MODAL AND SUBJUNCTIVE CONSTRUCTIONS AS MARKERS OF IRREALIS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK FAIRY TALES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Tursunova Sarvinoz

master student of SamSIFL

Abstract

This study investigates how modal and subjunctive constructions serve as linguistic markers of irrealis in English and Uzbek fairy tales. Irrealis, a grammatical and semantic category expressing unrealized, hypothetical, or imaginary states, reveals how languages encode human perception of possibility and unreality. The research employs a semantic-pragmatic and typological framework, analyzing a corpus of canonical English (*Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*) and Uzbek (*Zumrad va Qimmat*, *Boy va kambag'al*) fairy tales. English texts express irrealis primarily through modal verbs (*would, could, might*) and subjunctive structures (*if I were*, *so be it*), while Uzbek relies on conditional suffixes (*-sa*), auxiliaries (*edi*), and particles (*go'yo, xuddi*). The findings show that while both languages use grammatical mood to construct hypothetical worlds and moral imagination, English foregrounds individual volition and uncertainty, whereas Uzbek emphasizes collective destiny and divine causality. This comparative insight contributes to contrastive linguistics, translation studies, and the semantics of folklore discourse, illuminating the deep link between language structure and cultural worldview.

Keywords: irrealis, modality, subjunctive mood, Uzbek linguistics, English linguistics, fairy tales, comparative analysis

1. Introduction

The irrealis mood refers to linguistic forms expressing unrealized, imagined, or hypothetical events[1]. As opposed to the realis mood, which encodes actual events, irrealis reflects the speaker's mental projection into potential worlds—a domain crucial for the study of modality, subjunctivity, and narrative imagination[2].

Fairy tales, as archetypal narratives of the imaginary, are rich in linguistic constructions of irrealis. They depict transformations, curses, wishes, and moral trials that hinge upon hypothetical conditions—*"If only I had wings,"* or *"Bo'lsa edi, shahzoda qutqarardi"* ('If there were, the prince would save her'). Such patterns make them an ideal corpus for studying grammatical realization of non-factual meaning.

This paper explores modal and subjunctive constructions as core devices of irrealis in English and Uzbek fairy tales. By contrasting two typologically distinct languages—analytic English and agglutinative Uzbek—the study seeks to (1) identify grammatical mechanisms of irrealis; (2) analyze their semantic and pragmatic functions; and (3) interpret cultural implications of these linguistic patterns.

2. Literature Review

---

[1] Aikhenvald, A. Y. (2004). *Evidentiality*. Oxford University Press.

[2] Palmer, F. R. (2001). *Mood and Modality* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Scholarly approaches to mood and modality have long addressed the irrealis-realis dichotomy[3]. Palmer conceptualizes modality as a system of attitudes toward propositions—possibility[4], necessity, or unrealization—while Bybee[5] and Aikhenvald[6] emphasize its typological diversity.

In English, irrealis is typically realized through modal verbs (*would, could, might, should*) and the subjunctive mood, expressing hypothetical or counterfactual conditions. The subjunctive in expressions like *"If I were a bird"* or *"So be it"* signals non-actual states, often carrying moral or evaluative nuance[7] .

Uzbek, by contrast, encodes irrealis morphologically. Conditional suffixes (*-sa*) and auxiliaries (*edi*) mark hypothetical or unreal situations[8]. Particles such as *go'yo* ('as if') and *xuddi* ('just as though') introduce imagined realities, while modal adverbs (*balki*, *ehtimol*) express epistemic uncertainty. According to Rasulova and Shukurova[9], Uzbek modality integrates social and moral inference, intertwining narrative and cultural values.

Comparative typological analyses highlight structural and pragmatic contrasts between Indo-European and Turkic systems[10]. In folklore linguistics, Abdivalievna[11] shows that cumulative tales in both traditions use recurrent modal forms to structure magical causality. However, systematic contrastive studies of English and Uzbek irrealis in fairy-tale discourse remain limited—constituting the primary research gap this paper addresses.

3. Methodology

The study employs a semantic-pragmatic comparative framework, integrating typological and discourse-analytical approaches[12].

Corpus

---

[3] Lyons, J. (1995). *Linguistic Semantics: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press.

[4] Palmer, F. R. (2001). *Mood and Modality* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

[5] Bybee, J., Perkins, R., & Pagliuca, W. (1994). *The Evolution of Grammar: Tense, Aspect, and Modality in the Languages of the World*. University of Chicago Press.

[6] Aikhenvald, A. Y. (2004). *Evidentiality*. Oxford University Press.

[7] Emadi, N. (2013). *Tense and Mood in Persian and English: A Contrastive and Error Analysis*. University of Malaya.

[8] Üzüm, M. (2023). *The Development and Functions of the Inferential Marker chog'i in Uzbek. Acta Linguistica Academica*, *70*(1), 109–128

[9] Rasulova, M. I., & Shukurova, Z. I. (2017). *Comparative Typology of English, Uzbek and Russian Languages*. Gulistan State University.

[10] Bashir, E. (2025). *A Grammar of Khowar: Descriptive and Comparative Analysis*. Routledge

[11] Abdivalievna, K. O. (2019). *Comparative analyses of Uzbek and English cumulative fairy tales. International Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Interdisciplinary Studies*

[12] Lyons, J. (1995). *Linguistic Semantics: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press.

