

INTERACTION OF ACTIONALITY, ASPECT AND TENSE IN KUBAN KABARDIAN
COUNTERFACTUAL CONDITIONALS

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1. On past tense and counterfactuality

In many languages of the world past tense markers are used in conditional clauses to mark counterfactuality, see e.g. James (1982), Dahl (1997), Iatridou (2000).

ENGLISH (Declerck & Reed 2001: 183)

- (1) a. *If I **knew** the truth, I would tell you.* (present counterfactual)
b. *If I **had known** what I know now, I wouldn't have appointed him.*
(past counterfactual)

LEZGIAN (Haspelmath 1993: 396)

- (2) *Eger am naq' ata-na-j-t'a,*
if she.ABS yesterday come-AOR-PST-COND
za am vokzal.d-a gürüşmiš iji-da-j.
1SG.ERG she.ABS station-INESS meeting do-FUT-PST
'If she had arrived yesterday, I would have met her at the station.'

The counterfactual function is especially characteristic of the so-called **pluperfects**, i.e. grams used to denote past situations “disconnected” from the present (see e.g. Plungian & van der Auwera 2006; Сичинава 2013). E.g. in English (contrary to what is often taught at schools), the Pluperfect as in (1b) is perfectly licit in counterfactual conditionals with present (3a) and even future (3b) reference (Declerck & Reed 2001: 177–182).

ENGLISH

- (3) a. *If I **hadn't been** in the country now, I wouldn't have been able to attend your wedding.* (Declerck & Reed 2001: 178)
b. *If you **had come** tomorrow, you wouldn't have found me at home.*
(*ibid.*: 180)

Similarly, in Lezgian the Past Aorist in counterfactual protases is used not only with reference to past (2), but to the future as well (4).

LEZGIAN (Haspelmath 1993: 395)

- (4) *Eger am paka ata-na-j-t'a,*
if she.ABS tomorrow come-AOR-PST-COND
za am vokzal.d-a gürüşmiš iji-da-j.
1SG.ERG she.ABS station-INESS meeting do-FUT-PST
'If she had arrived tomorrow, I would have met her at the station.'

There are various explanations for this propensity of pasts and pluperfects to be used in counterfactuals, see e.g. Dahl (1997) or Iatridou (2000).

NB It is essential to keep apart temporal reference (past ~ present ~ future) and epistemicity (realis ~ hypothetical ~ counterfactual) in conditionals, see e.g. Declerck & Reed (2001) and Храковский (1998).

2. Circassian: a brief introduction

A branch of the North-West Caucasian (Abkhaz-Adyghe) language family, comprising two major languages (or rather groups of dialects): **Adyghe** (West Circassian) and **Kabardian** (East Circassian). The data for the current presentation comes from the Kuban dialect of Kabardian as spoken in the village Blešepsyne (Блечепсин) in the Republic of Adygeya (Республика Адыгея, Russian Federation). The data has been collected during the field-trip organized jointly by the Russian State University of the Humanities and the National Research University “Higher School of Economics” in July 2016.

Important typological features of the Circassian languages:

- Very little distinction between major word classes (Lander & Testeleets 2006).
- Polysynthesis: pronominal affixes expressing all arguments of the verb (S, A, P as well as various indirect objects such as recipient, benefactive, and even location, cf. e.g. Smeets 1992) and a rich system of affixes marking aspectual, temporal and modal meanings (Korotkova & Lander 2010, Lander & Letuchiy 2010, Arkadiev & Letuchiy 2011). Note that most 3rd person pronominal prefixes are null and won’t be marked in the examples.

(5) *wə-ǰə-s-č'er-jə-r-a-ve-wətapšə-č'ə-f-a-ǰəm*
 2SG.ABS-DIR-1SG.IO-LOC-3SG.IO-DAT-3PL.ERG-CAUS-tie-ELAT-HBL-PST-NEG
 ‘They could not make him untie you from me.’ (elicited)

- Ergativity in both head- and dependent-marking (Smeets 1992, Kumakhov & Vamling 2009, Lander 2012, Letuchiy 2012), coupled with an impoverished case system comprising only Absolutive (-*r*, marks intransitive subjects (5a) and direct objects (5b)) and Oblique (-*m*, marks transitive subjects (5b), all types of indirect objects (5b), and adnominal possessors (5c); NB personal pronouns, possessed nominals and proper names, as well as non-referential common nouns normally do not admit case marking (see Arkadiev & Testeleets 2015).

