

Finite Complements of *suppose (that)*, *supposing (that)*: A Corpus-Based Study

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Abstract

This study attempts to present rich complementation profiles of two related expressions - suppose (that) and supposing (that) - to show that there are correlations between the choice of certain verbal syntagms in the complements and particular genres. For example, the study demonstrates that the majority of usages of suppose (that) in both academic and non-academic genres involve complements with present indicatives, while the occurrences of supposing+0 have complements predominantly in the past indicative. Furthermore, the study illustrates the ratio of the past indicatives and past subjunctives in be-contexts. Finally, the data suggest that suppose (that) and supposing (that) may take on a range of textual and interactional functions.

Keywords: the mandative subjunctive, the past subjunctive, hypothesis verbs, conditional subordinators, corpus analysis

Systematic research in monolingual corpora has revealed that expressions governing content clause complements (e.g. *I suggest that he go/goes/should go there* etc.) exhibit complexities in their distributional patterns. According to Biber et al. (661), verbs that take content clause complements belong to three semantic domains. These involve mental verbs, speech act verbs and other communication verbs. As a mental verb, more specifically a hypothesis verb (Quirk et al. 1183), the expression *(to) suppose* represents one of the matrices that take the content clause complements and exhibit a rich complementation profile.

The study presented below aims at mapping this rather underexplored area of research. It presents the corpus analysis of verbal syntagms which appear in the complements of

two expressions that originated from the verb *suppose*. One of them, *supposing (that)*, is considered to be a subordinator, forming part of a gradient between the participle and the conjunction (Quirk et al. 998, 1089). The other, *suppose (that)*, is classified as the imperative of this hypothesis verb complemented by a nominal clause (Quirk et al. 1183). As both are derivatives of the same verb, they display similarities in terms of the functions and meanings which they convey. The range of their uses will be discussed in the following section.

2. Classification of *suppose/supposing*

Quirk et al. (842) state that both the subordinator *supposing* and the imperative *suppose* may occur in a range of functions, which are similar to the functions of *what if*.¹ In (1)–(2), the meaning of *supposing* and *suppose* may be rephrased as *what would happen if*. Also in (3), the expression *supposing* retains its conditional meaning and can be paraphrased as *what does it matter if*. Finally, in example (4), *supposing* may still be substituted with *what if*, but unlike in the previous usages, it marks the utterance as a tentative invitation. A similar function of *suppose* is demonstrated in an example given by Dušková et al. (332), here shown as (5).

- (1) *Supposing I don't see her*. [inquiry: What would happen if] (Quirk et al. 842)
- (2) *Suppose he was/is lost, what would you do?* (Quirk et al. 1013)
- (3) *Supposing they ARE poor?* [What does it matter if they...?] <impatience or scepticism>, (Quirk et al. 842)
- (4) *Supposing you come with us*. [invitation] (Quirk et al. 842)
- (5) *Suppose we go for a swim*. (Dušková et al. 332)

Furthermore, both expressions may occur in different forms than those presented in (1)–(5). In example (6), *supposing* is the gerund, and in (7) *suppose* is a verb in the indicative mood with the first person singular pronoun, which is used in the preceding context.

- (6) *...there are no good grounds for **supposing** that men have gradually been evolving into creatures of greater and greater intelligence*. [BYU-BNC:H10: W_non_acad]
- (7) *Because they're not stored in, in (SP:PSIV4). Yes. (unclear) (SP:PSIV3) a drawing number sequence. So. I (SP:PSIV4). (SP:PSIV3) No. **suppose** we could find them easy enough if they were. They're actually stored in bloody line reference and (SP:PSIV3) Are they really?* [BYU-BNC:FUL: S_meeting]

This study deals with the usages in which *supposing* and *suppose* can be replaced by *what if*, such as in (1)–(5); it therefore excludes cases demonstrated in (6)–(7). The following section attempts to outline the rich complementation profile of both expressions, preparing the background for the corpus analysis presented in Sections 6–10.

