# Differences in counterfactual strength explained

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Donnerstag, 5.3., 12:00-12:30

Counterfactual conditionals give rise to the inference that their antecedent is false. This is usually taken to be an implicature (or an implicated presupposition), because the inference is defeasible in Anderson-type contexts, and Modus Tollens would otherwise be question-begging. However, a number of languages appear to contain constructions for which the counterfactuality is more difficult to cancel (e.g. Karawani, 2014 for Palastinian Arabic; Komoto, 2011 for Japanese; Ippolito, 2004, for Italian). The nature of this difficulty is not yet well understood.

My talk addresses this issue with special attention to Dutch. In this language, counterfactuals may be marked with a past modal and an infinitive, but it is also sufficient to put the verb in the past tense: *Als ze rijk was,* "If she were rich,"

| (1) | **zou** ze een huis **kopen** | (2) | **kocht** ze een huis. |
|-----|-------------------------------|-----|------------------------|
|     | would she a house buy         |     | buy+PST she a house    |
|     | "she would buy a house"       |     | lit. "she bought a house" |

I will make two claims. First, the two Dutch constructions cannot always be used interchangeably. The bare past is infelicitous in Anderson-type contexts, yet is more natural in Modus Tollens arguments. Second, I claim that the bare past tense construction primarily signals the falsity of the *consequent*, while the construction with the modal suggests the falsity of the *antecedent*. The falsity inferences are not canceled in the same contexts, which explains the apparent difference in counterfactual strength.

**References:** Ippolito, M. 2004. Imperfect modality. In *The syntax of time*, eds. J. Guéron & J. Lecarme, 359-387. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. • Karawani, H.. 2014. *The real, the fake, and the fake fake: In counterfactuals, crosslinguistically*, University of Amsterdam dissertation. • Komoto, N. 2011. Internal past, external past, and counterfactuality: evidence from Japanese. In *Proceedings of SALT 20*, 618-635.