(6) a. *šale-r me-ž'je*
 boy-ABS DYN-sleep
 ‘The boy is sleeping.’

b. *šale-m pšaše-m txələ-r jə-r-jə-t-a*
 boy-OBL girl-OBL book-ABS 3SG.IO-DAT-3SG.ERG-give-PST
 ‘The boy gave the book to the girl.’

c. *çəx^{wə}-m jə-wəne-r*
 man-OBL POSS-house-ABS
 ‘the man’s house’

- Marking of clausal subordination by means of non-finite forms, e.g. nominalizations and converbs (see e.g. Клименченко 2014 on adverbial constructions in the closely related Besleney dialect of Kabardian).

– temporal form with the prefix *š(ə)*-:

(7) *sə-ǰə-š-jə-лак^{wə}-m wənč'əbze-xe-r s-tər-jə-χə-ž'-a*
 1SG.ABS-DIR-TEMP-3SG.ERG-see-OBL key-PL-ABS 1SG.IO-LOC-3SG.ERG-take-RE-PST
 ‘When he saw me, he took the keys away from me.’ (text example)

– conditional form with the suffix *-me*:

(8) *zderovje-r mə-terez-me p-x^{wə}-hə-ne-ǰəm.*
 health-ABS NEG-in.order-COND 2SG.IO-BEN-carry-FUT-NEG
 ‘If your health is weak, you won’t bear (the hajj).’ (text example)

3. Conditionals and tenses in Circassian

As other Circassian languages (see e.g. Короткова 2009 on Temirgoy Adyghe, Аркадьев 2014 on Shapsug Adyghe, Сомин 2011 on Besleney Kabardian), Kuban Kabardian has a “two-layer” tense system, distinguishing “primary” tenses (Present (unmarked) ~ Preterite *-a* ~ Imperfect *-t(e)* ~ Future *-ne*) and “secondary” tenses formed by combining two or even more tense suffixes (see Клягина 2016).

- (9) a. *ž’astune a šape-r de jən-u d-o-ve-λape.*
 now DEM place-ABS we big-ADV 1PL.ERG-DYN-CAUS-valuable
 ‘Nowadays we value this place very much.’ (text example)
- b. *dade-r mašjane-xe-r š-a-še-m qe-ķ^w-a.*
 grandfather-ABS car-PL-ABS LOC-3PL.ERG-sell-OBL DIR-go-PST
 ‘Granddad came to the place where they sold cars.’ (text example)
- c. *β^waneβ^w-jə nəbžev^w-jə ja-dje qe-mə-ķ^w-u ja-zaq^we pso-xe-t.*
 neighbour-ADD friend-ADD 3PL.IO-at DIR-NEG-go-ADV 3PL.POSS-alone live-PL-IPF
 ‘Neither neighbours nor friends visited them, they lived alone.’
 (text example)
- d. *we-rjə zeg^were-m qə-b-ne-sə-ne.*
 you.SG-ADD once-OBL DIR-2SG.IO-LOC-reach-FUT
 ‘This will affect you as well sometime.’ (text example)

The most notable “secondary” tense forms involve the Imperfect suffix *-t(e)*, which attaches to the Preterite to form the Pluperfect (10) and to the Future to form the Irrealis. Both appear in counterfactual conditionals: the Pluperfect in the protasis, and the Irrealis in the apodosis (11).