3. Complementation patterns and functions of *suppose/supposing*

The expressions *suppose* and *supposing* may be followed by a range of finite complements. There are slight differences in the use of individual choices. For instance, examples (8)–(9) demonstrate the pattern in which the complement involves the verb in the present indicative. As Quirk et al. state (1013, 1182), the present tense refers to the present or the future, and weakens the counterfactuality of the hypothetical meaning of the expressions *suppose (that)* or *supposing (that)* (see *as if* in Leech 121).

- (8) *Suppose a contract of sale contains an exemption clause; suppose also that exemption clause is rendered ineffective by the Unfair Contract Terms Act. There still remains the question...* [BYU-BNC:H7U: W_acad]
- (9) *...supposing that the flow investigated becomes more complicated than might be expected because of an instability, this fact would be discovered not by a stability analysis but by the observation, in the laboratory...* [BYU-BNC:J12: W_acad]

Also, the complements of the expressions *suppose* and *supposing* may contain the past indicative, as in (10)–(11), or the past subjunctive, as in (12)–(13). These uses imply hypothetical distance and suggest a negative presupposition. The latter option is more formal, and may evoke “overtones of tentativeness” (Quirk et al. 1093).

- (10) *Oh, it was a dangerous thing, to threaten Jasper. Suppose he left her? Oh no, he would not, she knew that absolutely.* [BYU-BNC:EV1: W_fic]
- (11) *Supposing the tramp was there behind the clump, she thought, smoking his pipe and waiting to catch her?* [BYU-BNC:B0B: W_fic]
- (12) *Suppose that the new equilibrium were at P.* [BYU-BNC: K92: W_commerce]
- (13) *Supposing she were found not guilty in Manila on whatever charges the government brought against her?* [BYU-BNC: ABK: W_MAG]

Finally, when the past perfect marks the verb in the finite complement, it locates events in the irreal past and suggests that the events did not happen, as in (14)–(15).

- (14) *Suppose that this agreement had never been made, and the wife had made no promise to maintain herself and did not do so.* [BYU-BNC: H81: W_acad]
- (15) *Supposing it had been your baby. Supposing all this had happened three months from now. We were still standing on the landing.* [BYU-BNC: FEE: W_fic]

The above-cited examples demonstrate that the subordinator *supposing*, along with the imperative *suppose*, may form complex distributional patterns and convey a range of communicative functions. All of these usages retain a conditional meaning which links *supposing (that)/suppose (that)* to the conditional subordinators whose distributional patterns have been subjects of corpus research. Major issues in the research into the area of conditional subordinators and their complements will be summarized in the following section.

4. Previous research on conditional subordinators and their complements

Research in the area of conditional subordinators has focused on the mood marking of the verb in the complement finite clause. For example, Leech et al. compare preferences for the past indicatives of the verb *be* (i.e. *I was, he was*) over the past subjunctives (*I were, he were*) in conditional clauses introduced by four conjunctions – *as if/as though/ even if* and *if*. Their corpus analysis, based on the data from the LOB and F-LOB corpora, leads to the conclusion that the use of the past subjunctive has decreased in British English within the last thirty years; both options (*he were x he was*) occur with comparatively similar frequencies (Leech et al. 65).

On the other hand, Johansson and Norheim (33–34), using the Brown and LOB corpora and a larger set of conditional subordinators, conclude that in the area of conditional clauses, the past subjunctive represents the dominant choice in hypothetical-conditional clauses. However, their analysis does not include the expression *suppose*, indicatives are not counted, and their corpora exhibit only five subjunctives. Also, these occurrences involve the use not only after *suppose*, but also after the verb *wish*, as authors do not provide the data separately for each expression.

Also, Schlüter's study (2009) illustrates the use of the verbal mood in conditional clauses. Her analysis aims at describing the complementation profile of one conditional subordinator – *on condition that*. She reaches the conclusion that past subjunctives are sporadic (286–287), and therefore she discounts them from her analysis. At the same time, she shows that adverbial clauses of condition represent a potential environment for triggering the present subjunctive (Schlüter 291–292).

