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Nonstandard Conditionals in English

Thesis Summary

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The present thesis is an investigation into the status, history, geographical spread, meaning and form of two structures which appear in conditional protases with past reference as well as in other counterfactual environments. These constructions, referred to here as *had have [pp]* and *would have [pp]*, are variants of the standard pluperfect, *had [pp]*, in similar contexts:

- | | |
|--|--|
| (1) If I <i>had said</i> it I would have remembered it. (WebCorp) | (1a) If I <i>had have said</i> it I would have remembered it. |
| | (1b) If I <i>would have said</i> it I would have remembered it. |
| (2) I wish, wish, wish I <i>had said</i> that when I was 16... (WebCorp) | (2a) I wish, wish, wish I <i>had have said</i> that when I was 16... |
| | (2b) I wish, wish, wish I <i>would have said</i> that when I was 16... |

The study documents the syntactical behaviour of the nonstandard constructions (i.e. whether they undergo inversion and ellipsis, the place of negation, etc.), what connectors co-occur with the structures, and the kinds of apodoses which follow the *had/would have [pp]* protases. It also investigates whether the nonstandard constructions make a different meaning contribution to the sentences where they appear by comparison with the standard pluperfect form. In short, the thesis attempts to answer the question whether *had [pp]*, *had have [pp]* and *would have [pp]* are fully interchangeable variants. Furthermore, as both *had have [pp]* and *would have [pp]* are deemed nonstandard, the study investigates the origins and motivations behind these structures' status. Finally, the thesis looks into how far back in history these nonstandard forms have been found and into whether there are any geographical limitations to their spread.

The thesis is organized in five parts, as follows. First, several terms and concepts related to the nonstandard structures are introduced and discussed. A clear theoretical stance is eschewed while the notions are discussed from different points of view. Part two is mainly a review of the scholarly literature on the two nonstandard structures written over the last hundred of years. A number of lines of inquiry which are connected with the nonstandard forms are rejected, as they are considered to be outside the central focus of the study. The third chapter deals with the corpus investigation of *had have [pp]* and *would have [pp]*. It presents the results of the research concerning the structures' syntactic behaviour and sentential environment, their respective frequencies in BrE and AmE, the regional spread of *had have*

[pp] in Britain, as well as the contribution that the forms make to the meaning of the sentences where they are found. The research has also yielded unexpected tangential results which are briefly presented and discussed. Chapter four mainly deals with English grammars and language usage guides from the eighteenth century onwards. They are employed to discover and document prescriptive attitudes towards the nonstandard forms in question, as well as to show how related phenomena have been treated by grammarians. Finally, the fifth part of the thesis presents the conclusions of the study and opens new avenues for research.

The grammar notions tackled in the *Preliminaries* section are: conditionals (section 1.1), counterfactuality (section 1.2), the perfect (section 1.3), *would* and the conditional perfect (section 1.4). Conditionals are sentences formed of a protasis, which introduces the premise, and an apodosis, which provides the consequent. *If* is for English the prototypical marker of conditionality, but its presence does not necessarily ensure that the sentence is a conditional. On the other hand, a sentence may be conditional even when *if* is not present. The nonstandard forms *had have [pp]* and *would have [pp]* are found in the protasis of a conditional type known as a ‘closed hypothetical with past reference’ (cf. Quirk et al. 1985), a ‘subjunctive counterfactual’ (cf. Akatsuka 1986), or a ‘third conditional’ in pedagogical approaches. Counterfactuals are a subset of conditionals which have a modal auxiliary in the apodosis and present in both the protasis and apodosis a backshift of tense. Counterfactuals express unrealized alternatives to given scenarios, and the conditional can refer to a hypothetical situation or to one which indeed did not take place. Counterfactuality is also expressed in contexts introduced by *wish*, *if only*, *as if*, and *would that*. The perfect (i.e. *have [pp]*) is present in the nonstandard *had have [pp]* and *would have [pp]* as well as in the standard protasis *had [pp]*. Its basic function is “to express the temporal relation of anteriority” (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 139). In some situations where contextual elements sufficiently establish anteriority, the perfect can be replaced by nonperfect verb forms with no meaning loss, as in the following examples:

(3) She asked if Jenna *had / had had* a bowel movement recently. (WebCorp; originally *had*)

(4) In terms of how the weekend has gone, I am incredibly happy with that. I think it has so far been one of the best. I can't remember *having / having had* the performance I have had this weekend on any weekend. (WebCorp; originally *having*)

The core modal *would* has both factual and counterfactual uses and can be employed to express politeness and tentativeness. Standard apodosis *would have [pp]* is commonly termed ‘conditional perfect’ (cf. Declerck 2006). It typically “refers to an event which [...] was once anticipated” (Binnick 1991: 117). In standard English *would* is prohibited in conditional protasis unless it expresses ‘volition’.

