

On the French *Conditionnel* and its Modal Uses

Introduction. The French *conditionnel* morphology occurs in the consequent of counterfactual conditionals (aka remoteness or subjunctive conditionals), with a distribution similar to English ‘would’ (1). In French and other languages this same morphology is also used to derive certain modals which in English are ostensibly non-compositional (2). These include the various flavors (deontic, teleological, epistemic, etc.) of so-called “weak” necessity modals *should* and *ought.to*, flavors of the possibility modals *might* and *could*, and the intensional predicate *wish*. Peculiar to French, the *conditionnel* is also used in an evidential-like way, known as the “journalistic *conditionnel*” (JC): (3,4). I argue, contra von Stechow & Iatridou (2006), that all these uses of the *conditionnel* have a shared meaning, namely allusion to possibly counterfactual worlds. I also argue, contra Copley (2006), that we need not abandon a Kratzer-Lewis framework in order capture its semantics.

Possible Counterfactuality. The possible counterfactuality hypothesis is that in both interpretations of modal+*conditionnel* (e.g. ‘would have.to’ and ‘should’), a modal holds in some possibly counterfactual worlds. We can show this counterfactuality by denying the prejacent explicitly (6-9) or choosing a prejacent which is truly counterfactual (10-12).

Note in (10-12) that although the modal can, in the absence of the *conditionnel*, have a possibly counterfactual interpretation which is future-oriented, the present-oriented counterfactual interpretation is available only with the *conditionnel*. Advice/goal modals, which influence von Stechow & Iatridou to reject the possible counterfactuality hypothesis, are pragmatically biased towards a future-oriented interpretation. For example, I can advise you that some future possible state of affairs (e.g. you take route 2) will allow you to achieve your goals (e.g. you get to Ashfield), but it is completely uncooperative to advise you that some counterfactual state of affairs (e.g. you are 21) will allow you to achieve your goals (e.g. you get into the bar). A present-oriented counterfactual interpretation is perfectly natural for (14) if the modal is deontic or normative, but unnatural if an advice/goal modal.

Kratzerian Framework. Within a Kratzerian framework, the semantic contribution of the *conditionnel* could be a modification of an embedded modal’s modal base, of its ordering source or of its quantificational force; or, the *conditionnel* might be a discrete modal. Here, I consider this last possibility.

We start by taking the semantics of the *conditionnel* in conditionals as basic. The *conditionnel* is a modal with an “empty” modal base and a “totally realistic” ordering source. The ordering source ensures that only the worlds closest to the actual world are considered. The “empty” modal base must be restricted explicitly or from context (otherwise only the actual world is considered – cf. the indicative). Any embedded modal is then evaluated with respect to the worlds selected by the *conditionnel*.

Specific Plural Indefinite. A refinement is then necessary to distinguish the other set of so-called “non-transparent” interpretations (‘should’, ‘could’, ‘wish’ and the JC). In the conditional and “transparent” interpretations, quantification over possibly counterfactual worlds is *universal*, although the modal base may be subject to explicit (e.g. by an *if*-clause) or contextual domain restriction. I am proposing that the “non-transparent” interpretations differ in that quantification over possibly counterfactual worlds is *existential*: in fact, they are plural specific indefinites (cf. Klinder 2007; Rullman *et al.* 2007). The domain of possibly counterfactual worlds may be restricted, but only a proper subset is considered. The specific subset is selected by a contextually-determined choice-function (cf.15).

In the case of a nominal specific indefinite, a speaker asserts the existence of a specific entity, but may or may not have a specific referent in mind (16). Similarly, in uttering (17), I may have in mind worlds in which I don’t leave you to pick up Hilda from the airport; or I may simply be anticipating that you will have certain helping worlds in mind. I can, but need not, make these worlds explicit (cf. also the *selon*-phrase in (4)). Because a specific indefinite, but not a universal quantifier, introduces worlds into the discourse, the “non-transparent”, but not the “transparent”, interpretations may be used discourse-initially (4,18). Finally, this differing quantification is most perspicuous in cases of modal subordination, where the domain has been restricted to counterfactual worlds only: in (19) the ‘would have’ interpretation applies to all those worlds; the ‘should’ interpretation applies only to certain of them.

The *conditionnel* quantifies over closest possibly counterfactual worlds, which will then be the worlds of evaluation for any embedded modal. These worlds achieve the same effect as a modified modal base or ordering source in competing theories, yet do not rule out our truly counterfactual examples.