- English fairy tales: *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*.
- Uzbek fairy tales: *Zumrad va Qimmat*, *Boy va kambag'al*, *Oltin baliq*, *Alpomish* (prose version).

Analytical Procedure

1. Identification of modal and subjunctive constructions denoting irrealis (conditional, wish, or hypothetical).
2. Classification by grammatical type: periphrastic (English) vs. inflectional (Uzbek).
3. Semantic interpretation (possibility, wish, obligation, conjecture).
4. Pragmatic contextualization within narrative functions (prophecy, wish, moral consequence).

The comparative typology follows Palmer's[13] model of epistemic and deontic modality and Bybee[14] semantic hierarchy of mood.

4. Analysis and Discussion

In English narratives, irrealis manifests through:

- Modal verbs:
  - *"If he could only climb higher, he might see the giant's castle."*
  - *"The prince would have married her if fate allowed."*
- Subjunctive mood:
  - *"If I were you, I would flee the forest."*
  - *"So be it," said the fairy queen.*
- Periphrastic conditionals using *if* + past tense + *would/might* to mark counterfactual worlds.

These forms carry **epistemic** (uncertainty, potentiality) and **deontic** (moral duty) nuances. In *Cinderella*, modal verbs dramatize the heroine's wishes, while in *Sleeping Beauty*, the subjunctive "if she were to wake" frames fate as conditional on magic.

Uzbek employs morphologically encoded irrealis:

- Conditional suffix -*sa*:
  - *"Agar Zumrad topilmasa, yovuz kampir baxtiyor bo'lmas edi"* ("If Zumrad were not found, the wicked woman would not be happy").
- Auxiliary *edi* marking unrealized past:
  - *"Bo'lsa edi, yurt tinch bo'lardi"* ("If it were, the land would be peaceful").
- Particles *go'yo*, *xuddi*:
  - *"Go'yo sehr kuchi bilan hayot o'zgarganday bo'ldi"* ("As if life had changed by magic").

---

[13] Palmer, F. R. (2001). *Mood and Modality* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

[14] Bybee, J., Perkins, R., & Pagliuca, W. (1994). *The Evolution of Grammar: Tense, Aspect, and Modality in the Languages of the World*. University of Chicago Press.

423

Here, irrealis expresses moral imagination and divine will rather than individual volition. The markers function not only grammatically but as narrative cues framing supernatural causality (Üzüm, 2023; Rasulova & Shukurova, 2017).

Feature	English Fairy Tales	Uzbek Fairy Tales
Dominant markers	Modal verbs (*would, might, could*)	Conditional suffix -*sa*, auxiliary *edi*
Form type	Analytic (periphrastic)	Synthetic (morphological)
Semantic range	Hypothetical, potential, volitional	Hypothetical, wishful, divine
Pragmatic function	Express individual desire and uncertainty	Convey collective morality and fate
Narrative effect	Creates subjective imagination	Evokes communal and mystical worldview

While both encode irrealis through mood and modality, English employs auxiliary constructions linked to personal agency, whereas Uzbek embeds irrealis within morphological and evidential systems tied to belief in destiny and cosmic justice.

5. Conclusion

This comparative study demonstrates that modal and subjunctive constructions are central to the expression of irrealis in both English and Uzbek fairy tales, yet they differ fundamentally in form and function. English realizes irrealis through syntactic modality, foregrounding individual imagination and choice, while Uzbek employs morphological and pragmatic markers that reflect communal belief and divine causation.

The contrast illustrates how linguistic structures mirror cultural epistemologies—English fairy tales articulate moral introspection, whereas Uzbek narratives emphasize spiritual causality and harmony. These findings have implications for contrastive linguistics, cross-cultural translation, and the semiotics of folklore discourse, revealing how grammar encodes worldview.

References

1. Abdivalievna, K. O. (2019). *Comparative analyses of Uzbek and English cumulative fairy tales*. *International Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Interdisciplinary Studies*.
2. Aikhenvald, A. Y. (2004). *Evidentiality*. Oxford University Press.
3. Bashir, E. (2025). *A Grammar of Khowar: Descriptive and Comparative Analysis*. Routledge.
4. Bybee, J., Perkins, R., & Pagliuca, W. (1994). *The Evolution of Grammar: Tense, Aspect, and Modality in the Languages of the World*. University of Chicago Press.
5. Emadi, N. (2013). *Tense and Mood in Persian and English: A Contrastive and Error Analysis*. University of Malaya.
6. Kenjabayev, J. A., & Nazarova, J. B. (2025). *Short Stories and Their Grammatical Aspects in English and Uzbek Languages*. *Ekonomika i Sotsium*.
7. Lyons, J. (1995). *Linguistic Semantics: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
8. Palmer, F. R. (2001). *Mood and Modality* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
9. Rasulova, M. I., & Shukurova, Z. I. (2017). *Comparative Typology of English, Uzbek and Russian Languages*. Gulistan State University.
10. Satvoldievna, U. D., & Qizi, A. M. N. (2020). *Comparative Typological Analysis of Semantic-Structural Features of Conditional Inclination in Different Systematic Languages*. *Problems of Modern Science and Education*.
11. Üzüm, M. (2023). *The Development and Functions of the Inferential Marker chog'i in Uzbek*. *Acta Linguistica Academica*, *70*(1), 109–128.