

Past-as-Past in Japanese counterfactuals

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Gist. Iatridou observed a tendency across languages to mark counterfactuality or irrealis with Past or Perfect morphology. Ippolito pointed out semantic differences between Simple Past and Past Perfect counterfactuals, identifying two layers of fake Past in the latter. Ogihara discussed occurrences of fake Past in Japanese counterfactuals. We use data from both English and Japanese to refine the Ippolito-style account and identify the proper analysis of Japanese fake Past.

Fake Past. (1a-c) are about the future (forced by the adverb *tomorrow*); the Past or Past Perfect in the antecedents of (1b,c) seems tied to their counterfactuality.

- (1) a. If Mary comes tomorrow, she will join the meeting. [indicative]
b. If Mary came tomorrow, she would join the meeting. [Simple Past (SP)]
c. If Mary had come tomorrow, she would have joined the meeting. [Past Perfect (PP)]

The use of Past or Perfect morphology for the expression of counterfactuality or irrealis mood (sometimes called **fake Past**) is widespread across languages, and languages which have fake Past generally use it in counterfactuals (Iatridou 2000). There are two principal approaches to fake Past. The common observation is that it marks reference to states of affairs that are (believed to be) non-actual at utterance time (either in addition to, or at the exclusion of, states of affairs that are (believed to be) actual). Approaches differ in whether or how they relate this modal meaning to the temporal meaning of non-fake Past. **Past-as-Past (PaP)** approaches retain a temporal component; non-actual states of affairs are made accessible via backshift in a branching-time model (Tedeschi, 1981; Condoravdi, 2002; Ippolito, 2003, 2013; Kaufmann, 2005). **Past-as-Modal (PaM)** distill an abstract notion of “remoteness” from the temporal meaning and apply it to the domain of possible worlds (Palmer, 1986; Fleischman, 1989; Iatridou, 2000; Schulz, 2014).

Fake Perfect. There are further differences within SP/PP pairs like (1b,c). Ippolito (2003, 2013) observed that SP (1b) can only be used if the antecedent is possible in principle (even if unlikely) at utterance time: if Mary’s coming is irrevocably ruled out by the facts (e.g., if Mary is dead, or if the trip in question has already taken place), only (1c) is felicitous. Thus (1c), which has an additional layer of Perfect morphology, involves a more radical departure from the actual state of affairs than (1b). Ippolito postulates two backshift operations in her PaP account (our labels):

Shift I, expressed by fake Past and present in both (1b,c), shifts to a past “accessibility time”, extending the domain of modal quantification to include antecedent worlds; the antecedent’s presuppositions must be satisfied at a “reference time” (distinct from the accessibility time) which by default is the utterance time.

Shift II, expressed by (fake) Perfect and present only in (1c), shifts the “reference time” at which the antecedent’s presuppositions are checked into the past, thus removing the need for those presuppositions to be satisfied at utterance time.

The issue. Granting that Shifts I and II are distinct operations and that in English both are realized by temporal (Past/Perfect) morphology, the PaP vs. PaM question arises for each of them separately. Ippolito applies her PaP analysis to both without much argument; but this is only one of four logical possibilities. Is PaM more appropriate for either or both of them? An additional question is to what extent the English pattern is mirrored in other languages: how common is it to have two classes of counterfactuals corresponding to English SP and PP, how are they realized morphologically, and how close are the similarities in interpretation?

We report results of an exploration from this perspective. Based on data from English and Japanese we find that (i) Japanese counterfactuals form two classes similar to the English ones (albeit marked differently); (ii) in both languages, while the PaP analysis is appropriate for Shift II, PaM is more fitting for Shift I. The arguments for (ii) are surprisingly similar in both languages.

Japanese. Japanese conditionals come in various forms; here we focus on ones of the form ‘*A-tara C*’ and ‘*A-reba C*’, where the connectives *-tara / -reba* are realized as suffixes on the main verb of *A*. With these connectives, *A* is not tensed; however, *C* is. Counterfactuality is not clearly marked: many conditionals can be rendered in English as either indicative or counterfactual depending on context. However, Ogihara (2014) observed that the Past-tense marker *-ta* in the consequent is ambiguous between a temporal and a modal meaning: *A-{tara/reba} C-ta* can be indicative (with past reference) or counterfactual (with possible future reference); in the latter case, Ogihara argues, *-ta* is fake Past. He only considers English SP counterfactuals for comparison, not PP ones.

Data. We outline two of our arguments in the abstract. *(i) Timeless counterfactuals.* Counterfactuals with antecedents whose falsehood did not “come about” at some past time are generally problematic for PaP accounts. In English, they tend to be in SP form, and peculiar as PP. Thus (2a) is preferred as a general statement about numbers, whereas (2b) strongly suggests that there is a past time at which the question about the number 9 was decided. This makes no sense on an “ontic” reading; it does make sense on an epistemic reading (referring to the time at which the speaker *learned* that 9 was not even). This “epistemic past” reading is the only one on which (2b) is acceptable. This would be surprising if Shift II did not crucially involve a temporal backshift. The fact that (2a) does not carry any such temporal connotations suggests that Shift I is not temporal.

- (2) a. If 9 was even, it would be divisible by 2.
 b. ??If 9 had been even, it would have been divisible by 2.

The facts are quite similar in Japanese, as shown in (3), the Japanese translation of (2a). (3b) shows the same peculiarity as (2b). (3a) is ambiguous between an indicative and a counterfactual reading; on its counterfactual reading it corresponds to (2a).

- (3) Mosi kyuu-ga guusuu dat-tara, ni-de warikire- {a. -ru / b. ??-ta}.
 PRT 9-NOM even number COP-COND 3-INSTR be divisible NONPAST PAST

(ii) Cancellability of counterfactuality Ogihara observes that while Japanese fake *-ta* is sufficient but not necessary for counterfactuality, when present it gives rise to a “truly counterfactual” reading, not a “future less vivid” (FLV) one. Thus (4a), without fake *-ta* can have a FVL counterfactual reading, whereas (4b) is unambiguously counterfactual.

- (4) Mary-ga asita ki-tara, kaigi-ni {a. de-ru / b. de-ta} daroo.
 Mary-NOM tomorrow come-TARA meeting-LOC attend-NPST attend-PST MODAL
 a. ‘If Mary { comes / came } tomorrow, she { will / would } join the meeting.’
 b. ‘If Mary had come tomorrow, she would have joined the meeting.’

(4a) on its counterfactual reading corresponds to English SP (5a), whereas (4b) corresponds to English PP (5b). As the (in)felicity of the continuations shows, the counterfactuality of PP conditionals is not cancellable.

- (5) a. If Mary came tomorrow, she would join the meeting. She might just do so this time.
 b. If Mary had come tomorrow, she would have joined the meeting. #She might just do so this time.

Discussion. Based on observations such as these, we argue that Japanese *-ta* on its non-temporal reading is indeed fake Past, as observed by Ogihara. However, *pace* Ogihara, it effects Shift II and gives rise to the analog of an English PP counterfactual. On the other hand, the Japanese analogs of English SP counterfactuals are not formally distinguished from indicative conditionals.

Selected References. • Iatridou, S. 2000. The grammatical ingredients of counterfactuality. *Linguistic Inquiry* 31:231-270. • Ippolito, M. 2013. *Subjunctive Conditionals*, MIT Press. • Ogihara, T. 2014. The semantics of ‘-ta’ in Japanese future conditionals. In Crnič and Sauerland (eds.), *The Art and Craft of Semantics*, vol. 2, MITWPL 71, 1-21.