

The fake imperfective aspect in subjunctive conditionals is real

1. Background and goals of this paper. As is well known, **subjunctive conditionals (SCs)** are often built by using one or two additional layer(s) of tense morphology on top of the regular tense morphology locating the events wrt the reference time (RT). Additional layer(s) of tense morphology characteristic of SCs are said to be ‘fake’, because they do not locate events wrt RT. In many languages as French or Greek, the first additional layer of past tense is generally realized (a.o.) with the imperfective morphology (IMP), cf. [Iatridou 2000, 2010](#). This crosslinguistic generalization can be explained in two ways. According to the ‘fake-aspect’ approach (e.g. [Bjorkman & Halpert 2012](#)), IMP is chosen to fulfill this purpose for purely morphological reasons (IMP is the ‘elsewhere’ aspect). The ‘real-aspect’ approach claims that the morphology IMP makes a substantive semantic contribution in SCs besides its PAST value, though its distinctive aspectual properties. As [Iatridou 2010:13](#) notices, such a proposal has never been made yet. Our first goal is to provide one, based on French data, cf. § 4. Our second goal is to provide a new account of when **counterfactuality (CF)** is cancellable in SCs.

2. One vs. two fake pasts. According to ‘past-as-past’ approaches of SCs, ‘fake’ layers of past tense in SCs are in fact real in so far they express temporal precedence like in the regular use of the past. However, this morphology is not interpreted within the ‘bare’ conditional (the structure consisting of the modal operator, its restriction p and its nuclear scope q), but rather outside it and contributes to the interpretation of the modal. Among these approaches, we adopt [Ippolito 2013](#)’s framework because it explicitly differentiates between cancellable and noncancellable CF. Ippolito distinguishes two kinds of SCs. ‘**One fake past**’ SCs are modal structures under a universal **present perfect**, cf. (1a); ‘**two fake pasts**’ SCs are modal structures embedded under a universal **past perfect**, cf. (1b). In both cases, combined with \forall , PERF gives a ‘perfect interval’ t' , such that for all subintervals t'' of t' , the conditional proposition (i.e. the bare modal structure) is true at t'' . The right boundary of the perfect interval is the UT for ‘one fake past’ SCs, and is a contextually salient past time for ‘two fake past’ SCs. The (simplified) truth conditions for the ‘one fake past’ SCs (2a) are given in (2b).

(1) a. PRES[PERF[$\forall \subseteq$ [WOLL[SIM[HIST p]]][q]]] b. PAST[PERF[$\forall \subseteq$ [WOLL[SIM[HIST p]]][q]]]

(2) a. Si John courait-IMP le Marathon de Boston demain, il gagnerait-COND.1. French
If John ran the Boston Marathon next spring, he would win. English

b. true if $\exists t'$ such that the right boundary of $t' = \text{UT}$ [utterance time], and $\forall t'' \subseteq t'$, it is the case that all possible worlds historically accessible from the actual world at t'' maximally similar to the actual world and where John will run the Boston marathon next spring are worlds where he will win.

The structure of ‘one fake past’ SCs (*would/would have*) includes a first past component because the perfect interval extends before the UT, cf. (3a); the structure of ‘two fake pasts’ SCs (*would have*) has a second past component that shifts this right boundary to a past time, cf. (3b). In **indicative conditionals**, MODAL is in the scope of PRES.

(3) a. PAST₁ [MODAL [PRES/PAST₂ p] [PRES/PAST₂ q]]] b. PAST₁ [PAST₂ [MODAL [PRES/PAST₃ p] [PRES/PAST₃ q]]]

Ippolito makes the crucial assumption that the No Empty Restriction requirement (‘The restriction of a quantifier cannot be empty’) accompanying the modal is only a pragmatic constraint designed to avoid vacuously true assertions. This means, in practice, that it is only required that there be *some* subinterval of t' when some p -worlds were historically accessible (p -worlds do not have to be accessible at *each* subinterval of t'). Therefore, with ‘one fake past’ SCs, this subinterval t'' when p -worlds are accessible *can* be the UT, but *does not have* to. In case $t'' \neq \text{UT}$, p is counterfactual.

One problem of this approach is that (as [Ippolito 2013](#) herself recognizes) languages like Italian (and French) do *not* have a present perfect in the English sense (whose right boundary is given by UT). Why would they build such a perfect just in SCs?

3. CF is cancellable in one fake past SCs only. As is well-known, the inference of CF of many SCs can be cancelled. SCs à la [Anderson 1951](#) are of this type, cf. (4).

(4) If John had taken arsenic, he would have shown exactly the symptoms that he has now. [$\cancel{\neg} \neg p$]

A major insight of [Ippolito 2013](#) is the hypothesis that *CF is cancellable with one fake past SCs, but noncancellable in two fake past SCs*. One of Ippolito’s arguments concerns past perfect SCs with an extra auxiliary head found in American and English dialects, cf. (5). These SCs have two (fake) layers of past on top of regular tense morphology. Crucially, the inference of CF of these SCs is not cancellable, cf. [Dancygier & Sweetser 2005](#), [Biezma et. al. 2013](#), [Ippolito 2013](#).

(5) If I hadd-a known you were coming, I would-a stayed home.

For [Ippolito 2013](#), the noncancellability of the CF inference in two fake past SCs is due to the fact that this inference is an antipresupposition. However, [Leahy 2013](#) provides arguments for analysing the CF inference of *all* SCs as an antipresupposition (included when it is cancellable), and it is unclear how Ippolito’s and Leahy’s results can be made compatible. We provide an alternative account in §5.

