye mnyamayczye* ‘don’t think, don’t assume’. These figures show the striking (though not exceptionless) regularity with which the subjunctival complementation type is used in those cases where a mistaken belief (either of one of the characters in the gospel narratives or of an imaginary rhetorical opponent) is referred to. Contexts being similar, the ratio of subjunctives to indicatives is 22 to 2. Of course, these are the data of just one Old Polish text, and a more thorough investigation should be carried out.

The dubitative subjunctive is still fully alive in the mid-16th century. In Górnicki’s *Polish Courtier* (1566), out of 36 uses of *mnimać/mniemać* with a clausal complement,³ 17 have an indicative complement and 19 have a subjunctive complement. Out of the attested 10 uses with the 1st person sg. *mnimam/mniemam*, only one has the subjunctive, which is as expected, as the content of the complement clause with a 1st-person sg. form of ‘think’ should normally coincide with the speaker’s opinion, so that realis marking is the expected option. This one exception involves a case in which the speaker comments on his own mistaken opinion in a certain (imagined) type of situation:

- (15) [*Lecz iż sie ia przegrávajác frásuję, pochodzi to stąd*],
iz *mniemam*, *aby* *sie* *to* *działo*
 that assume.PRS.1SG that.IRR RFL this happen.LF.SG.N
- moią* *nieumieięthnoscia* [...]
 my.INS.SG.F lack.of.skill.INS.SG

‘[But if I am distressed when losing [at cards], the reason is] that I assume it is because of my lack of skill [...]’ (i.e., I mistakenly assume)

³ One instance with an infinitival complement (*accusativus cum infinitivo*) was not counted.

This can be contrasted with the indicative in cases where *mniemam* reflects the speaker's opinion:

- (16) *ia* *mniemam,* *że* *każdemu* *wolno*
 I.nom think.PRS.1SG that everyone.DAT be.permitted
- nościć* *sie* *iako* *raczy*
 wear.INF RFL as please.PRS.3SG

'I think everyone is at liberty to dress as he pleases.'

Of course, the dubitative subjunctive is also observed in those contexts that still license it in contemporary Polish, that is, in the scope of negation and with the inherently negative *wątpić*:

- (17) *nie* *tuszę* [...] *aby* *ktho* *W. M.* *ták*
 NEG expect.PRS.1SG that.IRR anybody.NOM your.grace[ACC] so
- łatwie* *oszukać* *moğ*
 easily deceive.INF be.able.LF.SG.M

'I don't expect anybody could deceive you so easily, Sir.'

- (18) [*Więzczy sobie ważą roskosz therázniejszą, którą czuią niżli*]
karanie, *o* *ktorym* *ieszcze* *wątpią*
 punishment.ACC about REL.LOC.SG.M even doubt.PRS.3PL
- aby* *ná* *nie* *przyść* *kiedy* *miało*
 that.IRR upon them.ACC.PL come.INF ever have.to.LE.SG.N

'[They care more about the present pleasure which they experience than] about the punishment they even doubt will ever come upon them.'

This use of the subjunctive in contexts similar to those just illustrated for Old and Middle Polish is also characteristic of Old Czech. From the syntax volume

of Gebauer's Czech historical grammar (Gebauer 1929) I take the following two examples, analogous to the Polish ones from the *Rozmyślanie Przemyskie* in that the first has *by* as a complementiser (doubling as a subjunctive mood marker) while the second has the compound complementiser *žeby*:

- (19) *tvá* *syna* *sta,* *ješto* *s'*
 your.NOM.DU.M son.NOM.DU be.PRS.3DU REL.NOM.DU.M AUX.2SG
- mněla,* *bysta* *byla* *vtonula*
 think.LF.SG.F SBJV.3DU.M be.LF.DU.M drown.LF.DU.M

'These are your sons, who you thought had been drowned.' (Passionál, 14th c., Gebauer (1929: 566))

- (20) *domnievali* *se,* *že* *by* *ducha* *viděli*
 think.LF.ANIM.PL RFL that IRR ghost.ACC.SG see.LF.ANIM.PL

'They thought they were seeing a ghost.' (Petr Chelčický, Postilla, after 1434, Gebauer (1929: 566))

In Czech as well, this use of the dubitative subjunctive without additional licensing conditions (negative polarity contexts and inherently negative complement-taking verbs) is now a thing of the past. In explaining the dubitative use of the subjunctive, Gebauer (1929: 566) gives a few examples from modern Czech, but – tellingly – these are examples with precisely the above-mentioned licensing conditions: negative polarity and the occurrence of an inherently negative complement-taking verb, *pochybovati* 'doubt'. The situation in Modern Czech thus matches that which we find in Modern Polish.

