

Subjunctive Mood Selection in French: An Event-Based Analysis of Psych-Verbs and Bouletic Predicates

Original Study

Kantapon Intamart
French Section, Department of Western Languages,
Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University
kantapon.i@chula.ac.th

Submitted: 05.08.2025; Accepted: 10.12.2025.

Abstract: This study investigates subjunctive and indicative mood selection in French complement clauses governed by psych-verbs and bouletic predicates. We depart from prescriptive norms to propose a cognitive-semantic model based on Force Dynamics (Talmy 2000; Wolff et al. 2010) and Causal Chain Theory (Copley, Martin 2014). We argue that mood selection functions as a marker of the causal path connecting the subject to the event. Specifically, the indicative signals a direct, unobstructed realization. The subjunctive, conversely, marks a causal trajectory blocked or mediated by the subject's evaluative stance. Qualitative analysis of data from an online corpus supports this hypothesis. The results reveal a gradient of causal force where mood shifts reflect the degree of immediate access to the proposition. This framework integrates the internal cognitive simulation of force with the external conditions of event realization.

Keywords: mood (linguistics), force dynamics, causal chain theory, event structure, French subjunctive

1. INTRODUCTION

The distinction between the subjunctive and indicative mood lies at the heart of French grammar, posing a persistent challenge for both linguistic description and theoretical analysis. While traditional grammars often present a binary opposition—associating the subjunctive with uncertainty, emotion, and volition, and the indicative with factual assertions—this prescriptive dichotomy frequently proves insufficient in accounting for the nuanced and often variable patterns observed in actual linguistic usage. Cases of mood alternation, particularly with certain verb classes, highlight the limitations of purely syntactic or semantic explanations, necessitating a deeper exploration into the cognitive and conceptual mechanisms that underpin mood selection.

This study reexamines mood selection in French complement clauses, specifically focusing on psychological (psych-verbs) and bouletic (desire/

volition) predicates. We argue that mood choice is not merely a surface-level grammatical phenomenon but a profound reflection of underlying event structures and the interaction of causal forces. Adopting a Force Dynamics approach (Talmy 2000; Wolff et al. 2010) and integrating insights from Causal Chain Theory (Copley, Martin 2014; Copley et al. 2015), this research posits that mood selection is fundamentally a function of how speakers conceptualize and encode causality, agency, and the realization status of events. We propose that the subjunctive emerges in contexts where causality is indirect, mediated by external forces, or linked to unrealized or hypothetical states, whereas the indicative prevails in contexts of epistemic certainty and direct assertion of factual events.

This paper seeks to address two primary research questions:

1. To what extent do Force Dynamics and Causal Chain Theory provide a comprehensive and unified explanation for the observed variability between the subjunctive and indicative moods governed by psych-verbs and bouletic predicates in French complement clauses?
2. How do the semantic and structural properties of these verb classes, particularly their encoding of causal and event-based relations, determine mood selection?

To answer these questions, we will analyze a range of contemporary French examples, contrasting constructions where mood selection is influenced by explicit or implicit causal relations. We will demonstrate that by reframing mood selection as a function of causal perception and event dynamics, we can challenge traditional models and offer a more robust and unified perspective on the relationship between grammar, cognition, and linguistic structure in French.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FORCE DYNAMICS AND CAUSAL CHAIN THEORY

To provide a comprehensive account of mood selection in French complement clauses, this study adopts an event-based perspective rooted in Force Dynamics (Talmy 2000) and Causal Chain Theory (Copley, Martin 2014). These frameworks provide a mechanism to analyze event conceptualization and the dynamic interaction of forces that determines linguistic expression. Consequently, this approach transcends purely syntactic or semantic categorizations.

2.1. Force Dynamics: Conceptualizing Causal Interactions

Leonard Talmy's (2000) Force Dynamics provides a cognitive semantic framework for understanding how languages encode causal and volitional interactions between entities. It posits that causal relations are not merely binary cause-effect links but rather a complex work of forces, often conceptualized metaphorically from physical interactions.

Within this framework, several key components define the mechanics of these interactions. Central to the model are the Agonist and Antagonist; the Agonist is the entity whose tendency toward action or inaction is at issue, while the Antagonist is the entity exerting a force that opposes or influences that tendency. The ultimate outcome of an interaction depends on the balance of forces, specifically the relative strength and direction of the Agonist's inherent tendency in relation to the Antagonist's exerted force. Furthermore, Talmy identifies various patterns of force interaction to describe these results. These include *causation*, where the Antagonist overpowers the Agonist; *prevention*, where the Antagonist blocks the Agonist's tendency; and *enablement*, where the Antagonist removes an existing obstacle for the Agonist, as shown in Figure 1.

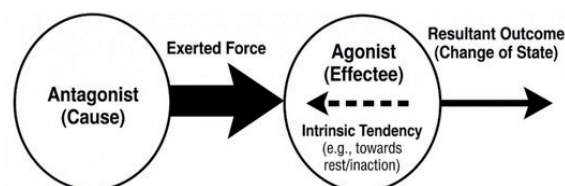


Figure 1. Schematic representation of a Causal Force Interaction in Talmy's Force Dynamics. Adapted from Talmy (2000).

Building on Talmy's work, Wolff et al. (2010) further developed these concepts, identifying three fundamental categories of periphrastic verbs that encapsulate essential distinctions in causative expressions:

1. **CAUSE:** Represents a direct force interaction where an entity (Antagonist) directly brings about an outcome in another entity (Agonist). For example, "The strong wind *caused* the tree to fall."
2. **PREVENT:** Involves an Antagonist blocking the Agonist's inherent tendency or an expected outcome. For instance, "The fence *prevented* the dog from escaping." Here, the dog's tendency to escape is blocked.
3. **ENABLE:** Describes a scenario where an Antagonist removes an obstacle, allowing the Agonist's inherent tendency to manifest. For example, "The key *enabled* me to open the door."