- (10) *x^wəλx^wəβ-u nebgər-jə-tx^w də-qe-ne-ž[?]-a-te-rjə.*
 male-ADV person-LNK-five 1PL.ABS-DIR-remain-RE-PST-IPF-ADD
 ‘... and (by that time) only five had remained of us, men’ (text example)
- (11) *jəβ^we-m wə-qe-ķ^w-a-te-me dirjekterə-m w-jə-šte-ne-t.*
 on.time-OBL 2SG.ABS-DIR-go-PST-IPF-COND director-OBL 2SG.ABS-3SG.ERG-take-FUT-IPF
 ‘If you had come on time the director would have let you in.’ (elicited)

Previous analyses of conditional clauses in Circassian (Кузнецова 2009: 297–309 and Короткова 2009: 276–277 on Temirgoy Adyghe, Орлицкая 2008 and Аркадьев 2014: 55–61 on Shapsug Adyghe, Клименченко 2014: 86–92 on Besleney Kabardian and Зубова 2015: 10–15 on Kuban Kabardian) have argued that the use of the Pluperfect is a feature of past counterfactual protases. In Аркадьев (2014) I have proposed, following Iatridou (2000), that one of the two Preterite markers constituting the Pluperfect in Shapsug Adyghe, contributes past temporal reference, while the other serves to encode irrealis, thus resulting in a compositional structure.

The same reasoning appears to follow from the description of conditional clauses in Besleney Kabardian in Клименченко (2014: 86–92). In realis conditional protases tenses have their normal temporal interpretation, cf. (12)–(13).

BESLENEY KABARDIAN (Клименченко 2014: 88–89)

- (12) *para č^wwe-r jə-vel-a-me aljə de-ʔapəq^w-a.*
 dad fence-ABS 3SG.ERG-paint-PST-COND ali COM-help-PST
 ‘If dad painted the fence (yesterday), Ali helped him.’

- (13) *aljə jə-urok-xe-r jə-ʂə-ʒ'ə-ne-me j-ane kanfet qə-r-jə-tə-ne.*
 Ali POSS-lesson-PL-ABS 3SG.ERG-do-RE-FUT-COND POSS-mother sweets DIR-DAT-3SG.ERG-give-FUT
 'If Ali does (lit. will do) his homework, his mother will give him sweets.'

Counterfactuality is marked in both parts of the conditional by the Imperfect suffix; when it attaches to tense suffixes in the protasis the latter retain their temporal interpretation, cf. (14)–(15). Not surprisingly, in counterfactuals with present-tense reference the Imperfect is the only tense marker, and its function is irrealis, not tense, cf. (16).

BESLENEY KABARDIAN (Клименченко 2014: 88–89)

- (14) *s-j-ane pš'edje qe-k'e-ne-te-me se sə-p-je-β'eč'ə-ne-t.*
 1SG-POSS-mother tomorrow DIR-go-FUT-IPF-COND I 1SG.ABS-LOC-DAT-meet-FUT-IPF
 'If mother were to arrive tomorrow, I would have met her.'
- (15) *dəβ'əse zare wered qə-ʒ'jə-ʔ-a-te-me*
 yesterday Zara song DIR-LOC-3SG.ERG-say-PST-IPF-COND
marjəne gitare-m q-je-we-ne-t.
 Marina guitar-OBL DIR-DAT-hit-FUT-IPF
 'If yesterday Zara had sung a song, Marina would have played the guitar.'
- (16) *pšaše-m pjəs'mo-xe-r jə-tx-xe-te-me ʒ'ewap qə-r-a-tə-ʒ'ə-ne-t.*
 girl-OBL letter-PL-ABS 3SG.ERG-write-PL-IPF-COND reply DIR-DAT-3PL.ERG-give-RE-FUT-IPF
 'If the girl wrote letters, she would have received letters in response.'

What is lacking in most descriptions of the Circassian conditionals, especially of the Kabardian ones, is the information on the interaction of counterfactuality with aspect and actional properties of verbs. Indeed, most if not all examples of counterfactual clauses reported so far involve telic events in the perfective aspect as in (11), (14) and (15). However, given that the secondary past tense/irrealis marking is carried out by the Imperfect, whose function as primary tense is to mark past imperfective (durative and habitual) contexts as in (9c), the following questions arise:

- How is counterfactuality marked in imperfective (durative and habitual) contexts?
- How is counterfactuality marked with atelic (activity and state) predicates?
- Does temporal reference of conditional interact with aspect and actionality in any non-trivial way?

4. The findings

(All subsequent examples are elicited, which is not specially marked.)

Since the doubling of the Imperfect suffix is impossible (*-te-te-me), past imperfective counterfactuals could in principle be expressed in two ways:

- a) by the Pluperfect (-a-te-me PST-IPF-COND), neutralizing the aspectual distinction;
- b) by the Imperfect (-te-me IPF-COND), neutralizing the modal distinction.

