

## Non-counterfactual past subjunctive conditionals in French

### Fabienne Martin, University of Stuttgart

**1. Introduction.** This paper focuses on **past subjunctive conditionals (PSCs)** in French. French PSCs have a *conditionnel 2* in the consequent. It is often assumed that French (like Greek) requires imperfective aspect as a **counterfactual (CF)** marker in the antecedent (Iatridou 2000, Bjorkman & Halpert 2012). This should explain why we find in the antecedent of PSCs the *plus que parfait*, a double past combining an imperfective morphology to a first layer of past, cf. (1a). Non-imperfective past tenses, a.o. the present perfect, are supposed to be banned, as confirmed by (1b).

- (1) *Si on (a.) OK avait réfléchi (b.) \*a réfléchi, on n' aurait pas signé.*  
 If we (a.) think-PQP (b.) think-PRST-PERF, we NEG sign-COND.2-NEG  
 'If we had thought/ have thought about it, we wouldn't have signed.'

We start from the observation that this empirical picture should be refined. We found many occurrences of conditionals with a *conditionnel 2* in the consequent and a present perfect in the antecedent in corpora, cf. e.g. (2)-(3). Their context of use makes clear that they are not confined to a substandard variant of French, even if they are banished by some prescriptive grammars. Since conditionals like (2)-(3) mix the morphologies typical of PSCs and **past indicative conditionals (PICs)**, we call them **'swing' PSCs**.

- (2) *Si un missile sol-air a effectivement été utilisé, il aurait été tiré à partir d' un bateau au large de Long Island.*  
 If a missile ground-air indeed be-PRES.PFCT used, it be-COND.2 launched from a boat at the coast of Long Island.  
 'If a missile has indeed been used, it would have been launched from a boat off the Long Island coast'
- (3) *Si le chef a réellement tenu [ces propos, il aurait commis un acte grave]*  
 If the Chief held-PRES.PFCT really these comments, he commit-COND.2 a act serious  
 'If the Chief really has made these comments, he would have committed a serious act'

**2. Swing PSCs vs standard PSCs.** A first defining property of swing PSCs *si p, q* is that they are systematically odd if  $p$  or  $\neg p$  follows from the **context C** (the **set of worlds currently taken to be epistemically accessible** by all participants): they require  $p$  to be *undecided* relative to C. This suffices to explain the problem of (1b), since there, C most probably entails either  $p$  or  $\neg p$ . Swing PSCs thus differ from standard PSCs, since the latter can be used if  $p$  is counterfactual in C. A second related property of swing PSCs is that they are typically used when  $p$  is contextually salient but not yet accepted or rejected —  $p$  is on the Table (Farkas & Bruce 2010). A sign of this is the frequent presence of anaphorical adverbials like *effectivement/vraiment* 'indeed/really' in their antecedent, cf. (2)-(3). Asserting a swing PSC is then a way to address the question on the Table  $p$ . Interestingly, doing so through the assertion of a swing PSC **projects a different set of future common grounds (projected set, ps; Farkas & Bruce 2010)** than through the assertion of a standard PSC. The way we interpret A's confirmation (6) of B's reaction (5) illustrates the point. Through (5), B reacts to A's proposal (4) to add  $p$  to the common ground.

- (4) A. Le Boeing 747 a été détruit par un missile, je crois/ 'The Boeing 747 was destroyed by a missile, I think'
- (5) a. B. S'il avait été détruit par un missile, il aurait été lancé par l'US Navy! (standard PSC)  
 'If it had been destroyed through a missile, it would have been launched by the US Navy!'  
 b. B. S'il a été détruit par un missile, il aurait été lancé par l'US Navy! (swing PSC)  
 'If it has been destroyed through a missile, it would have been launched by the US Navy!'
- (6) A. Tu as raison/ 'You're right.'

(5a) and (5b) have the same literal content  $p \rightarrow q$ . They also both presuppose that  $q$  is false or at least implausible in the current context  $C_1$ . But they differ through their implicated content. As an answer to (5a), (6) is easily understood as a confirmation to  $p \rightarrow q$  but also to  $\neg p$ , because the rule of *modus tollens* is applied ( $ps = \{C_1 \cup \{p \rightarrow q\} \cup \{\neg p\}\}$ ). By contrast, as an answer to (5b), (6) *cannot* be interpreted that way. To begin with, the reaction (5b) to the proposal (4) neither amounts to rejecting  $p$ , nor to accepting it. Rather, it invites to choose between (i) rejecting  $p$  and (ii) challenging the presupposition  $\neg q$  and accepting both  $p$  and  $q$ . The context state after a swing PSC is thus *inquisitive* wrt to  $p$ : its  $ps$  contains two future common grounds, namely  $ps = \{C_1 \cup \{p \rightarrow q\} \cup \{\neg p\}, C_1 \cup \{p \rightarrow q\} \cup \{p\} \cup \{q\}\}$ . However, A can still react to (5b) through (6) in order to signal she accepts the imposed choice. She can then continue by signaling which future common ground she goes for, either through (i) *You are right. The missile theory is after all very unlikely* (A chooses  $\neg p$ ), or (ii) *You are right. After all it isn't the first time that the Army is involved in such disasters* (A goes for  $p$  and  $q$ ). Note that (ii) *cannot* be used to assent to (5a).