These categories reflect universal linguistic patterns in how speakers conceptualize and express causality, extending beyond physical interactions to include psychosocial forces (Copley et al. 2015). Psychosocial forces, such as social norms or intentions, can act as vectorial quantities, possessing both direction and intensity, influencing human behavior and cognition in ways analogous to physical forces.

The applicability of Force Dynamics to Romance mood selection in Spanish has been recently demonstrated by García Yanes (2022). He argues that the subjunctive in causative constructions (e.g., *hacer que*) is triggered when the event is construed from the perspective of the Antagonist, reflecting a specific epistemic assessment of the force interaction. While his analysis focuses on explicit causation in Spanish, it provides strong cross-linguistic support for the hypothesis that mood selection is sensitive to the underlying force-dynamic configuration of the event.

2.2. Causal Chain Theory: Event Structuring and Realization

Causal Chain Theory, particularly as elaborated by Copley and Martin (2014) and Copley et al. (2015), provides a framework for understanding how events are structured in terms of causal dependencies and their ultimate realization. This theory distinguishes between different types of causal links and their linguistic encoding, focusing on a crucial distinction between direct and

indirect causation. Direct causation, associated with the lexical “cause,” implies an explicit force interaction where an agent directly brings about a result, aligning with the CAUSE category established by Wolff (2007). In contrast, indirect or enabling causation, often represented by “because,” applies to scenarios where conditions are favorable for an event or where the causal link is less direct. This latter category encompasses the ENABLE scenarios described by Wolff (2007) and can also describe situations where an implicit force is at play. Ultimately, this distinction is vital for understanding mood selection, as it correlates with the speaker’s commitment to the realization of the embedded event.

2.3. Event Structure, Thematic Roles, and Qualia

To further refine our analysis of psychological and bouletic predicates, we integrate concepts from event structure and thematic role theories. According to Pustejovsky and Bouillon (1995), even seemingly stative verbs, particularly factive psychological predicates, can be understood through an underlying causal structure. For instance, an emotional experience can be decomposed into a causative sub-event, representing the triggering stimulus, and a caused sub-event, representing the resulting emotional state. In this model, the experiencer argument (x) of the resultant state is affected by the triggering event, which leads to a change in emotional state.

Complementing this perspective, Dowty (1991) and Van Valin and Wilkins (1996) demonstrate that psychological events involve dynamic transitions in thematic roles. Specifically, the entity (x) that is the subject of a psychological predicate may function as a perceiver (proto-agent) during the triggering event (e1), actively engaging with the stimulus. It then transitions to an experiencer (proto-patient or undergoer) during the resulting emotional state (e2), thereby being affected by the experience. This dynamic shift is crucial for understanding how these predicates structure events.

Finally, the Qualia Structure proposed by Pustejovsky (1995) suggests that the subject noun phrase (NP) of a psychological predicate often contributes to its interpretation through its inherent purpose or function, known as the TELIC role. For example, in the sentence *Les livres m’ennuient* (‘The books bore me’), the TELIC role of ‘books’—namely, that they are intended to be read—contributes significantly to the understanding of the boredom experienced. This highlights how the inherent properties of the subject interact with the verb’s semantics to establish a definitive causal relationship.

2.4. Synthesis: Theoretical Boundaries and Integration

To clarify the architectural boundaries of this framework, we posit that Force Dynamics and Causal Chain Theory operate as complementary levels of description rather than overlapping alternatives. Force Dynamics functions as the cognitive model: it represents the internal, conceptual simulation of the speaker’s stance (e.g., the geometric configuration of “blocking” or “urging”). Causal

Chain Theory, conversely, functions as the semantic representation: it maps these internal configurations onto the external event structure, defining the logical conditions of realization (e.g., whether the energy flows successfully to the result).

Thus, the proposed causal typology is inherently cognitive-semantic: it argues that the semantic licensing of the subjunctive is strictly determined by the cognitive conceptualization of the event’s causal path. The mood is not merely a label for uncertainty, but rather the linguistic trace of a specific force-dynamic simulation.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study proposes that mood selection in French complement clauses is a reflection of the speaker’s conceptualization of the causal forces at play, the directness or indirectness of the causal link, and the realization status of the embedded event.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, cognitive-semantic approach to analyze how causal forces and event conceptualization dictate mood selection in French complement clauses. This framework isolates the specific force-dynamic patterns that trigger grammatical shifts in psych-verbs and bouletic predicates. The following sections define the data selection criteria and the analytical procedures applied to the linguistic evidence.

3.1. Data Source and Scope

The empirical basis for this research consists primarily of examples drawn from the Frantext database (ATILF-CNRS 1998-2024), focusing specifically on the sub-corpus of texts published between 1950 and the present. This period was selected to isolate contemporary standard usage and minimize diachronic interference. The search was restricted to standard literary and non-literary prose (essays, journalism, memoirs), excluding poetry and highly experimental fiction to ensure the analysis reflects the “standard written norm.” While the total corpus contains over 5,000 texts, this study focused on a qualitative extraction of concordance lines that illustrate the relevant predicate-complement structures.

These examples are then meticulously selected to isolate and illustrate specific linguistic phenomena and theoretical distinctions related to mood selection, ensuring they reflect actual French usage. To ensure replicability, queries were structured to identify the target verb lemma immediately followed by the complementizer *que* (e.g., [Lemma: *regretter*] + [*que*]). The resulting concordance lines were manually filtered to exclude archaic usages and non-standard syntax, prioritizing examples that clearly exhibited the relevant causal structure. Where relevant, examples from previously published scholarly works are also integrated and re-analyzed within our proposed framework, with proper attribution.