The Old Czech and Old Polish dubitative irrealis does not seem to have received much attention in the literature, though it is briefly mentioned (for both Old Czech and Old Polish) in Panzer's study of the Slavonic conditional (Panzer 1967: 171, 173). Surprisingly, Panzer calls this irrealis use a *conditionalis obliquus* and characterises it as a means of marking indirect speech, suggesting influence from Latin or German as a possible explanation. This explanation is hardly adequate. As a rendering of the Latin subjunctive in indirect discourse, the irrealis would have been rampant in Polish

texts throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, but we see nothing of it; Safarewicz (1972) explicitly mentions the widespread use of the Latin-inspired *accusativus cum infinitivo* as a feature of Polish written texts from this period, and he would certainly have noticed an analogous use of the irrealis in analogous contexts. As far as spoken Polish and Czech are concerned, the spread of a device for rendering indirect speech under Latin or even German influence is a priori unlikely. What is involved is, moreover, not rendering of indirect speech but dubitative marking.

The occurrence of this wider range of the dubitative subjunctive in complementation in both Old Czech and Old Polish points to an areal phenomenon within Slavonic.⁴ It is interesting to note that Old Czech and Old Polish also share another innovation in the domain of subjunctival complementation, viz. the introduction of the dual use of the marker *by* as a complementiser / subordinator and a mood marker, illustrated in (10) and (19) above (characterised as an instance of haplogy in Holvoet 2025). Considered together, these two features are perhaps significant as reflecting common innovations in the domain of mood in West Slavonic; they are, however, not logically connected. The dubitative function of the subjunctive could have developed without the subjunctive assuming an additional complementiser function.

It is uncontroversial that the complementiser *by* is historically identical with the mood marker (cf. Pisarkowa 1984: 239): in cases like (10) and (19) we are dealing with a type of complement clause originally characterised only by mood, not by a complementiser. The status of the mood marker must have changed at a given moment in the prehistory of Polish and Czech: as a mood marker, *by* became enclitic whereas those instances of *by* which, in clause-initial position, were reanalysed as complementisers-plus-mood

⁴ Whether it extended to the whole of West Slavonic is not clear because we cannot be sure about Old Sorbian. The oldest Sorbian text, Jakubica's 1548 Low Sorbian New Testament, has instances of it but this translation is known to have undergone a strong influence of Czech. If, in Luke 2.44, we find *domywaley se pak, zeby won byl podlatich chynich Towaryschow* 'they supposed he was with the other companions', this might reflect a Czech construction. We do not know the Czech translation source but the 1488 Prague Bible, for instance, has *domniewagicze se o nie[m], zeby byl w zastupu* 'supposing him to have been in the company'. As to the other innovation just mentioned, the reanalysis of the irrealis marker *by* as a complementiser, it is also unclear whether it occurred in Old Sorbian. I have not found any instances either in Jakubica or in Frencl's 1670 translations of the gospels of Matthew and Mark.

markers, could remain in clause-initial position. Thus their syntactic status changed but, at least initially, nothing changed semantically. The complement clauses in (10) and (19) had their epistemic-stance feature in virtue of their irrealis semantics, just as in the case of the Portuguese subjunctive in (8). It is true that *by* had acquired a dual status, but the dubitative meaning obtained with the whole range of irrealis complementisers (*by*, *aby*, *izby*) rather than with one particular complementiser.

When the dubitative subjunctive in its wider application (beyond negative polarity and ‘doubting’ verbs) went out of use in Polish is a matter that can probably be established with reasonable exactitude by studying Old Polish texts from the late 16th and early 17th centuries. This would have to be separately investigated; for the purpose of the present article I have not gone beyond checking a few randomly chosen texts. Piotr Kochanowski’s translations of Tasso and Ariosto (the former was printed in 1618 while the latter remained in the manuscript) show no trace of it, reserving the use of the subjunctival construction with *منيماć* to negative polarity contexts. An important text from the final decades of the same century, Pasek’s Diaries, does not have a single example either. On the basis of this, we could preliminarily, and very broadly, point to the second half of the 16th century and perhaps the early 17th century as the period in which the wider-range dubitative irrealis in complementation went out of use.