Studies have demonstrated that the present subjunctives have exhibited increasing use within the twentieth century, and – especially in American English – have been gradually losing their formal stigma (Leech et al. 60, Övergaard 1995). This specific mood marking may be used if the semantics of a particular trigger denotes an action that should be taken by somebody or if some person wants a certain event to happen (Crawford 259). Prototypical expressions that are associated with triggering the present subjunctive on the verbal syntagms in the complement content clauses are verbs used “for directive speech acts” (Peters 134), such as *suggest, recommend, insist*, etc. This is demonstrated in example (16), where the verb *recommend* elicits the use of the present subjunctive (i.e. *he speak*).

- (16) “*Personally, I'd recommend that he **speak** in public as soon as possible,*” said
Toko Kanoh [COCA:2011:NEWS: WashPost]

As Schlüter (278) points out, the conditional subordinator *on condition that* may also be added on the list of expressions which elicit subjunctive mood marking. This is shown in example (17). In this sentence, somebody wants the school to change its name, and the verb *change* is marked as the present subjunctive.

- (17) *He left \$ 67 million to the endowment when he died in 1925 on the² condition that the school - then Trinity College - change its name to honor his father; Washington Duke. (The Times 1990, Schlüter 278)*

As is neatly illustrated in example (18), *suppose* may occur in similar contexts. In this case the speaker wants the other person to come and see him/her in the future. Therefore, the speaker proposes a potential course of action (Biber et al. 667), and *suppose* endows the utterance with the communicative function of a tentative suggestion.

- (18) *Well, I suggest you give up about the beginning of September. You'll be wanting to take things a bit more easily by then, I dare say. Suppose you come and see me again at the beginning of April. Perhaps you would like to make an appointment with my secretary on the way out. Thank you.* [BYU-BNC:CDE: W_acad]

Since this expression carries the mandative component of meaning and exhibits affinity with verbs, as in (16), and with the conditional subordinator *on condition that*, as in (17), it is questionable whether or not the verb in the complement clause in (18) can be marked as the present subjunctive. Simply put, the question that arises is whether *suppose* (*that*), alongside with *supposing* (*that*), may trigger the contexts into which the present subjunctives have begun to expand.

To answer this question, this study aims at providing a detailed complementation profile of both triggers, showing the distribution of individual complement types across genres. Finally, the study attempts to illustrate the ratio of the past tense forms of the verb *be* and of past subjunctives.

5. Data and methodology

The analysis of the complementation patterns of the expressions *suppose* (*that*)/*supposing* (*that*) is based on data from the *British National Corpus* (BYU-BNC). The search was restricted to finite complements of both expressions (*suppose* and *supposing*) introduced by *that* or a zero complementizer (hereafter referred to as zero). Prior to presenting the data in the following sections, there are several methodological caveats that need to be mentioned.

First, the whole corpus involved 1382 usages of *suppose that* and 155 instances of *supposing that*. All of them were manually checked to extract examples in which *suppose* and *supposing* fulfilled the criteria mentioned in Section (2) and represented uses in which these two expressions imply conditionality and may be replaced with *what if*.

Second, in case of *suppose+0* (i.e. zero complementizer), the search was narrowed down to those instances in which this hypothesis verb was preceded by a punctuation mark, specifically a full stop or a colon. This was done to exclude usages in which *suppose* was preceded by personal pronouns, and therefore represented a conjugated verb, as in (19).

- (19) *I suppose I don't know whether we ought, we should mention it here, erm, the, the National A G M is a future event really isn't it?* [BYU-BNC:DCH: S_meeting]

To keep the search consistent, the same process was applied to filtering complements of *supposing* followed by a zero complementizer. Despite the fact that the results were limited to contexts in which the key expressions were preceded by punctuation, satisfactorily

workable samples were generated, as shown in Table 5.1. Individual results and figures will be presented in the following section.

	<i>suppose that</i>	<i>.(:)suppose+0</i>	<i>supposing that</i>	<i>.(:)supposing+0</i>
all manually checked examples	1382	752	155	67
extracted samples	340	457	50	60

Table 5.1 Overall representations of *suppose (that)/supposing (that)*

6. Complementation patterns of *suppose that* and *suppose+0*

Table 6.1 below summarizes the overall frequencies of occurrences of all verbal syntagms occurring in the complements of the expression *suppose* irrespective of their time reference (for differences see Section 3).