Kuban Kabardian follows the b) strategy:

- Past imperfective counterfactuals are strictly opposed to past perfective ones, at least with telic verbs, by means of Imperfect vs. Pluperfect, cf. (17a) vs. (17b):

- (17) a. *də-qə-ʂə-k'w-a-te-m ʂhambjə polə-r jə-pχenč'-te-me*
 1PL.ABS-DIR-TEMP-go-PST-IPF-OBL Shkhambi floor-ABS 3PL.ERG-sweep-IPF-COND
wəne-m də-ʂ-jə-βe-he-ne-te-qəm.
 house-OBL 1PL.ABS-LOC-3SG.ERG-CAUS-enter-FUT-IPF-NEG
 'If Shkhambi had been sweeping the floor at the moment when we had come, he would not have let us into the house.'

- b. *də-qə-šə-k^w-a-te-m* *šhambjə polə-r* *jə-pχenč^ʔ-a-te-me*
 1PL.ABS-DIR-TEMP-go-PST-IPF-OBL Shkhambi floor-ABS 3PL.ERG-sweep-PST-IPF-COND
wəne-m *də-š-jə-βe-he-ne-te-qəm.*
 house-OBL 1PL.ABS-LOC-3SG.ERG-CAUS-enter-FUT-IPF-NEG
 ‘If Shkhambi had (already) swept the floor by the time we had come, he would not have let us into the house.’

– At least some of my consultants have similar intuitions with respect to atelic verbs as well, cf. (18a) vs. (18b):

- (18) a. *də-šə-k^we-ž^ʔ-a-m* *d-j-ane* *laže-te-me*
 1PL.ABS-TEMP-go-RE-PST-OBL 1PL-POSS-mother work-IPF-COND
də-dje *qə-še-č^ʔə-fə-ne-te-qəm.*
 1PL-at DIR-LOC-exit-HBL-FUT-IPF-NEG
 ‘If mother had been working when we had arrived she wouldn’t have been able to come out (she would be occupied).’
- b. *də-šə-k^we-ž^ʔ-a-m* *d-j-ane* *lež-a-te-me*
 1PL.ABS-TEMP-go-RE-PST-OBL 1PL-POSS-mother work-PST-IPF-COND
də-dje *qə-še-č^ʔə-fə-ne-te-qəm.*
 1PL-at DIR-LOC-exit-HBL-FUT-IPF-NEG
 ‘If mother had (already) worked by the time of our arrival, she would not have been able to come out (she would have been too tired).’

This aspectual restriction accords well with the observation by Клягина (2016) that the Kuban Kabardian Pluperfect does not in general occur in imperfective contexts.

– Conditional protases with Imperfect marking are underspecified with respect to both reality status and tense, cf. realis conditional in (19), present counterfactual in (20) and even future counterfactual in (21).

- (19) *jə-pe-č^ʔe* *turcije-m* *wə-k^we-te-me,*
 POSS-before-INS Turkey-OBL 2SG.ABS-go -IPF-COND
tərk^wə-bze *šə-z-we-mə-βe-çəx^w-a-r* *λo?*
 Turk-language REL.RSN-RFL.IO-2SG.ERG-NEG-CAUS-know-PST-ABS what
 ‘If you have been to Turkey before, why didn’t you learn Turkish?’
- (20) *ž^ʔəpstu* *weš^ʔx* *q^ʔ-je-mə-š^ʔx-te-me* *q^ʔe-t-k^wehə-ne-t.*
 now rain DIR-DAT-NEG-rain-IPF-COND DIR-1PL.ERG-go.around-FUT-IPF
 ‘If it wasn’t raining now we would have gone for a walk.’
- (21) *pšedje* *thamex^we = max^we-te-me* *de* *də-lež^ʔe-ne-te-qəm.*
 tomorrow Sunday = day-IPF-COND we 1PL.ABS-work-FUT-IPF-NEG
 ‘If tomorrow had been Sunday we wouldn’t work.’