One of the reasons for the disappearance of the dubitative irrealis might have been the availability of another construction close to it in function: the construction with *jakoby*, which we also find in the 16th century alongside the constructions with *by*, *aby*, *izby*:

(21) [*Jeden też chwalił wielkiego łupiescę, ktory*]

<i>fálesznie</i>	<i>miał</i>	<i>tę</i>	<i>slawę,</i>	<i>iákoby</i>
falsely	have.LF.SG.N	that.ACC.SG.F	fame.acc	as.if.IRR

<i>był</i>	<i>bárzo</i>	<i>hoynym.</i>
be.LF.SG.M	very	munificent.INS.SG.M

‘[One of them spoke in praise of a great robber, who] was falsely reputed to be very munificent.’ (Górnicki, *Dworzanin Polski*)

The construction with *jakoby* has its own source of grammaticalization, which was ultimately a counterfactive similative construction, whatever the intermediate stages might have been (on this problem see Jędrzejowski 2020, Wiemer 2024). The coexistence of the two constructions shows that the construction with *jakoby* did not arise from the dubitative irrealis through insertion of an additional, more overt marker. The distribution of the two constructions in the period in which they coexisted would be an interesting object of investigation. This would be a precondition for establishing whether there was any causal connection between the spread of the construction with *jakoby* and the demise of the wider-range dubitative irrealis, and whether, to some extent, the dubitative irrealis fed into the expansion of the construction with *jakoby*. There is no reason to assume this *a priori*; the two may have been completely independent of each other.

4. Towards an interpretation

The Old Polish and Old Czech wider-range dubitative irrealis is an interesting detail of the comparative grammar of mood in Slavonic. But it is also of interest in the context of the typology of irrealis. It is important to establish the connection between the strictly licensed and the wider-range dubitative irrealis, which has not been done for Slavonic. As subjunctive use under negation is widespread all across Slavonic (for an overview cf. Panzer 1967: 70–78), it seems tempting to adopt an explanation invoking such notions as non-veridicality or non-assertivity. Actually for some classes of complement-taking verbs this type of explanation works reasonably well, as in the case of verbs of perception:

- (22) *Nikt* *nie* *widział,* *żeby* *Jarzęcka* *opuszczała*
 nobody.NOM neg see.LF.SG.M that.irr J.NOM leave.LF.SG.F
- swój* *pokój* *lub* *żeby* *gdzieś* *wychodziła.*
 RFLPOSS. room.ACC.SG or that.IRR somewhere go.out.LF.SG.F
 ACC.SG.M

‘Nobody saw Jarzęcka leave her room or go out somewhere.’ (Zygmunt Zeydler-Zborowski, 1958, NKJP0)

But what holds for certain types of complement-taking predicates should not be generalised to all types. With speech-act verbs and verbs of epistemic stance, the subjunctive under negation or with *verba dubitandi* appears to be a special case of a wider marking type, even if the wider use is not attested in every language and may therefore easily escape detection, or be ignored. Other languages (often closely related languages, as in the case of Romance) may then provide valuable evidence. Between the narrow type and the wider type of the dubitative irrealis we find variation across related languages, as in the case of the Romance languages, or diachronic changes in one or other direction. Polish and Czech have, in historical times, switched from wider range to narrower range, whereas at some earlier stage these languages may have undergone (if the situation in the other Slavonic languages is the original one) a change in the opposite direction. In dealing with the narrow-range dubitative irrealis it seems useful to take the wider-range variety into account as well. Veridicality, as defined by Giannakidou (2009: 1889), implies the truth of a proposition “in some individual’s epistemic model”. This does not seem to provide an adequate account for situations in which two epistemic models – the speaker’s and that of the subject of an utterance or thought that is being referred to – fail to coincide, and this non-coincidence needs to be marked. Here we have a shift from a situation for which the non-veridicality account would still be satisfactory to one where it loses its explanatory value.