3.2. Analytical Framework and Process

The analysis is grounded in the theoretical frameworks detailed in Section 2, namely Force Dynamics (Talmy 2000; Wolff et al. 2010) and Causal Chain Theory (Copley, Martin 2014; Copley et al. 2015). The methodological process involves the following steps:

1. Identification of Mood Patterns: For selected psych-verbs and bouletic predicates, we identify the prevailing mood (indicative, subjunctive, or alternation) in their complement clauses.
2. Causal Force Analysis: Each example is analyzed to identify the underlying causal forces at play. This includes discerning the Agonist and Antagonist, the direction and intensity of forces, and whether the interaction represents a CAUSE, PREVENT, or ENABLE scenario. Particular attention is paid to how the speaker's subjective stance or emotional evaluation contributes to these forces.
3. Event Structure Decomposition: We decompose the embedded propositions into their constituent event structures, applying insights from Pustejovsky and Bouillon (1995) to understand how a triggering event (e1) leads to a resulting state (e2).
4. Thematic Role Examination: The thematic roles of the arguments (e.g., perceiver, experiencer, stimulus) are examined using Dowty's (1991) Proto-Role Theory and Van Valin and Wilkins' (1996) Role and Reference Grammar to understand how their dynamic evolution influences the causal relationship and, consequently, mood selection.
5. Correlation with Mood: The identified causal forces, event structures, and thematic role configurations are then systematically correlated with the observed mood selection. The aim is to demonstrate how indirect causation, subjective mediation, and the realization status of the embedded event consistently align with the subjunctive, while direct assertion and objective factuality align with the indicative.
6. Addressing Alternation: For verbs exhibiting mood alternation, the analysis delves into the subtle semantic or pragmatic differences that trigger distinct causal interpretations, thereby explaining the shift between indicative and subjunctive.

By applying this qualitative analytical methodology, the study aims to provide a coherent and theoretically robust explanation for the dynamics of mood selection in French, particularly for the challenging cases of psych-verbs and bouletic predicates.

4. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS APPROACHES TO MOOD SELECTION IN FRENCH

The distribution of subjunctive and indicative moods in French complement clauses has been a cornerstone of linguistic inquiry for decades, leading to a rich but often fragmented body of literature. While traditional grammars offer prescriptive rules, contemporary research reveals a more complex relationship of syntactic, semantic,

and pragmatic factors. This section critically reviews prominent theoretical approaches to mood selection to identify their specific limitations in fully accounting for the dynamic behavior regarding psych-verbs and bouletic predicates. These frameworks fail to account for the force-dynamic shifts inherent in such constructions. This gap in the literature necessitates the causal-force dynamics framework proposed in this study.

4.1. Traditional and Prescriptive Accounts

Traditionally, the subjunctive is associated with contexts expressing uncertainty, desire, volition, emotion, or purpose, while the indicative is the default for asserting facts perceived as real or verified. Poplack et al. (2013) summarize these prescriptive environments, noting categories such as desire, doubt, obligation, and regret. However, as Poplack et al. (2013) themselves demonstrate through corpus analysis, these normative rules often fall short in explaining real-world linguistic usage, where variations and unexpected mood choices are widely attested, particularly in spontaneous speech. The rigid categorization fails to capture the subtle semantic and pragmatic nuances that drive mood selection in many contexts.

4.2. Semantic and Pragmatic Approaches

More recent theoretical approaches have sought to move beyond prescriptive norms by incorporating semantic and pragmatic dimensions:

4.2.1. Intensionality and Referential Anchoring

Farkas (1992) proposed an explanation based on the degree of intensionality of the governing verb, arguing that mood selection depends on the referential anchoring of the matrix predicate. Within this framework, a distinction is made between weak and strong intensionality.

Weak intensionality, which favors the indicative mood, is associated with verbs expressing a cognitive, epistemic, or narrative relation to an established fact. In contrast, strong intensionality characterizes verbs that imply a significant modal projection, such as those denoting desire, order, or obligation; these predicates inherently require the subjunctive. By focusing on how these verbs anchor their complements referentially, this model provides a semantic basis for the shift between mood types.

This distinction successfully explains why verbs like *croire* 'to believe' and *penser* 'to think' typically govern the indicative, while *souhaiter* 'to wish' and *ordonner* 'to order' impose the subjunctive. For instance:

1. *Je crois qu'il est arrivé.* (Indicative) 'I believe that he has arrived.' *The event is asserted as true within the speaker's belief system.*
2. *Je veux qu'il arrive.* (Subjunctive) 'I want that he arrives.' *The event is projected as a desired state, without a guarantee of realization.*

However, this approach does not fully explain cases of modal alternation, particularly those involving emotive predicates or expressions of doubt, where a single verb might take either of the mood depending on context. It also struggles with verbs that maintain factivity but exhibit mood alternation, such as *comprendre* ('to understand').

4.2.2. Non-Veridicality and Possible Worlds

Giannakidou and Mari (2016, 2021) offer an approach based on (non-)veridicality, where the subjunctive functions as an activation marker of alternative scenarios, integrating both envisioned realities and hypothetical states. According to this view, the subjunctive signals that the embedded proposition is not necessarily true in the actual world, but rather in a set of non-veridical possible worlds. For example:

3. *Il faut que tu viennes demain.* (Subjunctive) 'It is necessary that you come tomorrow.' *This signals a scenario that has not yet occurred but is necessary, existing in a non-veridical context.*
4. *Je sais que tu viens demain.* (Indicative) 'I know that you come tomorrow.' *This signals a scenario integrated into the speaker's reality, thus veridical.*

This explanation is particularly relevant for modal attitude verbs and directives. While insightful, its application to all alternating verbs, especially those with subtle semantic ambiguities, requires further elaboration. The notion of non-veridicality can sometimes be vague and may conflict with certain interpretations, particularly for verbs like *falloir* and *espérer*.

4.2.3. Emotive Predicates and Gradability

Another perspective, also explored by Giannakidou and Mari (2016), focuses on emotive predicates, which are gradable and reflect variable degrees of emotional intensity. They argue that the subjunctive when selected by these verbs encodes modal distance between the speaker and the event.