	<i>suppose + that</i>	<i>suppose + 0</i>
present indicatives (3rd person sg)	212 (62.4%)	194 (42.5%)
ambiguous present indicatives (all other persons)/present subjunctives	48 (14.1%)	100 (21.9%)
present subjunctives (3rd person sg)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
past indicatives	31 (9.1%)	71 (15.5%)
ambiguous past indicatives/past subjunctives	4 (1.2%)	12 (2.6%)
past subjunctives (1st and 3rd pers. sg)	4 (1.2%)	15 (3.3%)
present perfect	10 (2.9%)	16 (3.5%)
past perfect	17 (5%)	32 (7%)
modal	9 (2.6%)	12 (2.6%)
miscellaneous	5 (1.5%)	5 (1.1%)
TOTAL	340	457

Table 6.1 Complementation patterns of *suppose that* and *suppose +0*

Before commenting on the tendencies in the use of complements of the expression *suppose*, one remark needs to be made about finite clauses involving the verbs in the present tense. Returning to the point raised in Section 4, one has to keep in mind that the present subjunctives cannot be theoretically *a priori* excluded from the repertoire of finite complements because *suppose* may occur in the contexts which coincide with the use of

mandative subjunctives – as for example in (18), discussed in Section 4. Since present subjunctives are clearly distinguishable from present indicatives only in the third person singular contexts, the analysis treated the verbs in the third person singular and those in all other persons separately.

However, the corpus search has not proved any occurrences of the unambiguous present subjunctive mood in the entire sample of finite complements of *suppose that/suppose+0*. Leaving the question why this is so aside at this moment (see Section 10 for a discussion of this issue), it can be stated that all the verbs in the present tense are therefore considered present indicatives. A detailed summary of their representations in the corpus is, for the sake of clarity, provided in Table 6.2. Here it is shown that if the finite complement of *suppose* occurred in the corpus, then in the majority of cases it involved the verb in the present tense (76.5% with *suppose that* and 64.4% with *suppose+0*).

	<i>suppose + that</i>	<i>suppose + 0</i>
present tense (3rd person sg.)	212 (62.4%)	194 (42.5%)
present tense (all other persons)	48 (14.1%)	100 (21.9%)
TOTAL	260 (76.5%)	294 (64.4%)
all usages	340	457

Table 6.2 Finite complements with the verbs in the present tense

7. Distribution of finite complements across genres

Building on the data presented in the previous section (Table 6.1), this section will demonstrate how the use of a certain complement correlates with its occurrence in a particular genre.

For example, the data yield interesting results related to the use of finite complements with the present tense in the formal registers. The analysis shows that if the expression *suppose* was complemented by a finite clause with the verb in the present tense, then roughly a half of these occurrences were represented in the formal register, such as academic and non-academic genres (193 instances in ACAD and 93 in NON-ACAD – see the rightmost column of Table 7.1), or in the formal text types of the miscellaneous genre³.

	<i>suppose that</i> (present indicatives)	<i>suppose+0</i> (present indicatives)	TOTAL
MISCELLANEOUS	116	106	222
ACAD	92	101	193
NON_ACAD	44	49	93
FICTION	2	30	32
MAGAZINE/NEWSPAPER ⁴	3	6	9
SPOKEN	3	2	5
TOTAL	260	294	554

Table 7.1 Distribution of finite complements with the verbs in the present tense (indicative mood) across genres

Furthermore, it may be stated that the relation between the use of the genre and of the tense functions in both directions. In other words, if the expression *suppose* appeared in the academic or non-academic genre, it predominantly involved the finite complements with the verb in the present tense. This is demonstrated in Table 7.2, which presents convincing figures reflecting that in the academic and non-academic genres, almost 77% of usages of *suppose that* and *suppose+0* have finite complements with present indicatives.

