The Subjunctive in Old English

The subjunctive mood is typically used in headclauses to express some sort of unreality: a wish, command, or proposed action. In subclauses it is used more widely, but it is especially common in clauses beginning with *þæt* ("that/so that/in order that"), if-clauses, and reported speech or opinion. This document provides examples for these most common types of subjunctive construction.

Headclauses

1. **Hortatory**: first person (plural) "Let us..."

    - Herigen we ures dryhtnes naman.
    - Secen we ure cyrcean mid clænnesse ⁊ mid hlutran mode.
    - Bidden we eaðmodlice.
    - Ne agymeleasien we þa teoðan sceattas to syllanne.
    - Secen we soðne gefean.
    - Þancien we ussum dryhtne.
    - Wuldrigen we ærest ælmihtigne God.
    - Wyrcen we ⁊ bidden we.

2. **Optative**: Expressing a wish

    - Ealle hie cigdon ⁊ cwædon, "sie he ahungen."

3. **Jussive**: Indirect commands in the third person

    - Se þe godum offrie buton Gode anum, slea man hine.
    - Geweorðe leoht.

Subclauses

1. **Purpose clauses**: "in order that"

   - And þa beseah he hine þæt he gesawe þæne ðe þæt dyde.
   - Syle me on þeowdome for hine, þæt þu þinne sunu eft onfo.
   - Ða gewende he to rome be ðæs caseres hæse þæt he hine betealde gif he mihte.

2. **Result clauses**: "so that"

   - Gif he þonne ful beo, slea man hine, þæt him forberste se sweora.

3. **If-clauses**

   - Gif he godcundnysse hæbbe þonne secge he hwæt ic þence.
   - Gif he losige, sie he afliemed.
   - Gif hit þonne hwa do, ðonne sie he scyldig cyninges mundbyrde.

4. **Concessive clauses**: "although"

   - Ðeah hi on ðam hade fela wundra wyrcen, eft ðonne hi to him cumað, he cuið: Gewitað from me ge unryhtwyrhtan.

5. **Object clauses**: "that"

   - Þa se cniht bæd hine þæt he come mid him to Eufrosinan.
   - Þa lærde se casere hine þæt he forlete Cristes geleafan.
   - [Hie] woldon þæt mon to him gebæde ꝺ him ofrede.

6. **Reported opinion/speech**

   - Hi cwædon þæt he god wære.
   - Ða wurdon hi afærede ꝺ wendon þæt hit sum gast wære.
   - Þa cwæð Iohannes to petre þæt hit wære se hælend þe on ðam strande stod.
   - Þa geleaffullan cwædon þæt hit nære petrus, ac wære his engel.
   - He him bocstafas arædde and arehte, hwæt seo run bode.

7. **Whether/or-clauses**

   - Ælc ðæra manna ðe blod ytt sceal losian of his folce, beo he inlenda, beo he ælðeodig.