5. *Je suis heureux qu'il soit venu.* (Subjunctive) 'I am happy that he came.' *The event is evaluated positively but remains within a subjective perspective.*
6. *Je sais qu'il est venu.* (Indicative) 'I know that he came.' *The event is presented as an established fact, without subjective modulation.*

However, Marques (2024) challenges this, arguing that gradability alone does not explain all cases of subjunctive usage, especially with epistemic verbs like *croire* or *douter*, which may not be inherently gradable but still exhibit distinct mood preferences. Furthermore, Baunaz, Blochowiak and Grisot (2024) provide experimental evidence suggesting that while emotivity matters for mood licensing, it interacts with pragmatic factors and broader subjectivity (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1999). Godard

(2012) advances a semantic-pragmatic account, arguing that mood selection depends on whether the complement clause represents an 'open issue' or is part of the 'common ground.' She rightly identifies that 'semantically active' verbs govern the indicative.

4.2.4. Causal Structure and Event Conceptualization

Marques (2024) also proposed that the subjunctive is a trigger for causally structured events, suggesting that predicates governing the subjunctive introduce a strong causal relation between the external argument (main clause subject) and the internal argument (subordinate clause). This leads to the idea that mood selection is linked to necessary and sufficient conditions structuring these causal relations.

7. *Il faut que tu partes maintenant.* (Subjunctive) 'It is necessary that you leave now.' *This implies a conditional necessity relation.*
8. *Je constate que tu pars maintenant.* (Indicative) 'I observe that you leave now.' *This implies a factual assertion relation.*

While this moves closer to our proposed framework, the concept of "causal and modal relation" needs further clarification and the examples provided (e.g., with expletive subjects like *il*) do not always align with the claim about external arguments. The precise nature of the "event structure" linked to the subjunctive also requires more development.

4.3. Limitations of Previous Approaches and the Present Study's Contribution

While previous approaches offer valuable insights into the phenomenon of mood selection, they face several limitations that the current study aims to address. One primary concern is the lack of a unified explanation; many existing theories provide only partial accounts and struggle to offer a comprehensive explanation for mood distribution across diverse verb classes, particularly for alternating verbs. Furthermore, there is often an insufficient engagement with causality, as the role of underlying causal mechanisms and force interactions is frequently not fully integrated or rigorously defined. This leads to a less dynamic understanding of mood choice and highlights the need for a deeper engagement with recent research on stative causation (Maienborn, Herdtfelder 2017; Copley 2018; Page 2023) and the causal structure of psychological verbs (Croft 2012). Additionally, empirical gaps persist within the literature, as claims regarding usage patterns are sometimes formulated based on linguistic introspection rather than robust verification from attested corpus data. Finally, the field is marked by terminological inconsistencies, where key terms such as "psychological verb" or "evaluative predicate" are employed without clear justification or consistent definition, resulting in conceptual confusion.

5. THE DYNAMICS OF MOOD SELECTION WITH PSYCH-VERBS

Psychological predicates, or psych-verbs, describe mental states, emotions, and cognitive processes. Their behavior in governing mood in complement clauses is particularly complex and has posed significant challenges for traditional and even more recent semantic approaches, as discussed in Section 4. This section applies the Force Dynamics and Causal Chain Theory framework to explain the distinct mood patterns observed with these verbs, demonstrating how the conceptualization of causal forces and event realization drives mood selection.

5.1. Factive-Emotive Predicates and Indirect Causation

Factive-emotive predicates, such as *regretter* ('to regret') and *craindre* ('to fear'), systematically govern the subjunctive mood in their complement clauses. While these verbs presuppose the truth of their complement (i.e., the event described in the subordinate clause is taken as a fact), their "emotive" or "evaluative nature" introduces a crucial layer of subjectivity that our causal framework helps to elucidate.

The precise meaning of the "evaluative nature" imposing a distance between the speaker and propositional content warrants clarification. From a Force Dynamics perspective, the speaker's emotional stance acts as an indirect causal force that mediates the perception or assertion of the embedded event. The event itself is factual, but the speaker's *reaction to* or *evaluation of* that fact introduces a scenario akin to a PREVENT interaction (Wolff et al. 2010). The speaker's emotion (the Antagonist's force) "prevents" the straightforward, objective assertion of the event (the Agonist's tendency), even if the event has occurred. This mediation shifts the event into a realm where it is filtered through a subjective lens, triggering the subjunctive.

Examples illustrating this effect follow:

1. *Il regrette qu'elle soit venue si tôt.* (Subjunctive) 'He regrets that she came too early.' *Analysis:* The event "she came too early" is a fact. However, the matrix subject's regret (an emotional evaluation) acts as an indirect force. This regret implies a desire for a different, unrealized scenario (e.g., she came later, or not at all). The subjunctive *soit* encodes this tension between the factual event and the subjective, counterfactual evaluation, reflecting a PREVENT scenario where the regret PREVENTS the event from being presented as a purely neutral, objective fact. The speaker's emotional involvement creates a modal distance.
2. *Ils craignent qu'il meure.* (Subjunctive) 'They fear that he might die.' *Analysis:* Here, the event "he dies" is anticipated but not yet realized. The fear acts as a strong emotional force, projecting the event into a hypothetical, undesirable future. This is a clear case of the subjunctive encoding an unrealized state influenced by an emotional force, aligning with a

PREVENT dynamic where the fear is directed at preventing this future outcome, even if it's merely a possibility.

The ungrammaticality of the indicative occurring with these verbs (**Il regrette qu'elle est venue si tôt*, **Ils craignent qu'il meurt*) confirms that this subjective, mediated causal relationship is obligatory for these predicates. The indicative would imply a direct, unmediated assertion of the event, which conflicts with the inherent evaluative nature of *regretter* and *craindre*.

Baunaz, Blochowiak and Grisot (2024) provide experimental evidence that emotivity is crucial for mood licensing, interacting with pragmatic factors and broader subjectivity (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1999). Our Force Dynamics approach formalizes this interaction: the emotional state of the experiencer (the matrix subject) creates a "force field" that influences the presentation of the embedded proposition, leading to the selection of the subjunctive.