	pres. ind.	past ind.	past subj.	modal	pres. perf.	past perf.	ambg. <i>be</i> past/ subj.	misc.	
ACAD/ NON- ACAD <i>suppose that</i>	136 77%	17 9.6%	1 0.5%	2 1.1%	8 4.5%	11 6.2%	0 0%	2 1.1%	177
ACAD/ NON- ACAD <i>suppose+0</i>	150 77%	20 10.25%	3 1.53%	2 1.02%	8 4.18%	5 2.5%	5 2.5%	2 1.02%	195

Table 7.2 Distribution of all finite complements of *suppose that* and *suppose+0* in academic/non-academic genres

A final remark needs to be made about the overall representations of *suppose that* and *suppose+0* in the fiction genre. There is a striking difference in the distribution of *suppose* with and without the overt complementizer in fictional texts. Table 7.3 illustrates the discrepancy between the frequencies of *suppose* with and without the complementizer, showing the limited representations of *suppose that* on the one hand (1.5%), and 109 occurrences (24%) of *suppose+0*, on the other hand.

	<i>suppose + that</i>	<i>suppose + 0</i>
FICTION	5 (1.5%)	109 (24%)
TOTAL IN ALL GENRES	340	457

Table 7.3 Overall distribution of *suppose that* and *suppose+0* in the fiction genre

Naturally, the question that arises is why there are correlations between the choice of certain verbal syntagms and particular genres (see Tables 7.1-7.2). One potential explanation relates to the diverse meanings and functions which *suppose* may take on. This will be dealt with in greater detail in Section 10. Nevertheless, prior to it I will present the data related to the complementation patterns of *supposing that* and *supposing+0* to

provide a complex picture of the distributional layout of all analyzed matrices.

8. Complementation patterns of *supposing (that)*

To maintain consistency with the presentation of the data related to the distribution of complementation patterns of *suppose that* and *suppose +0*, Table 8.1 is provided below to reflect the occurrences of all verbal syntagms in the adverbial clause introduced by *supposing that/supposing+0* that refer to various time spectra.

	<i>supposing + that</i>	<i>supposing + 0</i>
present indicatives (3rd person sg)	10 (20%)	10 (16.7%)
ambiguous present indicatives (all other persons)/present subjunctives ⁵	4 (8%)	6 (10%)
present subjunctives (3rd person sg)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
past indicatives	10 (20%)	28 (46.7%)
ambiguous past subjunctives/past indicatives	3 (6%)	2 (3.3%)
past subjunctives (1st and 3rd pers. sg)	4 (8%)	3 (5%)
present perfect	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
past perfect	2 (4%)	8 (13.3%)
modal	15 (30%)	3 (5%)
miscellaneous	2 (4%)	0 (0%)
TOTAL	50	60

Table 8.1 Complementation patterns of *supposing that* and *supposing +0*

The first notable difference between *suppose (that)* and *supposing (that)* taking finite complements is in the frequencies of their representations in the BYU-BNC corpus. The subordinator *supposing*, regardless of its occurrence with or without the overt complementizer, appears approximately seven times less than the expression *suppose* in the analyzed corpus sample (see the total of 110 vs. 797 in Tables 8.1 and 6.1).

Another difference is in the shape of the distributional patterns of *supposing*. When used with the complementizer *that*, the architectonic make-up of the complementation landscape of *supposing* is much more diverse than that of the expression *suppose*. Specifically, the verb in the finite complement is a modal verb roughly as many times as the verb in the present indicative. As Table 8.1 shows, there were 15 modals and 14 present indicatives (in all persons) altogether. Furthermore, this table demonstrates that the past indicatives represent a viable complementation option of *supposing that*, and it is even the most represented verbal syntagm occurring with *supposing+0*. Overall, past indicatives

appeared almost in half of cases (46.7%) out of the total number of 60 manually checked corpus samples involving the subordinator *supposing+0*.

Additionally, these occurrences of the complements with the past indicatives were predominantly represented in the fiction genre. Table 8.2 demonstrates that out of the total number of 28 finite complements with past indicatives, 21 of them were found in fictional texts.

