

Empirically approaching counterfactuality

The proper categorization of counterfactual (CF) readings, realized as past conjunctive in German, has been under debate at least since the famous Anderson example, whose purpose is to show that counterfactuality is cancellable in English, cf. e.g. Iatridou (2000). A presuppositional (or, for that matter, anti-presuppositional) treatment of counterfactuality in German is not farfetched in view of the strong implications it gives rise to. This makes a preference for the German past conjunctive over its indicative (IND) counterpart a phenomenon falling under *Maximize Presupposition* (MP, Heim 1991), cf. Sode (2017).

As a first step of empirically approaching this possibility, we distinguish three – conceivable or existing – theories in this (anti-)presuppositional vein. On one such theory, IND- and CF-morphology are each presupposition (PSP) triggers, which is roughly what Schulz (2014) proposes for the English ‘fake past’. Given a balance in presuppositional strength, MP predicts an omission of contextually licensed IND- or CF-morphology to be equally infelicitous. Alternatively, we may in turn treat only one of the two kinds of morphology as presuppositional, which leads to a comparatively weak anti-PSP violation in case the respective non-presuppositional competitor is not used (Sauerland 2008).

Having gained more clarity on the status of counterfactuality, we will turn to cases of seemingly superfluous uses of CF-morphology on desire predicates such as German *wünschen*, as witnessed by slightly stylized, but common sentences such as *Ich wünschte_{CF}, die Sonne schiene_{CF}*. CF-inflecting *wünschen* displays the same anomaly as CF-marked WANT in a variety of languages looked at by von Stechow & Iatridou (2008, 2017): Contrary to what one would expect, the desire asserted by *wünschen* persists under CF-marking, instead of being implied to be false in the actual world. We follow von Stechow & I (2017) in ascribing a PSP-cancelling effect to CF-marking on *wünschen*: This implies a precondition of wishing, namely the attitude holder’s ignorance with respect to her object of desire, not to be met. Even more strongly, that object is implied to be unsatisfiable in the actual world. We plan to gain empirical evidence on the status of this implication – which on a presuppositional view of counterfactuality should be likewise presuppositional. If CF-inflection is presuppositionally stronger than the indicative, as one may be inclined to suppose, MP will predict counterfactually inflecting *wünschen* to be mandatory in contexts that establish the desideratum as impossible to be satisfied.