- (1) S'il n'était pas linguiste, il **serait** comédien.
'If he weren't a linguist, he **would** be an actor.'
- (2) a. *doit* 'must/have.to' + COND → *devrait* 'should/ought.to', 'would have.to'
b. *peut* 'can/may/able.to' + COND → *pourrait* 'could/might', 'would be.able'
c. *veut* 'want' + COND → *voudrait* 'wish' 'would want'
- (3) COND 'supposedly/apparently/...', 'would'
- (4) (Selon *le Monde*,) le président arriverait.
a. '(According to *le Monde*,) the president is **supposedly** arriving.'
b. '(According to *le Monde*,) the president **would** arrive.'
- (6) Après 3 heures, la bière doit être froide maintenant, #mais elle ne l'est pas.
'After 3 hours, the beer must/has.to be cold now, #but it isn't.' (cf. Copley 2006)
- (7) Après 3 heures, la bière **devrait** être froide maintenant, mais elle ne l'est pas.
'After 3 hours, the beer should/ought.to be cold now, but it isn't.'
- (8) Je réfute fermement sa suggestion selon laquelle l'action gouvernementale **serait** influencée par des considérations électorales. (Dendale 1993)
'I strongly reject the suggestion according to which government action was **supposedly** influenced by electoral considerations.'
- (9) (Selon la télé,) il **serait** en train de pleuvoir, mais je peux voir que le ciel n'est même pas nuageux.
'(According to the TV,) it's **supposedly** raining right now, yet I can see the sky isn't even cloudy.'
- (10) Je #dois/**devrais** être plus grand. 'I #must/ought.to be taller [e.g. than I am now]'
- (11) Je #peux/**pourrais** être plus grand. 'I #can/could be taller [e.g. than I am now]'
- (12) Je #veux/**voudrais** être plus grand. 'I #want to be/wish I were taller [e.g. than I am now]'
- (13) Pour vous rendre en Ashfield, vous **devriez** prendre la route 2.
a. 'To get to Ashfield, you **should/ought.to** take Route 2.'
b. 'To get to Ashfield, you **would have.to** take Route 2.'
- (14) Pour entrer, vous **devriez** avoir 21 ans. (15)
a. 'To get inside, you **should** be 21.'
b. 'To get inside, you **would have.to** be 21.'
- (16) A: I hear that Tom wants to buy a (certain) motorcycle.
B: That's right. It's the red Harley he found on Craigslist.
- (17) Je **devrais** vous aider. 'I **should/ought.to** help you.'
- (18) Bonsoir, Monsieur. Je **devrais** me présenter.
a. 'Good evening, sir. I **should/ought.to** introduce myself.'
b. # 'Good evening, sir. I **would have.to** introduce myself.'
- (19) Un policier pourrait arriver.
'A police officer might show up.'
Et il **devrait** nous arrêter.
a. 'And he **should/ought.to** arrest us.'
b. 'And he **would have.to** arrest us.'

<p>$[[COND \phi]]^{f,g,h,w}$ is defined iff</p> <p>(i) modal base f is "empty"</p> <p>(ii) ordering source g is "totally realistic"</p> <p>(iii) h is a choice-function</p> <p>(iv) $h(g(f(w))) \subseteq f(w)$</p> <p>If defined,</p> <p>$[[COND \phi]]^{f,g,h,w} = 1$ iff $\forall w' \in h(g(f(w))): [[\phi(w')]] = 1$</p>
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References: Copley, Bridget. 2006. "What should *should* mean?" Ms.; Dendale, Patrick. 1993. "Le conditionnel de l'information incertaine: marqueur modal ou marqueur évidentiel?" In H. Gerold (eds.), *Actes du Xxe Congrès de Linguistique et Philologie Romanes*, pp.165-176. Tübingen: Francke. von Stechow, Kai and Sabine Iatridou. 2006. "How to Say 'Ought' in Foreign." To appear in *Time and Modality*, Guéron & Lecarme (eds.), Springer.; Klinedinst, Nathan. 2007. *Plurality and Possibility*. PhD Dissertation, UCLA.; Rullman, Hotze, Lisa Matthewson and Henry Davis. 2007. "Modals as Distributive Indefinites." To appear in *Natural Language Semantics*.