	<i>supposing that</i> (past indicatives)	<i>supposing+0</i> (past indicatives)	TOTAL
ACAD/NON ACAD	0	3	3 ⁶
MISCELLANEOUS	1	2	3
FICTION	4	21	25
MAGAZINE/NEWSPAPER	1	0	1
SPOKEN	4	2	6
TOTAL	10	28	38

Table 8.2 Distribution of finite complements with the verbs in the past tense (indicative mood) across genres

At the same time, the relation holds between the use of the fiction genre and the choice of the verbal syntagm in the past indicative as well. In other words, if the subordinator *supposing* complemented without the overt complementizer appeared in the fiction genre, it was most likely to be in the past indicative. To provide precise figures, Table 8.3 shows that out of the total 37 instances of *supposing+0*, 21 sentences (56.8%) involved finite complements with the verbs in the past indicative.

	pres. ind.	past ind.	past subj.	modal	pres. perf.	past perf.	ambg. <i>be</i> past/ subj.	misc.	
FICTION	4	21	2	2	0	7	1	0	37
<i>supposing+0</i>	10.8%	56.8%	5.4%	5.4%	0%	18.9%	2.7%	0%	

Table 8.3 Distribution of all finite complements of *supposing+0* in the fiction genre

Again, the question that arises is why there is a correlation between the choice of the past indicative and the use in the fiction genre (Tables 8.2-8.3). I will discuss a potential explanation in Section 10. Before that, I will turn my attention to the choice of the subjunctive mood, as up to this point I have only considered the indicatives.

9. The use of past subjunctives versus past indicatives

This section will take a closer look at the contexts in which past subjunctives are easily distinguishable from the past indicatives. The setting where the ambiguity between the two moods is resolved is represented by the complements involving the verb *be*, as in (12), repeated here in (20). In this example the verb *were*, used with the third person singular subject, is clearly marked as the past subjunctive.

(20) *Suppose that the new equilibrium were at P.* [BYU-BNC: K92: W_commerce]

The question that may be put forward is whether the past indicatives and subjunctives occur with comparatively similar frequencies, as suggested in Leech et al. (65), or whether the past subjunctive represents a marginal choice for complementing the expressions *suppose* and *supposing* (cf. Schlüter 286–287). To answer this question satisfactorily, one has to take into account that the total number of the *be*-contexts with past reference is made up of 87 sentences, and therefore the settings for the potential usage of these verbs are rather limited in representations. The overall figures are provided in Table 9.1, where it is shown that past indicatives form almost a half of all occurrences (46%).

	suppose+ 0	suppose <i>that</i>	supposing + 0	supposing <i>that</i>	TOTAL
past subjunctives (1st and 3rd pers. sg + <i>were</i>)	15	4	3	4	26 (30%)
past indicatives (1st and 3rd pers. sg + <i>was</i>)	22	9	6	3	40 (46%)
ambiguous <i>were</i> (2nd pers. sg and plural)	12	4	2	3	21 (24%)
TOTAL	49	17	11	10	87

Table 9.1 Past indicatives versus past subjunctives in *be*-contexts

Nevertheless, past subjunctives were used in 26 cases (30%), out of which 12 (46%) involved a lexicalized phrase *suppose/supposing (that)+ NP + were+to infinitive*, as in (21).

- (21) *Supposing that worst were to occur—you missed that promotion, your lover rejected you, you failed to sell your house – what would be the ensuing results and how would you deal with them?* [BYU-BNC: W_MISC]

A closer inspection of the distribution of the past subjunctives and past indicatives across the genres only confirms conclusions brought by the corpus study of Johansson and Norheim (33–34). Similar to their findings, the genre analysis shows that a half of all past subjunctives (13 out of 26, see Table 9.2) occur in fiction. However, Table 9.2 demonstrates that fictional texts are also dominated by the past indicatives; therefore, it cannot be stated straightforwardly whether the genre factors determine the preference of one alternant over the other one.