Further complications:

– With stative predicates the aspectual distinction appears to be neutralized: my consultants allow both Imperfect and Pluperfect in past counterfactual contexts without any tangible difference in meaning, cf. (22):

- (22) *dəβ^wase* *s-jə-q^weš^ʔə-r* *wəne-m* *še-s-te-me* / *še-s-a-te-me*
 yesterday 1SG-POSS-brother-ABS house-OBL LOC-sit-IPF-COND / PST-IPF-COND
qə-p-x^wə-tje-we-ne-t.
 DIR-2SG.IO-BEN-LOC-hit-FUT-IPF
 ‘If my brother had been at home yesterday he would have called you.’

– Moreover, such neutralization is attested with dynamic atelic verbs as well, especially in past habitual contexts, where the Pluperfect is allowed even by those speakers who assign to it a perfective interpretation in episodic contexts like (18b) above:

- (23) *nɛʁabe nɛχə-be.re wə-ž'ej-a-te-me / wə-ž'je-te-me*
 last.year more-often 2SG.ABS-sleep-PST-IPF-COND / IPF-COND
nɛχ-maʃe.re w-je-zeš'ə-ne-t.
 more-rarely 2SG.ABS-DAT-get.tired-FUT-IPF

'If you had slept more last year you would have been less tired.'

The Pluperfect appears to be barred from habitual contexts only with telic verbs:

- (24) a. *nɛʁabe wə-ǰə-č'erə-mə-x^w-te-me škola-m wə-ǰə-ŝ-a-x^wə-ne-te-ǰəm*
 last.year 2SG.ABS-DIR-LOC-NEG-fall-IPF-COND school-OBL 2SG.ABS-DIR-LOC-3PL.ERG-drive-FUT-IPF-NEG
 'If you had not (regularly) arrived late last year, they would not have excluded you from school.'
- b. *nɛʁabe wə-ǰə-č'erə-mə-x^w-a-te-me škola-m wə-ǰə-ŝ-a-x^wə-ne-te-ǰəm*
 last.year 2SG.ABS-DIR-LOC-NEG-fall-PST-IPF-COND school-OBL 2SG.ABS-DIR-LOC-3PL.ERG-drive-FUT-IPF-NEG
 'If you had not (once) arrived late last year, they would not have excluded you from school.'

Interim summary:

	imperfective		perfective
	durative	habitual	
telic verbs	Imperfect		Pluperfect
activities	Imperfect	Imperfect/Pluperfect	Pluperfect
states	Imperfect / Pluperfect		

5. Pluperfect: optionality vs. spread

The investigation has revealed that the use of the pluperfect is not obligatory even in past counterfactuals: as in Adyghe (see e.g. Аркадьев 2014: 56–57), the Preterite can be used in such contexts instead, cf. (25):

- (25) *jəb^we-m wə-ǰe-k^w-a-me djərjekterə-m w-jə-ŝte-ne-t.*
 on.time-OBL 2SG.ABS-DIR-go-PST-COND director-OBL 2SG.ABS-3SG.ERG-take-FUT-IPF
 'If you had come on time the director would have let you in.' — cf. (11)

Moreover, the Preterite can also replace the Imperfect with stative (26) and habitual atelic verbs (27), but not with telic verbs (28).

- (25) *dəb^wase s-jə-ǰ^weš'ə-r wəne-m ŝe-s-a-me ǰə-p-x^wə-tje-we-ne-t.*
 yesterday 1SG-POSS-brother-ABS house-OBL LOC-sit-PST-COND DIR-2SG.IO-BEN-LOC-hit-FUT-IPF
 'If my brother had been at home yesterday he would have called you.' — cf. (22)

- (27) *jəles-k^w-a-m nɛχə-be.re wə-ž'ej-a-me nɛχ-maʃe.re w-je-zeš'ə-ne-t.*
 year-go-PST-OBL more-often 2SG.ABS-sleep-PST-COND more-rarely 2SG.ABS-DAT-get.tired-FUT-IPF
 'If you had slept more last year you wouldn't have been less tired.' — cf. (23)

- (28) *#səhatə-r t^wə-m swande sup jə-βe-v-a-me*
 hour-ABS two-OBL Swande soup 3SG.ERG-CAUS-boil-PST-COND
jə-peš'ə-m tjeljevizerə-r xe-βe-ne-βe-ne-te-ǰəm.
 POSS-room-OBL television-ABS LOC-CAUS-be.lit-RES-FUT-IPF-NEG
 'If at two o'clock Swande had finished cooking (*had been cooking) soup, the TV-set in her room couldn't have been turned on.'

