

Strong vs weak counterfactuality of the consequent

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It is received wisdom that the strength of a counterfactual inference generated by the antecedent (CF_p) is reflected in the one-past/two-past morphological contrast [2, 3]. This project aims to explore the parallel restrictions on the strength of the counterfactual inference of the consequent (CF_q). When uttering a subjunctive conditional, the speaker is taken to be in a belief state such that they know the antecedent to be not true. It's possible the speaker knows the proposition of the antecedent to be false; we refer to this as **strong** counterfactuality. However, the speaker may also be ignorant or agnostic as to the truth of the proposition in question; we refer to this as **weak** counterfactuality.

- (1) a. I don't know if he is rich, but if he were rich, he would be popular with that crowd.
b. # I don't know if he is rich, but if he had been rich, he would have been popular with that crowd. [1]

There are contexts, such as in (1a), where uttering a conditional with weak CF_p is felicitous. However, when we go from a one-past to a two-past subjunctive conditional in the same context, it becomes infelicitous, as in (1b). This project seeks to explore the restrictions imposed by weak/strong counterfactuality on the consequent, as well as whether this contrast is reflected in the one-/two-past distinction as in (1).

We know that strong CF_p is compatible with both one- and two-past conditionals, as we can see when we consider the sentences in (1) in a context in which we know that he is in fact *not* rich. Thus, we might want to create a context in which we have strong CF_p , but weak CF_q .

- (2) a. If Mary went to Harvard, she would have a good job now.
b. If Mary had gone to Harvard, she would have had a good job now. [4]

In a context in which we are agnostic about both Mary's education and her current employment situation, (2a) is felicitous. However, if we change the context to one of strong CF_p (we know that Mary did *not* go to Harvard), the judgment becomes unclear. My own native-speaker intuition tells me that making (2a) into the two-past conditional in (2b) makes the sentence more acceptable.

- (3) Context: there is a race tomorrow, and the winner will qualify for the Olympic team. After that, there will be more opportunities to qualify for the Olympic team. John doesn't take part in tomorrow's race, but is planning to take part in some of the future qualifying events.
a. ? If John ran tomorrow's race, he would qualify for the Olympic team.
b. ? If John had run tomorrow's race, he would have qualified for the Olympic team. [4]

Once again, subjunctive conditionals with strong CF_p and weak CF_q result in uncertainty regarding felicitousness of the utterance, as in (3). These subtle judgments are further obscured by a host of potential factors that go beyond counterfactuality, including aspect clashes, the speaker's epistemic states, the one-/two-past contrast, and the future-orientedness of (3). As such, we propose a more thorough investigation to tease apart the source of the uncertainty in such judgments.

[1] Sabine Iatridou. The grammatical ingredients of counterfactuality. *Linguistic inquiry*, 31(2):231–270, 2000.

[2] Michela Ippolito. Semantic composition and presupposition projection in subjunctive conditionals. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 29:631–672, 2006.

[3] Michela Ippolito. *Subjunctive conditionals: A linguistic analysis*, volume 65. MIT Press, 2013.

[4] Jos Leonard Tellings. *Counterfactuality in Discourse*. PhD thesis, University of California Los Angeles, 2016.