

If you want a future darling, why don't you get a past?

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It is a well-known fact that past tense morphemes in particular contexts, such as counterfactual conditionals or optatives, may give rise to a (counterfactual) present tense interpretation (1) (Iatridou 2000, Ippolito 2004, a.o.).

- (1) a. If John were ill, he would be home now.
b. Had I been in Spain now!

Much less known is that past tense morphemes may also give rise to future tense readings, albeit with two constraining factors: (i) the speaker must express uncertainty about the likelihood of the future event (2) and (ii) the past tense morpheme may only refer to planned activities (3).

- (2) a. Tomorrow we were having diner *(, right?)
b. {Were we / *we were} having diner tomorrow
(3) a. Were we meeting up tomorrow?
b. *Did it rain tomorrow?

Many languages, including Dutch and Arabic, exhibit past-for-future readings as well (cf. Karawani & Zeijlstra t.a.). In those languages there may be slightly differing restrictions than those observed for English, but in all these languages the uncertainty requirement always applies. But in all those languages, the restrictions with respect to the kind of future readings of a past-for-a-future construction are identical to the restrictions on using present tense morphology to express future readings. English, for instance, does not allow present tense to refer to other events than planned activities, both in the case of past-for-future readings and present-for-future readings (4):

- (4) *It rained tomorrow.

This shows that the facts in (2)-(3) reflect a blocking effect. Adopting the idea that tense is presuppositional in nature (following Sauerland 2002, Schlenker 2005, a.o.), the most straightforward answer to the question as to why past tense morphology may give rise to readings that could also be expressed by present tense morphology is that present tense is semantically stronger (i.e. marked) with respect to the past and that therefore in those cases where the speaker does not believe the stronger (present tense) presupposition to hold, the past tense may be used. Under such a view past tense is a semantic default tense, following Maximize Presupposition:

- (5) Maximize Presupposition (MaxPresup): If $\text{domain}(\psi)$ entails $\text{domain}(\phi)$, ψ is a scalar alternative of ϕ , and ψ and ϕ are equivalent, assertion of ϕ entails that the speaker doesn't believe $\text{domain}(\psi)$ to be entailed by the common ground (cf. Heim 1991).

However, this view is completely at odds with the standard view (voiced in Sauerland, Schlenker, a.o.) which takes past tense to be semantically marked with respect to present tense. A past tense morpheme, in its temporal interpretation, may only refer to events that lie in the past, whereas present tense may refer to both past and present events. If the usage of a past and a present tense morpheme would both be compatible to describe a particular situation, MaxPresup predicts that usage of the past tense morpheme prevails.

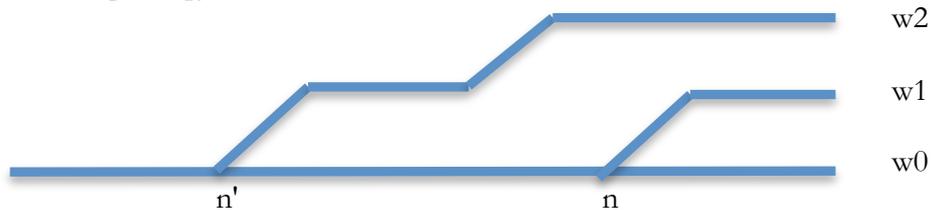
Hence, a paradox arises: in order to explain the future readings of the past tense morpheme, it must be assumed that present tense is marked with respect to past tense, but to account for the way past tense readings are expressed, past tense, by contrast, must be a semantic default. While the standard view a la Sauerland and Schlenker takes past tense to be semantic, this is the reverse for future tense readings. Also for counterfactual readings, the past tense must be the default one, since a present tense morpheme in a conditional may never give rise to a counterfactual interpretation: in (6) (and also (1)a), the present tense may only be used if the speaker is certain that the truth of the antecedent is a possibility; otherwise past tense morphology must be used.

- (6) a. If John were ill, he would be in bed now
b. If John is ill, he would be in bed now.

If both future and counterfactual readings of tense morphology are taken to be modal (cf. Enc 1996, Condoravdi 2001), the following generalisation arises, which to the best of our knowledge has

hitherto never been observed before: in its *temporal* interpretation past tense is marked with respect to present tense, in its *modal* interpretation present tense is marked with respect to past tense.

The question as to how to solve this paradox relates to the question why past tense morphology is able to express modality in the first place. Different views on this have been proposed: either past tense denotes some exclusion feature (denoting that the described event is not true in the actual world at the moment of speech, cf. Iatridou 2000) or is taken to follow from the specific semantics of past tense (Ippolito 2004). Both approaches, however, do not explain how this view extends to the fact that also present tense is able to give rise to modal (i.e. future) readings. In this paper we follow a recent approach, proposed by Verkuyl (2008), who argues that tense is inherently modal. For him, time of speech (n) is a domain breaker between actual and non-actual readings of the present tense (thus already accounting for the fact that present tense is able to give rise to future readings). Present tense denotes that the described event lies in a time interval that contains n. The effect of using a past tense morpheme is that the time of speech is 'shifted' to the past (n'). Using past tense morphology denotes that the time interval contains n'.



Under this view, the observed markedness effects and possible readings follow naturally: for a temporal interpretation (applied to w0) only, a past tense denotes an event that must lie in an interval that contains n'. However, this interval can always be extended to an interval that also contains n. This renders the past tense semantically marked with respect to present tense under its temporal interpretation: temporal past tense always gives rise to stronger readings. However, for modal readings the mirror image emerges. To see this, take the picture above again. Here, w2 is a world that is accessible from w0 at n', but not at n. Naturally, all worlds that are accessible from w0 at n, are also accessible at w0 from n'. Thus present tense is stronger than past tense in its modal interpretation. Now the facts observed for past-for-a-future reading are explained as well. (7)a denotes an event that is located at a time interval that contains n'. This allows either for actualized events prior or at n', and for planned activities after n' (in either w0, w1 or w2). (7)b, by contrast, denotes an event that is either actualized prior to or at n or that is an activity planned after n (either in w0 or w1). Hence, by uttering (7)b, a speaker may refer to future events that are planned at n, whereas (7)a may refer to all future events planned at n' (which may or may not still count as planned at n).

- (7) a. We were meeting up.
 b. We are meeting up.

MaxPresup guarantees that if the speaker is certain to refer to a planned event in either w0 or w1, s/he would have used present tense morphology. Consequently, only if this certainty is absent, the speaker can no longer use the present tense and must, therefore, use past tense morphology.

To conclude, the past-for-a-future readings reveal a hitherto unobserved paradox about the strength relations between past and present tense. Adopting a view on tense and modality as proposed in Verkuyl (2008 et seq) solves this paradox and makes it possible to account for the past-for-a-future readings in terms of blocking effects.

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