In principle, one could therefore argue that the irrealis use in (3) and (4) is actually motivated by non-veridicality, whereas the Old Polish dubitative use in (10), (11) etc. reflects a shift to another function. But non-veridicality, as viewed by Giannakidou, is *the* function of the subjunctive; in the tradition of formal semantics, as in the structuralist tradition of Jakobson (1931), there is no place for polysemy or polyfunctionality. In line with Bybee (1998), we do not assume an overarching meaning for the irrealis; rather, we think its function can be defined only within the individual usage types in which it can be found. The usage types build a network, and we could similarly speak about a network of related irrealis functions. Now it is possible that the function of the irrealis in (3) and (4) comes close to the putative non-veridical value. Indeed (3) could be contrasted with (23), which has a realis complement clause:

(23) <i>Nawet</i>	<i>Kosiński nie</i>	<i>wierzy,</i>	<i>że</i>	<i>Gorczyca</i>
even	K.NOM NEG	believe.PRS.3SG	that	G.NOM

popelnił *błąd.*
 commit.LF.SG.M mistake.ACC
 (constructed on the basis of (3))

‘Even Kosiński does not believe Gorczyca could make / have made a mistake.’

One of the possible readings of (23) is that Gorczyca actually, as a matter of shared knowledge between speaker and addressee, did make a mistake but Kosiński does not believe this. This is, however, only one of the readings, and the realis form does not impose a veridical interpretation. As *wierzyć* ‘believe’ is not in itself a factive verb (while *widzieć* ‘see’, when used under positive polarity, as in (22), undoubtedly is), there is no need to use an irrealis to obtain a non-factive reading. The speaker may certainly choose the irrealis form in order to exclude a possible factive, or veridical, interpretation, but there is no either-or alternative. We have a non-factive realis form that is compatible with a factive reading, and a non-factive irrealis form that discourages a factive reading; we could characterise the latter as emphatic non-factive. What we are dealing with is a strategy to avoid a factive reading by using a form that, in other constructions, is associated with counterfactive or potential meaning. The emphatic non-factive irrealis is related to the counterfactive irrealis, but these are distinct usage types within the irrealis network.

5. Outlook

The present article is both a contribution to the broader study of the functioning of irrealis (subjunctive) moods in complementation, and an incentive to further work on the dubitative irrealis in Old Polish, Old Czech and West Slavonic in general. The questions to be answered include: when and how this irrealis went out of use in Middle Polish; what could have caused its demise; and what kind of relationship opposed dubitative irrealis complementation to the competing strategy with dubitative complementisers like *jakoby*.

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Abbreviations

ACC – accusative, ADJ – adjective, ANIM – animate, CVB – converb, DAT – dative, DEM – demonstrative, DU – dual, F – feminine, IMPER – imperative, INF – infinitive, INS – instrumental, IRR – irrealis, LF – the *l*-form, the base for the formation of the past tense and the subjunctive, LOC – locative, M – masculine, N – neuter, NEG – negation, NOM – nominative, PL – plural, PRS – present, PST – past, PTCP – participle, REL – relative pronoun, RFL – reflexive, RFLPOSS – reflexive possessive pronoun, SBJV – subjunctive, SG – singular, VOC – vocative

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Staropolski (i staroczeski) dubitatywny irrealis i jego implikacje (streszczenie)

W tekstach staropolskich zaświadczone jest dubitatywne użycie trybu przypuszczającego w komplementacji zdaniowej w zakresie wykraczającym poza konteksty dopuszczające dubitatywne użycie tego trybu w języku współczesnym, tzn. konteksty polarności ujemnej oraz komplementację czasowników o znaczeniu inherentnie przeczącym typu *wątpić*. Artykuł zawiera zwięzłą analizę tego typu użycia, który zanikł w okresie średniopolskim, ustępując konstrukcjom opartym na spójniku dubitatywnym *jakoby*. Analogiczny rozwój można zaobserwować w języku staroczeskim. Omawiane fakty staropolskie i staroczeskie każą na nowo przemyśleć naturę szerzej rozpowszechnionych typów użycia irrealis w kontekstach epistemicznych w zasięgu eksplicytnej lub implikowanej negacji. W tych ostatnich występowanie irrealis związane jest często z działaniem negacji znoszącej prawdziwość lub asertywność. Wydaje się jednak, że konteksty polarności ujemnej jedynie sprzyjają występowaniu irrealis w funkcji dubitatywnej; świadectwo języków, w których ma on szerszy zakres (jak staropolszczyzna lub staroczeszczyzna), wskazuje, że tryb irrealis pełni w omawianych tu kontekstach funkcję polegającą na sygnalizowaniu wątpliwości mówiącego co do prawdziwości tego, co jest zawarte w zdaniu dopełnieniowym.

Słowa kluczowe: dubitatywność; irrealis; komplementacja; prawdziwość