While Godard (2012) attributes the mood of *regretter* to its non-assertive pragmatic status, the Force Dynamics framework allows us to visualize this as a PREVENT interaction. The emotional reaction (Antagonist) acts as a counter-force that prevents the complement from moving into the status of a direct assertion.

5.2. Cognitive/Evaluative Predicates and Direct Assertion

Conversely, cognitive or evaluative verbs like *se souvenir* ('to remember') and *savoir* ('to know') generally select the indicative mood. These verbs establish a direct relationship with reality, presenting the subordinate event as a verified, objective fact without a subjective filter that imposes a PREVENT or "indirect" force.

3. *Il se souvient qu'elle est venue si tôt¹.* (Indicative) 'He remembers that she came too early.' *Analysis:* The act of remembering directly asserts the factual occurrence of the event "she came too early." There is no mediating emotional force that creates modal distance or projects a counterfactual scenario. The causal link between the memory and the remembered event is direct and unmediated, thus favoring the indicative.
4. *Nous savons qu'il est parti.* (Indicative) 'We know that he left.' *Analysis:* The verb *savoir* expresses epistemic certainty. The knowledge of the event "he left" is presented as a verified fact. The causal force is one of direct assertion, where the cognitive state directly reflects a known reality.

¹ It is also worth noting that the adverbial *si tôt* ("so soon") in Example 3 often behaves like a Negative Polarity Item (NPI), sounding more natural in non-veridical or negative contexts. The preference for the subjunctive in the negative form further harmonizes with the non-actualized status of the memory in the speaker's current cognitive state.

The subjunctive is unacceptable with these verbs (**Il se souvient qu'elle soit venue si tôt*, **Nous savons qu'il soit parti*), reinforcing that they encode a direct, factual relationship.

Moreover, the robustness of the Force Dynamics model is further tested by polarity effects, particularly with memory predicates. As noted in the data, while the affirmative *se souvenir* selects the indicative due to the successful retrieval of the event, the negative form (*Il ne se souvient pas qu'elle soit venue*) frequently licenses the subjunctive. Under the present framework, negation functions as a "Force Barrier" or a severance of the causal chain. In the negative, the subject's cognitive access to the event is blocked; the mental path fails to reach the proposition. Consequently, the event is not established as a direct reality for the subject, triggering the subjunctive to mark this lack of causal contact.

5.3. Alternating Psych-Verbs: The Case of *Comprendre*

The behavior of verbs like *comprendre* ('to understand'), which are often considered factive yet can take both the indicative and the subjunctive, is particularly insightful for our framework. This alternation demonstrates how a single verb can encode different causal relationships depending on the speaker's stance or the discourse context.

When *comprendre* takes the indicative, it signals a direct cognitive grasp of a factual situation, similar to *savoir*:

5. *Je comprends qu'il est fatigué.* (Indicative) 'I understand that he is tired.' *Analysis:* This implies a direct understanding of an existing, factual state. The speaker's comprehension is a direct reflection of reality.

However, *comprendre* can also take the subjunctive, particularly when it expresses an emotional reaction to a fact, a form of empathy, or a concession, thereby introducing a subjective evaluation or a PREVENT force.

6. *Je comprends qu'il soit fatigué, mais il doit continuer.* (Subjunctive) 'I understand that he is tired, but he must continue.' *Analysis:* Here, *comprendre* implies an acknowledgement of the fact ("he is tired") but also an emotional or empathetic response to it, often with an implied counter-expectation (e.g., "I understand his tiredness, but it's inconvenient/undesirable in this situation"). The subjunctive *soit* marks this subjective evaluation and the tension between the fact and the speaker's or implied agent's will or expectation, creating a subtle PREVENT scenario where the understanding mediates a desired (or necessary) action.

Another critical test for the explanatory scope of the Force Dynamics model for the verb *comprendre* exhibits a distinct semantic split based on mood selection.

- (a) *Je comprends qu'elle est partie.* (Indicative)
- (b) *Je comprends qu'elle soit partie.* (Subjunctive)

In (a), the Force Dynamic is one of intellectual grasping (Realization). The subject successfully accesses the factual event; the causal path is complete. In (b), the verb shifts to an emotive/empathic reading ("I find it understandable/I accept"). Here, the subject's evaluative stance acts as a filter (Antagonist), mediating the relationship to the event. The assertion of the fact is backgrounded in favor of the subject's reaction. This alternation confirms that, even within the same verb, mood is not determining the meaning arbitrarily, but rather flagging the specific Causal Chain being profiled: direct epistemic access (Indicative) versus mediated evaluative reaction (Subjunctive).

5.4. Thematic Roles, Event Structure, and Subject Constraints

The analysis of psych-verbs is further enriched by considering their event structure and the thematic roles of their arguments. As discussed in Section 2.3, psychological events can be decomposed into a triggering event (e1) and a resulting emotional state (e2).

This decomposition facilitates a deeper understanding of role transitions, where the subject of a psych-verb often functions as a perceiver, or proto-agent, during e1 as they actively engage with the stimulus. Subsequently, this entity transitions to an experiencer, or proto-patient/undergoer, during e2 upon being affected by the resulting emotional state (Dowty 1991; Van Valin, Wilkins 1996). Such a dynamic shift is central to the semantics of these predicates; for instance, in the sentence *Les livres m'ennuient* ('The books bore me'), the books serve as the stimulus that triggers the emotional state of boredom in the experiencer. Within the framework of Force Dynamics, the term "agent" can refer to any entity exerting a force that triggers an effect—even an inanimate one—which aligns with the concept of a "stimulus" in Pustejovsky's framework.