	FIC	ACAD	NON-ACAD	MISC	MAG	NEWS	SPOK	Total
past subjunctives	13	1	3	4	1	1	3	26
past indicatives	16	5	7	9	0	0	3	40

Table 9.2 Distribution of past subjunctives and past indicatives across genre

On the other hand, it is possible to conclude that the data do convincingly demonstrate that albeit not a dominant choice, past subjunctives are far from sporadic. In the light of this conclusion, one may feel even more puzzled why the *present* subjunctives were not represented in a relatively large sample of corpus data. I will address this point in the following section.

10. Meanings and functions of *suppose (that)*/ *supposing (that)*

The data in the previous sections have shown that certain verbal syntagms tend to be represented in particular genres more than in others. While some verbal constructions exhibit a different time reference (e.g. the perfect tenses), some differ in the degree of negative truth commitment to the hypothetical meaning which they convey, as was mentioned in Section 3 (see examples 8–15). For example, in (22)–(23), the present tense weakens the counterfactuality of the hypothetical meaning of the expressions *suppose (that)* and *supposing (that)*.

- (22) *Suppose that in a decay the recoil momentum is p ; then the kinetic energy of the nucleus is $p^2/2M$ where M is its mass. It follows that in a Mossbauer transition...*
[BYU-BNC: H8K: W_acad]

- (23) *Supposing that the result of the investigation is satisfactory, and the purchase is completed, a subsequent purchaser must again go through the whole process;...*
[BYU-BNC: ABP: W_acad]

On the other hand, the use of the past indicative in (24)–(25) draws a negative inference, but past subjunctives (26)–(27) also express a tentative distance.

- (24) *Who are the ‘Hobbs’? Flora asked, speaking their name with a comic intonation. ‘Nobody. Oh—dreadful people.’ Richard laughed but I could tell he was alarmed. Suppose we went for this drink and the Hobbs greeted us? Flora might think we were friends. I saw him redden: he was ashamed to have thought like this. [BYU-BNC: CEX: W_fic]*
- (25) *Eighteen years away from a stage, eighteen years and she’d forgotten until now that terrifying gut-wrenching dread of stepping out in front of several hundred people and making a total fool of yourself. Supposing Gesner pulled a trick, or she fell over. Supposing the audience laughed at her playing a soubrette role. Supposing she forgot what she was supposed to do, missed her entrance, let them all down. The Direktor had taken such a chance on her. Supposing she let him down? When she got to the theatre she found her dressing room was full of flowers... [BYU-BNC: J19: W_fic]*
- (26) *His hat disturbed him too much. He shuddered at his remembrance of royalty’s puzzled look when he removed this ostentatious headgear. Suppose he were to think it Auguste’s own choice? [BYU-BNC:H8K: W_fic]*
- (27) *And on the busto Victoria she began to wish she had not been quite so rash in offering to visit John. Supposing he were not ill at all? It was surely – the words came in the tone of voice her mother would have used – ‘most unsuitable’... [BYU-BNC:HA4: W_fic]*

These differences may imply why the uses of the present tense, such as in (22)–(23), are conventionalized and coincide with occurrence in formal registers. On the other hand, the past tense is well-fitted for describing imaginary scenes, as in (24)–(27), typically occurring in the fiction genre.

Also, it can be pointed out that the function of *suppose/supposing* in (22)–(23) is somewhat different from the function in examples (24)–(27). In the first two above-mentioned examples, *suppose*, alongside with *supposing*, is deployed as a strong conditional device with a clear structural dependency on the following clause (cf. *because*, Burridge 526). On the other hand, in (24)–(27) both expressions do retain their conditional meaning, but the consequent of the condition is more implied in the wider discourse, rather than on the sentence level.

Finally, *suppose* (and probably even *supposing*⁷) may serve as an element that indicates the communicative function of the utterance. It relates the content of the clause introduced by *suppose* to the speaker, who suggests that a certain action be carried out (Biber 667). This interactive function is demonstrated in examples (28)–(29), in which *suppose* marks the utterances as tentative suggestions.