**3. Swing PSCs vs PICs.** Swing PSCs also differ from PICs in three respects. **1.** PICs can sometimes be used as a rhetorical device when  $p$  follows from  $C$  (*It rained. If it rained, the match was cancelled*, cf. e.g. Dancygier 1999); this is not possible with swing PSCs. **2.** PICs à la Anderson 1951 (e.g. (7b)) are odd, because they are totally uninformative (von Fintel’s 1997). By contrast, ‘Andersonian’ swing PSCs are natural, as shown by the acceptability of (7a). **3.** Except in Andersonian cases, swing PSCs tend to presuppose that the consequent  $q$  is false (or at least implausible) in  $C$ . This is not the case with PICs.

(7) *Si John a pris de l’arsenic, il (a.) aurait montré (b.) # a montré exactement les*  
 If John take-PRST.PFCT of-the arsenic, he (a.) have-COND.2 (b.) have-PRST.PFCT exactly the  
*symptomes qu’il a maintenant*  
 symptoms that he has now

‘If John has taken arsenic, he would have shown/has shown exactly the symptoms that he has now’

**4. Swing PSCs are subjunctive conditionals.** Why should we analyse ‘swing PSCs’ as subjunctive rather than indicative conditionals, if (i) their morphology only partly matches the one of PSCs and (ii) they do not implicate that  $p$  is false? We endorse here the view according to which the difference between PSCs and PICs mainly lies in the kind of domain ( $D(w)$ ) the conditional quantifies over. Following e.g. von Fintel’s 1997, we assume that the default pragmatic constraint on quantification over worlds performed by conditionals is that  $D(w)$  is entirely in  $C$ . The indicative being *unmarked*, it does not signal anything against this constraint  $D(w) \subseteq C$ . The subjunctive is *marked* and indicates a violation: SCs presuppose that  $D(w)$  is partly outside  $C$  ( $D(w) \not\subseteq C$ ). This explains why standard PSCs are used when the antecedent  $p$  is taken to be CF, but also when  $D(w)$  needs to be widened for some other reason (e.g. if  $p$  and  $q$  follow from  $C$  but  $D(w)$  contains  $\neg q$ -worlds, as in Andersonian PSCs according to von Fintel’s 1997’s analysis). The facts described in § 2 and 3 allow to conclude that swing PSCs **are** PSCs: their  $D(w)$  contains either CF/implausible  $q$  worlds (cf. e.g. (2)-(3) & (5b)), or CF/implausible  $\neg q$  worlds (cf. (7a)).

**5. The role of the imperfective.** Swing PSCs allow to better tease apart the contribution of aspect/tense morphology in the antecedent and the consequent of PSCs. Their properties point to the following conclusions. **1.** The ‘subjunctivehood’ of French PSCs (that we equal with  $D(w) \not\subseteq C$ ) depends on the *conditionnel* 2 morphology in the consequent (found in swing and standard PSCs), and *not* on the extra-layer of past in the antecedent (not present in swing PSCs). This is confirmed by the fact that PSCs cannot be obtained by combining a *plus-que-parfait* in the antecedent and a non-*conditionnel* indicative in the consequent (these sentences are either out, or force a temporal interpretation of the *pqp* and are PICs). **2.** The ‘CF antecedent falsity’ of PSCs depends, in French, *not only* on the *conditionnel* 2, *but also* on the imperfective in the antecedent. Given that the *conditionnel* can be analysed as the morphological spell-out of the imperfective plus the future (Iatridou 2000), this suggests that imperfectivity in **both** clauses is necessary to signal *CF antecedent falsity*.

**6. A case of agreement failure.** In several treatments of PSCs (e.g. Ippolito 2003, Arregui 2004), the past tense morpheme *in the main clause* is used to go back to a time where the proposition could still be true. A way to implement this is to have the past tense outscoping the modal (NOW PAST(MOD( $p \rightarrow q$ ))). Tense/aspect morphology *in the antecedent* is often analysed as a case of agreement with the morphology in the matrix clause (cf. e.g. von Fintel 1997, Arregui 2004, Anand & Hacquard 2009). Swing PSCs can then be conceived as a case where agreement *fails* to hold. We propose the idea that through this agreement failure, the speaker indicates that subjunctivehood is not obtained through the counterfactuality of  $p$ , i.e. that *it is not* because  $p$  is CF that  $D(w)$  reaches outside of  $C$ .