Furthermore, factive-emotive predicates often impose specific subject constraints on the main and subordinate clauses. In general, the use of the subjunctive is favored when the subjects of the matrix and complement clauses are distinct. This distinction ensures that the emotional evaluation is performed by an external experiencer (the matrix subject) regarding an event involving a different participant (the subordinate subject).

7. *Il regrette qu'ils ne soient pas suffisamment formés.* (Subjunctive) 'He regrets that they are not sufficiently trained.' *Analysis:* The regret is *his*, but the lack of training pertains to *them*. The distinct subjects allow for the subjective evaluation to be projected onto an external event.

When the subjects are identical, French typically prefers a *de + infinitive* construction, which presents the event more as a direct consequence or property of the matrix

subject's action/state, reducing the "modal distance" that triggers the subjunctive:

8. *Il regrette de ne pas être suffisamment formé.* (Infinitive) 'He regrets not being sufficiently trained.' *Analysis:* The regret is directly tied to the subject's own state, eliminating the need for a mediated, subjunctive projection.

While the subjunctive can sometimes be used with identical subjects in marked or emphatic constructions, this typically signals a heightened sense of distance or a more deliberate, formal register, consistent with the idea of a PREVENT force being more explicitly invoked.

In summary, mood selection with psych-verbs is a direct consequence of how the speaker conceptualizes the causal link between the matrix predicate and the embedded event. Factive-emotive verbs, through their subjective evaluation, introduce an indirect causal force that triggers the subjunctive, while cognitive verbs, by asserting direct factual knowledge, favor the indicative. Alternating verbs like *comprendre* further illustrate this sensitivity to the underlying causal-force dynamics.

6. THE DYNAMICS OF MOOD SELECTION WITH BOULETIC VERBS

Bouletic verbs, which express desire, wish, or volition, represent another crucial class of predicates for understanding the dynamic between causal forces and mood selection in French. While these verbs share a common semantic core of intentionality, their mood governance reveals subtle distinctions based on the speaker's perceived control over the event and the likelihood of its realization. This section analyzes the behavior of bouletic verbs through the lens of Force Dynamics, distinguishing between verbs that impose the subjunctive and those that allow for alternation.

6.1. Wish/Volition Verbs and Unrealized Projection

Verbs that express a pure wish, strong volition, or an unrealized desire systematically govern the subjunctive mood. These predicates project the event of the complement clause into a hypothetical or desired sphere, where the action has not yet occurred and its realization is not guaranteed. From a Force Dynamics perspective, the matrix subject (the Agonist) exerts a strong internal force (volition) directed towards a future state, but this force does not directly *cause* or *ensure* the event's realization in the actual world. Instead, it creates a scenario of unrealized projection, triggering the subjunctive.

Examples illustrating this phenomenon follow:

1. *Je souhaite que tu partes pour chez toi.* (Subjunctive) 'I wish that you leave for your home.' *Analysis:* The action of leaving (*partes*) is purely desired by the speaker. The subjunctive signals that this action is a hypothetical projection, belonging to the realm of intentionality rather than reflecting an actual or

guaranteed state of affairs. The speaker's wish is a force, but it's not a directly causative one in the sense of bringing about an immediate, certain outcome.

2. *Je veux que tu viennes immédiatement.* (Subjunctive) 'I want that you come immediately.' *Analysis:* *Vouloir* ('to want') imposes a stronger degree of volition than *souhaiter*. However, despite this stronger intent, the event of "coming immediately" is still a desired future state that may or may not be realized. The subjunctive *viennes* encodes this future-oriented projection, where the speaker's will acts as a strong, but not necessarily determinative, force towards the embedded event.

Other verbs following this pattern include *désirer* ('to desire') and *avoir envie que* ('to feel like that'):

3. *Je désire que la situation s'améliore.* (Subjunctive) 'I desire that the situation improves.'
4. *J'ai envie que tu réussisses.* (Subjunctive) 'I feel like that you succeed.'

The ungrammaticality of the indicative in combination with these verbs (e.g., **Je souhaite que tu pars*, **Je veux que tu viens*) confirms that they encode a forward-oriented force relation with no inherent guarantee of realization. The subjunctive functions as a marker of intentionality and hypothetical projection.

6.2. Expectation Verbs and Perceived Probability: The Case of Espérer

In contrast to the verbs above, *espérer* ('to hope') introduces an expectation that is perceived as realistic or probable, and it typically governs the indicative mood. Here, the speaker envisions the event as a likely outcome rather than a purely abstract wish. From a Force Dynamics perspective, the speaker's hope aligns with an ENABLE scenario or a weak causal link (Copley, Wolff 2014), where the conditions are seen as favorable for the event's realization, or the speaker's belief in its likelihood is strong enough to treat it as a potential fact.

5. *J'espère que tu pars pour chez toi.* (Indicative) 'I hope that you leave for your home.' *Analysis:* The event "you leave" (*pars*) is perceived as a probable scenario. The indicative reflects the expectation of an event with a high likelihood of realization. The speaker's hope, while still a subjective stance, is anchored in a stronger epistemic modality or perceived reality than the pure desire expressed by *souhaiter*.

The rejection of the subjunctive with *espérer* in such contexts (**J'espère que tu partes pour chez toi*) suggests that the event introduced by *espérer* is conceptualized as having a higher degree of potential realization, making the "unrealized projection" encoded by the subjunctive less appropriate.

However, it is important to acknowledge that *espérer* can, in certain marked contexts or specific registers,

appear with the subjunctive. This behavior, highlighted by Baunaz and Puskás (2022) and Mari and Laurenti (2023) in *Mere-desire and action-oriented bouletics in French* (2023), suggests that alternating verbs are often ambiguous between different readings. For *espérer*, this ambiguity can be between an “emotive or bouletic reading” (licensing the subjunctive, akin to a strong wish with less certainty) and a “doxastic reading” (licensing the indicative, akin to ‘count on’ or ‘expect’ with higher certainty). This systematic meaning difference linked to mood alternation reinforces our framework: when *espérer* triggers the subjunctive, it is because the speaker is emphasizing the *desire* aspect, which aligns with an indirect causal force towards an unrealized state, rather than the *expectation* aspect, which aligns with a more direct, probable outcome.