Such a use of the Preterite seems to be the minor option, but it is robustly attested even if not all speakers accept it in all contexts. This probably shows that the use of the Pluperfect in counterfactuals is perceived by the speakers as somehow redundant. Note that just like the Imperfect, the Preterite does not unambiguously mark the protasis as counterfactual, cf. (29) with a realis conditional:

- (29) *ruslan qe-k^w-a-me sebranije-r je-d-ke-že-n.*
 Ruslan DIR-go-PST-COND meeting-ABS DAT-2PL.ERG-CAUS-begin-POT
 ‘If Ruslan has come, let’s begin the meeting.’

On the other hand, there is a clearly observable spread of the Pluperfect (and, more marginally, Preterite) to non-past (including future) contexts, testifying to its becoming a default marker of counterfactuality *per se*, regardless of temporal reference, cf. (30)–(31).

- (30) *ž’astune s-jā-q^weš’ā-r wāne-m še-s-a-te-me*
 now 1SG-POSS-brother-ABS house-OBL LOC-sit-PST-IPF-COND
jā-peš’ā-m šhenκ^wabž’e-r ɽ^wā-x-a-we šā-tā-ne-t.
 POSS-room-OBL window-ABS LOC-open-RES-ADV LOC-stand-FUT-IPF
 ‘If my brother had been at home now, the window in his room would have been open.’

- (31) *tha wjəkepsə nobe aχš’e-r qā-zerā-z-e-p-t-a-m-č’e*
 thanks today money-ABS DIR-REL.FCT-1SG.IO-DAT-2SG.ERG-give-PST-OBL-INS
awe pšedje-jā qā-z-e-p-t-a-te-me deκ^we-ne-t.
 but tomorrow-ADD DIR-1SG.IO-DAT-2SG.ERG-give-PST-IPF-COND good-FUT-IPF
 ‘Thanks for giving me money today, but if you had given them to me tomorrow, it would have been better.’

Cf. a similar development in English illustrated above, and the discussion in Dahl (1997).

6. Conclusions

Marking of counterfactuality in Kuban Kabardian (and, *mutatis mutandis*, most probably in other Kabardian varieties as well) is achieved by means of a non-trivial interplay of actionality, aspect and tense:

- The Imperfect *-t(e)* serves as a marker of counterfactuality *par excellence* only in non-past contexts and, as part of the complex Pluperfect, in past perfective (and some habitual) contexts; in most imperfective contexts the Imperfect does not specify either reality status or temporal reference.
- The use of the Imperfect marker as a secondary temporal/modal operator inducing counterfactual interpretation is non-obligatory even in past perfective counterfactuals, where the simple Preterite can appear instead.
- All in all, temporal reference seems to be the less important parameter in the marking of irrealis conditionals in Kuban Kabardian: all of the markers surveyed, even the Pluperfect, are in principle compatible with past, present and future interpretation; with respect to the Pluperfect this points towards its development into a specialized marker of counterfactuality.
- By contrast, the aspectual distinctions (perfective vs. imperfective, and, in the latter, durative vs. habitual), as well as the actional ones (telic vs. atelic), constrain the morphological expression of counterfactuality in important ways.

Abbreviations

ABS — absolutive; ADD — additive; ADV — adverb; AOR — aorist; BEN — benefactive; CAUS — causative; COM — comitative; COND — conditional; DAT — dative; DEM — demonstrative; DIR — directional; DYN — dynamic; ELAT — elative; ERG — ergative; FCT — factive; FUT — future; HBL — habitative; INESS — inessive; INS — instrumental; IO — indirect object; IPF — imperfect; LNK — linker; LOC — locative; NEG — negation; OBL — oblique; PL — plural; POSS — possessive; POT — potential; PST — past; RE — refactive; REL — relativizer; RES — resultative; RFL — reflexive; RSN — reason; SG — singular; TEMP — temporal.

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