4. Proposal for one fake past SCs. We assume that ‘one fake past’ SCs are bare modals embedded under the past, cf. (6). The truth-conditions (2b) for (2a) are modified as in (7).

(6) Modal structure for one fake past SCs: PAST[$\forall \subseteq$ [WOLL[SIM[HIST p]]][q]]

(7) true if $\exists t'$ such that t' is a past interval, and $\forall t'' \subseteq t'$, it is the case that

An advantage of (6) is that it does not resort to a tense that does not exist in many Romance languages. Let us see now how we can explain (i) Iatridou’s observation that many languages use IMP in SCs, (ii) why CF as expressed in ‘one fake past’ SCs is *generally* cancellable, but also (iii) exceptions to this rule (cf. (12a below)).

Since the modal in conditionals is a stativizer (see e.g. Ferreira 2014), combining IMP to the bare modal structure outputs a past *stative* sentence. Altshuler and Schwarzschild 2012 convincingly argue that for stative sentences, PRES and PAST are scalar alternatives, a.o. on the basis of the observation that a stative PRES- ϕ sentence asymmetrically entails its PAST- ϕ alternative (e.g. *Scotty is anxious* entails *Scotty was anxious* but not the reverse). From this, they derive the well-known observation that a PAST- ϕ stative sentence (the weaker statement) often implicates the negation of the stronger PRES- ϕ alternative (*S was anxious* implies *S is not anxious anymore*). This is what they call the *cessation implicature*, cf. (10). As they show, this implicature is obviated when PRES and PAST cannot compete, as in (11). This is the case when the RT concept (provided by the *when*-clause in (11)) makes by itself PRES- ϕ false (by excluding the UT).

Languages like French force to choose between the imperfective or the perfective (PFV) for stative sentences too. The cessation implicature arises in the former case only, because IMP, but not PFV, can combine with an unbounded (non maximal) state (de Swart 2007, Cory 2009) (we need the state to be at least potentially non-maximal if we want to *imply* rather than *entail* cessation!). For instance, (8a), with an imperfective, **implicates** (8b); (9a) shows that this implicature can be cancelled. But (8c) **entails** that S was not anxious afterwards; if Scotty is (again) anxious in UT, we deal with *two* different fits of anxiety. This explains why the inference cannot be cancelled in (9b) as easily as in (9a); *de nouveau* ‘again’ solves the problem raised by *toujours* ‘still’ because it satisfies the entailment of change of state triggered by perfective past stative sentences.

[context: a little boy named Scotty has just been brought to the hospital. Dr. Spock is talking to him, when the nurse walks in and ask: "How is he doing?/Comment est-ce qu'il va?"]

(8) a. *Il était-IMP anxieux.* b. \sim *He is not anxious anymore.* c. *Il a été-PERF. anxieux.*
 he was anxious. he was anxious

(9) a. *Il était-IMP. anxieux et l'est toujours.* b. *Il a été-PERF. anxieux et l'est #toujours/ OKà nouveau.*
 he was anxious and it is still he was anxious and it is still again

(10) Cessation implicature: the utterance of a past tensed sentence implicates that no state of the kind described currently holds.

(11) When I entered the room, there was [# is] a lamp on the table (\neq The lamp is not on the table anymore)

We argue that PRES and PAST above MOD in conditionals compete exactly the same way as in non-modal stative sentences, on the basis of two arguments. **1.** Indicative conditionals (with PRES over MOD) asymmetrically entail the one fake past SC alternative (with PAST over MOD); e.g. *If John runs the Boston Marathon next spring, he will win* entails (2a), but the reverse is not true. **2.** The (cancellable) CF inference of ‘one fake past’ SCs can be identified with the cessation implicature triggered by past stative sentences: SCs *implicate* that the past state during which *p*-worlds are accessible does not hold anymore at UT, but this implicature is defeasible. In languages like French that forces a choice between IMP and PFV, IMP is preferred over PFV because it enables to express *cancellable* CF, through the same semantic contribution as outside conditionals.

When a one fake past SCs does not compete with its potential stronger alternative, e.g. because the latter is obviously false (as was the case in (11)), we expect the CF inference not to be cancellable anymore. This prediction is borne out. Take e.g. the indicative conditional (12a), obviously false. Therefore, no competition arises with the SC in (12b). And as the oddity of the parenthesis in (12a) shows, the CF inference of the SC in (12a) is *noncancellable*, although we deal with a one fake past SC.

(12) a. John est mort. #Mais s’il écrit-PRST un roman aujourd’hui, ce sera-FUT. un succès. (after Ippolito 2013)
 John is dead. But if he writes a novel today, it will be a success.

b. John est mort. Mais s’il écrivait-IMP. un roman aujourd’hui, ce serait-COND.2 un succès. (# Ça va peut-être arriver!)
 John is dead. But if he wrote a novel today, it would be a success. (# May be it will happen!)

5. Proposal for two fake past SCs. For ‘two fake past SCs’, we keep Ippolito’s analysis (1b) (the bare conditional is embedded under a past perfect, introducing \llbracket PAST \rrbracket and \llbracket PERFECT \rrbracket). The past interval t' output by this tense is perfect (bounded), and its right boundary is in the past. We account for why CF is not cancellable with two fake past SCs simply by assuming that *p*-worlds are accessible *only* at (some subinterval t'' of) the denoted interval t' . Since t' never includes UT with two fake past SCs, these SCs are necessarily CF.