6.3. Degree of Control and Speaker’s Commitment

The distinction between these bouletic verb types can be further explained by the degree of control exerted by the speaker and their commitment to the future-oriented situation.

Verbs like *vouloir* imply a strong volitional force from the speaker, representing an attempt to directly influence the outcome even when success is not guaranteed. This strong, intentional force is directed at a non-actualized event, a characteristic that inherently aligns with the subjunctive mood. In a similar vein, *souhaiter* expresses a softer intention; it reflects a desire that is projected into the future but with less direct control or certainty regarding its eventual realization. This sense of indirect influence likewise favors the use of the subjunctive. In contrast, *espérer* conveys a higher degree of confidence in the event’s realization. Although the outcome is not fully certain, the perceived probability reduces the “modal distance” between the speaker and the event. This aligns the predicate more closely with a factual projection, which explains why it frequently favors the indicative mood over the subjunctive.

These observations confirm that mood selection with bouletic verbs is not based solely on syntactic constraints but is deeply intertwined with pragmatic and event-based factors, particularly the speaker’s conceptualization of the causal forces at play and the likelihood of the

embedded event’s realization. The verbal mood thus serves as a crucial indicator of the speaker’s propositional commitment to a future-oriented situation.

6.4. Synthesis: The Gradient of Causal Force

To synthesize the findings from both psychological and bouletic predicates, we can observe a clear correlation between the strength of the causal path and mood selection. Rather than a binary opposition, the data suggests a gradient of causal force. As the causal link between the subject and the event transitions from direct realization to blockage or prevention, the preference shifts from the indicative to the subjunctive.

The following table illustrates the correlation between the strength of the causal path (from subject to event) and the licensing of the indicative mood. As the causal link weakens or is blocked by an Antagonist (emotion/volition), the preference shifts toward the subjunctive.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has reexamined the selection of the subjunctive and indicative moods in French complement clauses, specifically focusing on psych-verbs and bouletic predicates, through the rigorous lens of Force Dynamics (Talmy 2000; Wolff et al. 2010) and Causal Chain Theory (Copley, Martin 2014; Copley et al. 2015). By integrating these event-based frameworks, we have demonstrated that mood selection is not merely a matter of prescriptive grammar or superficial semantic categories, but is deeply intertwined with how speakers conceptualize and encode the underlying causal forces, agency, and the realization status of embedded events.

One of the key findings of this study is that the subjunctive mood consistently appears in contexts where the causal relationship between the matrix verb and the embedded proposition is indirect, mediated by a subjective stance, or linked to an unrealized or hypothetical state. This pattern is particularly evident in the analysis of factive-emotive psych-verbs, such as *regretter* and *craindre*. Despite the fact that these verbs presuppose the truth of their complement, their inherent evaluative nature introduces what can be characterized as a PREVENT scenario. Within this framework, the speaker’s emotion acts as an indirect causal force that

Table 1 The Gradient of Causal Force and Mood Selection Tendencies

Predicate Type	Force Dynamic Configuration	Causal Connection	Mood Tendency
Factive-Perception (<i>voir, savoir</i>)	Realization (Unobstructed Path)	Strong / Direct	Indicative (Fixed)
Probabilistic (<i>espérer, supposer</i>)	Enablement / Weak Potential (Potential Path)	Weak / Mediated	Indicative (Dominant, but fragile)
Polysemous / Shifting (<i>comprendre, admettre</i>)	Variable (Realization ↔ Acceptance)	Context-Dependent	Alternating (Meaning shift)
Bouletic / Emotive (<i>vouloir, regretter</i>)	Impingement / Prevention (Antagonist Blocks Result)	Severed / Blocked	Subjunctive (Fixed)

mediates the objective assertion of the event, thereby triggering the subjunctive. Similarly, wish or volition bouletic verbs like *souhaiter* and *vouloir* project desired, future-oriented states that lack a guarantee of realization. In these instances, the speaker's strong volitional force is directed toward an unrealized event, aligning with the subjunctive's role as a marker of intentionality and hypothetical projection.

Conversely, the indicative mood is favored when the embedded event is asserted as a direct fact or when the causal link between the two clauses is stronger and remains unmediated. This is observed most clearly with cognitive or evaluative psych-verbs, such as *se souvenir* and *savoir*, which encode epistemic certainty and a direct cognitive grasp of reality, leading to the indicative. Furthermore, expectation bouletic verbs like *espérer* demonstrate this shift; when *espérer* conveys a perceived probability or a realistic expectation, it aligns with an ENABLE scenario or a weaker causal link. This higher degree of potential realization reduces modal distance and favors the indicative, distinguishing it from more purely volitional predicates.

The analysis of alternating verbs, such as *comprendre* and the nuanced behavior of *espérer*, further underscored the sensitivity of mood selection to the underlying causal-force dynamics and the speaker's propositional commitment. These alternations demonstrate that a single verb can encode different causal relationships depending on the context, leading to distinct mood choices. We also showed how the evolution of thematic roles and subject constraints within psychological events contributes to this dynamic.

This research contributes to linguistic theory by providing a unified explanatory framework for mood selection with psych-verbs and bouletic predicates, effectively moving beyond traditional descriptive accounts. By rigorously integrating Force Dynamics and Causal Chain Theory, the study offers a more dynamic and cognitively grounded understanding of mood as a reflection of force interactions. A significant contribution of this work is the highlighting of the crucial roles played by indirect causation, subjective mediation, and event realization status in determining the use of the subjunctive mood. Furthermore, this framework allows for a more precise analysis of alternating verbs by directly linking mood choice to specific semantic ambiguities and the pragmatic interpretations of causal forces within the discourse.