- (28) *Suppose you come and see me again at the beginning of April. Perhaps you would like to make an appointment with my secretary on the way out. [BYU-BNC:CDE: W_acad]*

(29) *If Mr. Marshall will excuse me, I don't think I'll bother with lunch. Suppose we meet in the offices downstairs at, say, five o'clock?* "That'll be fine," I said.
 [BYU-BNC:CDE: W_fic]

It may be stated that out of these three different usages, only those in (28)–(29) represent potential settings where the present subjunctives could be triggered. *Suppose* in these examples occurs in contexts that may be interpreted as mandative. For illustrative purposes, the overview of all mandative uses with *suppose/supposing* is provided in Table 10.1 below.

	mandative uses
suppose that	2
suppose + 0	11
supposing that	0
supposing + 0	0
all mandative uses	13 (1.4%)
all analyzed uses	907

Table 10.1 Mandative uses of *suppose that*, *suppose+0*, *supposing that*, *supposing+0*

Table 10.1 yields interesting results. It demonstrates that with respect to the total sample of all analyzed usages, mandative uses of *suppose* represent a small fraction (1.4%) and *supposing* does not occur in such contexts at all. It also needs to be pointed out that in these mandative uses only the indicatives appeared, as in examples (28)–(29). Therefore, it remains an open question whether the present subjunctives cannot be triggered after these expressions or whether they have not filtered into the data because of the limited number of contexts in which they could appear.

11. Conclusions

The data analysis has shown tendencies in the complementation of *suppose/supposing (that)*, as documented in the British National Corpus. It reveals certain asymmetries in the use of tenses, as well as in the distributions of individual forms in the genres. One of the asymmetric uses may be seen in the fiction genre, in which there is a discrepancy between the representations of *suppose that* (1.5%) on the one hand, and *suppose+0* (24%) on the other hand.

It can also be summarized that there are correlations between the choice of particular verbal syntagms and genres. For example, occurrences of *suppose (that)* in the formal genres involve predominantly finite complements with the verb in the present tense (77%, see Table 7.2). Furthermore, the appearance of the subordinator *supposing+0* in the fiction genre is in 56.8% cases connected to the use of the subordinate verbs in the past indicative (see Table 8.3).

In the use of the past subjunctive, *suppose (that)* and *supposing (that)* exhibit converging tendencies, with subordinators introducing adverbial conditional clauses. The data indicate that the *were*-subjunctive is not dominant, yet it is a well-established choice

in these contexts (see Table 9.1). On the other hand, the use of the present (i.e. mandative) subjunctive has not filtered into the data, which may have been caused by the limited number of mandative uses of *supposing (that)/suppose (that)* represented in the corpus sample (Table 10.1).

Finally, the data suggest that *suppose (that)* and *supposing (that)* take on various functions, ranging from strong conditional linkers with a clear structural dependency on the main clause to modal-like elements that imply conditionality and serve communicative purposes.

Notes

¹ As Quirk et al. (842) put it, “subordinate clauses beginning with *supposing* may have the same force as *what if* or indeed, of the imperative *suppose*”

² The use of the definite article is optional and is more characteristic of American English (Schlüter 279).

³ The miscellaneous genre is made up of various texts of different degrees of formality. It includes essayistic, religious, administrative, biographical and commercial texts, instructions, miscellaneous texts, and also less formal text types, such as emails, advertisements and personal letters. Out of 116 usages of *suppose that* in the miscellaneous genre, 105 occurred in the commercial texts, and 48 (out of 106) did with *suppose*+0.

⁴ Genres are grouped together so that they represent comparable samples: miscellaneous (20,835,159) academic (15,331,668), non-academic (16,495,185), fiction (15,909,312), magazine and newspaper (17,728,412), and the rather underrepresented spoken genre (9,963,663) – see <https://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/>.

⁵ To achieve a systematic organization of the complements, the categories in Tables 6.1 and 8.1 are identical. However, all of these are considered present indicatives (see Chapter 6).

⁶ Figures are low, therefore, the percentage of uses is not stated.

⁷ There were no instances of *supposing* with this function in the analyzed corpus sample (see Table 10.1), but as shown in example (4), Quirk et al. (842) demonstrate a similar usage.

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