

Serbo-Croatian Subjunctive Conditionals

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This poster points to an asymmetry in the behavior of two kinds of subjunctive conditionals in Serbo-Croatian (henceforth SC), those with the complementizer *da* and those with the complementizer *ako*. The asymmetry is found in the projection of presuppositions between the two types of subjunctive conditionals. We demonstrate this in the theoretical context of Ippolito's (2013) account of English subjunctive conditionals.

By Subjunctive conditionals we intend conditionals that express unlikelyhood or counterfactuality. English utilizes the past tense for this function, and analogous constructions in SC sometimes use the past, and other times use specialize lexical items.

In English, there are two kinds of subjunctive conditionals; those that employ the simple past (2a) and those that employ past perfect morphology (2b).

(2) a. If John died next week, Mary would inherit a fortune.

if PAST ϕ , would ψ

b. If John had died next week, Mary would have inherited a fortune. (Ippolito, 2013)

if PAST PERF ϕ , would have ψ

Both sentences in example (2) are about the future, since they both have the temporal modifier *next week*. But they are not felicitous in the same contexts. In the context where John is dead, (2a) is infelicitous, but (2b) is. On the other hand, if John is alive, (2a) is fine, but (2b) is not.

The primary ingredients in Ippolito's (2013) account are presuppositions, two temporal points of reference (accessibility and reference time) to account for difference between Simple and Perfect conditionals, and antipresuppositions to explain why Perfect conditionals cannot be used across the board.

Simple conditionals have one layer of past tense. This past tense shifts the accessibility time of the conditional to the past, so that a conditional is true if and only if the antecedent worlds compatible with worlds that are accessible at that past time are a subset of the consequent worlds. Any presuppositions of the antecedent project to become the presuppositions of the whole conditional and they must be satisfied at the time of utterance since that is the reference time of the conditional.

Perfect conditionals have two layers of past tense. One layer of past tense shifts the accessibility time to the past, so that the relevant antecedent worlds are accessible from that past time. The second layer of past pushes the reference time also to the past (but after the accessibility time), so that any presuppositions of the conditional must be satisfied at that past time.

Maximize Presupposition principle states that a speaker should presuppose as much as her speech context allows. Since more worlds are accessible in a Perfect conditional than in the Simple conditional, uttering a Simple conditional is stronger, i.e. it presupposes more. Uttering a Perfect conditional triggers the antipresupposition that the stronger alternative is not felicitous, otherwise the speaker would have uttered that one.

However, Ippolito's approach does not suffice to explain the treatment that the subjunctive conditionals have in SC. Although there are significant morphosyntactic similarities between English conditionals with past perfect morphology and one type of SC conditionals, there are striking differences in the projection of presuppositions.

SC subjunctive conditionals can be expressed with two conditional complementizers *da* and *ako*. *Da* complementizer paired with present tense yields *irrealis* conditionals equivalent to Simple subjunctive conditionals in English. When *da* conditional is paired with a layer of PAST tense, the result is similar to the Perfect conditionals in English, with the note that *existence presupposition*, i.e. the subject of the proposition must be alive (Musan 1997) at the time of

utterance (4a). However, the *possibility presupposition*, i.e. that the even in question must not have previously culminated or ended does not need to hold at the time of utterance (4b).

(4)

context: Radivoj Korać was our best basketball player but he died in an accident.

a. #Da **je** on **igrao** u utakmici protiv Zvezde sutra, OKK bi bio pobedio.

If₁ **is** he play.PAST in game against Star tomorrow, YBC would been won.

If he had played the game against Red Star tomorrow, YBC would have won.

context: My friend came over yesterday to pick up a book you needed, but I was not at home.

a. Da **je došla** sutra, bila bi me našla kod kuće.

if₁ **is come**.PAST tomorrow been would me found at home

If she had come tomorrow, she would have found me at home.

Ako conditionals are typically indicative unless paired with a layer of PAST tense when they also get the *irrealis* reading, equivalent to that of *da* conditionals with present tense. *Ako* conditionals can be accompanied by two layers of PAST tense, which makes them morphosyntactically similar to English. However, they too are not identical to English. While English Perfect conditionals are felicitous (i) when the subject in the antecedent clause is dead, or (ii) when the subject is alive but the event is no longer possible, SC *ako* conditionals with two layers of PAST are felicitous when the subject is dead (5a), but not felicitous when the event already ended (5b).

(5)

context: Radivoj Korać was our best basketball player but he died in an accident.

a. Ako **bi** on **bio igrao** na utakmici sutra, OKK bi bio pobedio.

if₂ **would he been play** in game tomorrow YBC would been win

If he had played in the game tomorrow, YBC would have won.

context: My friend came over last week to pick up a book you needed, but I was not at home.

b. #Ako **bi bila došla** kod mene sutra, dala bih joj bila tu knjigu.

if₂ **would been come** at me tomorrow given would her been that book

If she had come over tomorrow, I would have given her the book.

The construction thus shows a divergence that is not predicted in Ippolito's theory, where both presuppositions project identically, and are evaluated uniformly in the given (shifted) reference time.

What is also striking about *ako* conditionals with two layers of past is while they are felicitous in sentences with future temporal modifier, they are infelicitous with sentences with past temporal modifier. If we were to find an underlying connection between the two quirks of *ako* conditionals with two layers of PAST in SC, it could show the direction to proceed in, in order to account for the conditionals of SC and contribute to the theory of conditionals in general.

Findings from the SC data show that although Ippolito's proposal successfully accounts for English subjunctive conditionals, much more work needs to be done in order to account for what is happening with conditionals in SC.

Selected References:

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