The broader implications of this framework extend beyond the synchronic analysis of French complement clauses. Cross-linguistically, the Force Dynamics model offers a promising avenue for comparative Romance linguistics, potentially elucidating why languages like Spanish and Italian retain the subjunctive in contexts where French has lost it—perhaps due to differing thresholds of “force” perception. Diachronically, this approach suggests that the erosion of the subjunctive in spoken French (Poplack et al. 2013) may stem from

a loss of the cognitive simulation of these forces, reducing complex causal configurations to simple linear assertions. Furthermore, the model shows potential for extending to adjunct clauses; for instance, concessives (e.g. *bien que*) can be rigorously modeled as “counter-force” configurations where an Antagonist persists despite a stronger opposing force. Future research should therefore expand the empirical dataset to include these contexts and employ experimental approaches to explore how native speakers process these causal-force interactions in real-time discourse.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by the Ratchadaphiseksomphot Endowment Fund, Chulalongkorn University (Specific Journal Research Grant in Arts & Humanities; Grant No. RSF-AnH-69-24-22-08).

REFERENCES

- ATILF-CNRS, 1998–2024. *Base textuelle Frantext* [Online database]. CNRS & Université de Lorraine. available at: <https://www.frantext.fr/>
- Baunaz, L., Blochowiak, J., Grisot, C., 2024. Emotivity matters for mood licensing: Experimental evidence from French. *Isogloss. Open Journal of Romance Linguistics*, 10(1), 1–34. available at: <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/isogloss.465>
- Baunaz, L., Puskás, G., 2022. Introduction. In: *A Cross-linguistic Approach to the Syntax of Subjunctive Mood*. Studies in Natural Language and Linguistic Theory, vol 101. Springer, Cham. available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-04540-0_1
- Copley, B., 2018. Dispositional causation. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 3(1): 137. available at: <https://doi.org/10.5334/gjgl.507>
- Copley, B., Martin, F., 2014. *Causation in Grammatical Structures*. Oxford University Press.
- Copley, B., Wolff, P., 2014. Theories of causation should inform linguistic theory and vice versa. In B. Copley, F. Martin (Eds.), *Causation in Grammatical Structures* (pp. 11–57). Oxford University Press.
- Copley, B., et al., 2015. Force interaction in the expression of causation. In T. Snider, S. D. Epstein, S. J. Goldin (Eds.), *Semantics and Linguistic Theory* (Vol. 25, pp. 433–451). Linguistic Society of America. available at: <https://doi.org/10.3765/salt.v25i0.3482>
- Croft, W., 2012. *Verbs: Aspect and Causal Structure*. Oxford University Press.
- Dowty, D., 1991. Thematic proto-roles and argument selection. *Language*, 67(3), 547–619. available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/415037>
- Farkas, D., 1992. On the Semantics of Subjunctive Complements. In P. Hirschbühler, E. Koerner (Ed.), *Romance Languages and Modern Linguistic Theory* (pp. 69–104). John Benjamins Publishing Company. available at: <https://doi.org/10.1075/cilt.91.07far>
- García Yanes, F., 2022. Force dynamics as the path to the Spanish subjunctive. *Cognitive Linguistics*,

- 33(4), 767-800. available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/cog-2021-0130>
- Giannakidou, A., Mari, A., 2016. Emotive predicates and the subjunctive: a flexible mood OT account based on (non)veridicality. *Proceedings of Sinn Und Bedeutung*, 20, 288–305. available at: <https://ojs.ub.uni-konstanz.de/sub/index.php/sub/article/view/264>
- Giannakidou, A., Mari, A., 2021. *Truth and Veridicality in Grammar and Thought: Mood, Modality, and Propositional Attitudes*. University of Chicago Press. available at: <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/T/bo78676587.html>
- Godard, D., 2012. Indicative and subjunctive mood in complement clauses: from formal semantics to grammar writing. *Empirical issues in syntax and semantics*, 9, 129-148. available at: http://www.cssp.cnrs.fr/eiss9/eiss9_godard.pdf
- Kerbrat-Orecchioni, C., 1999. *L'énonciation: De la subjectivité dans le langage* (4th ed.). Armand Colin.
- Maienborn, C., Herdtfelder, J., 2017. Eventive versus stative causation: The case of German causal von-modifiers. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 40(3), 279–320. available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10988-016-9201-8>
- Mari, A., Laurenti, E., 2023. *Mere-desire and action-oriented bouletics in French*. halshs-04074769.
- Marques, R., 2024. Explaining the Subjunctive in factive contexts. *Isogloss. Open Journal of Romance Linguistics*, 10(2), 1–27. available at: <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/isogloss.273>
- Page, A. K., 2023. Causation is non-eventive. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 54(1), 1–36. available at: <https://era.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/39841>
- Poplack, S., Lealess, A., Dion, N., 2013. The evolving grammar of the French subjunctive. *International Journal of Latin and Romance Linguistics*, 25(1), 139-195. available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/probus-2013-0005>
- Pustejovsky, J., 1995. *The Generative Lexicon*. MIT Press. available at: <https://mitpress.mit.edu/9780262661409/the-generative-lexicon/>
- Pustejovsky, J., Bouillon, P., 1995. Aspectual Coercion and Logical Polysemy. *Journal of Semantics*, 12(2), 133–162.
- Talmy, L., 2000. *Toward a Cognitive Semantics, Vol. II: Typology and Process in Concept Structuring*. The MIT Press. available at: <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/6848.001.0001>
- Van Valin Jr., R. D., Wilkins, D. P., 1996. The case for 'Effector': Case roles, agents, and agency revisited. In M. Shibatani, S. A. Thompson (Eds.), *Grammatical Constructions: Their Form and Meaning* (pp. 289–322). Oxford University Press.
- Wolff, P., 2007. Representing causation. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 136(1), 82–111. available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0096-3445.136.1.82>
- Wolff, P., Barbey, A. K., Hausknecht, M., 2010. For want of a nail: How absences cause events. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 139(2), 191–221. available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018129>