The sociolinguistic issues discussed in the *Preliminaries* concern language varieties (section 1.5), Standard and nonstandard English (section 1.5.1), its ‘internal’ and ‘external’ analyses (section 1.5.1.2), the process of standardisation and its stages (section 1.6.), the ideology of SE (section 1.7), and the place of education in the propagation and maintenance of the standard (section 1.8). For the purposes of the present thesis, SE is defined as that variety of English which is primarily distinguished by its grammatical features endorsed by educational materials, i.e. described in grammars and prescribed in usage books targeted at both the native-speaking and the non-native-speaking public (such as learners of English as a foreign language). As far as published texts are concerned, these are understood as being primarily written in SE and thus contain to an almost exclusive extent the grammatical standard core. As a corollary, nonstandard English is defined as a range of grammatical features which have the same roles or functions as the SE ones, but whose forms are different. These forms are either proscribed or described as nonstandard when mentioned, and they are infrequent, or altogether absent from the types of texts noted above. Thus, a SE feature can have more than one nonstandard equivalent. Nonstandard English cannot be treated as a self-contained variety. If around ten percent of a nation’s population uses the standard (cf. Trudgill 1999), then the remaining ninety percent is made up of such a diverse crowd that no common denominator could be found.

Nonstandard English is by its very nature the opposite of the standard, or an alternative to it, and cannot be defined in other terms. The nonstandard is argued to partially overlap with the vernacular, but, given the above definition, it is significantly different from what the latter term usually designates.

It is possible to view SE as the end result of standardisation whose intermediate stages are selection, elaboration of function, codification and prescription (Milroy & Milroy 1999). The ideology which builds up alongside standardisation imagines a perfectly uniform and stable language which must be studied in order to be correctly used. Speakers of nonstandard

varieties are often victims of discrimination (cf. Lippi-Green 2012). The ideology of the standard may also influence language studies.

The second part of the thesis examines various comments and studies of or relevant to the nonstandard *had have [pp]* and *would have [pp]*. The literature under review starts with Mencken's *The American Language* (1919) and ends with Biezma et al. (2014), covering nearly one hundred years of interest in the forms. Historically-oriented studies found that the structures made an appearance in the language in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In addition, instances of protasis *would have [pp]* not expressing volition were also found as early as the fifteenth century (Molencski 1999, Jespersen 1931). The question of origin is addressed along two main lines: one involves the 'reinterpretation', or 'unpacking' of an element, while the second involves an 'analogy' or a 'parallelism' with a different structure. In one analysis, the contracted 'd is said to be 'unpacked' as either *would* or *had*, of which *had* is perceived as an error, or a misinterpretation (Quirk et al. 1985, Dancygier & Sweetser 2005). In another analysis, patterns emerge where some kind of syntactical analogy or phonological similarity can be discerned (Evans & Evans 1957, Lambert 1986). It is also possible that the nonstandard structures appeared so as to mark factual versus counterfactual information, making up for the lost indicative-subjunctive distinction, a differentiation which *had [pp]* does not make in standard English (Denison 1998, Biezma et al. 2014). There is general agreement in what regards the status of *had have [pp]* and *would have [pp]* as nonstandard structures.

Prospecting the literature also led to a narrowing in the focus of research and certain potential lines of inquiry were discarded (sections 2.1 and 2.2). Thus, a decision was taken to consider *of* and *a* as essentially alternative spellings of *have*, as for instance in:

(3) Rosa Parks, if she *hadda* (=had have) been a black dude that done that, they *woulda* (=would have) hung him on the highest tree. (WebCorp)

(4) If we *would of* (=would have) waited about 3 weeks we *could of* done the same refi [=refinance] for free as they had a bigger discount on points then and it *would of* (=would have) covered all the closing costs. (WebCorp)

Furthermore, protasis *should have [pp]* was ignored in subsequent corpora inquiries because of its extreme rarity. Similarly, the use of the preterite in conditional protases as a nonstandard alternative to the pluperfect is not taken into consideration either.

The third chapter investigates counterfactual *had have [pp]* and *would have [pp]* in *if-* and *wish-* clauses in present day British and American English, inquiring into their spread and investigating their uses in context. Three main corpus tools are used: BNC, COCA, and WebCorp. Corpus linguistics is shown to share a number of fundamental principles with sociolinguistics (section 3.1), and the limitations of the approach are discussed, particularly in terms of the corpora's limited representativeness, which directly impinges on perceiving BNC and COCA as faithfully representing BrE and AmE respectively. BNC and COCA are found not to be fully comparable in at least one respect: there is considerable difference in the frequency of 'd *have [pp]* and of contracted *have* in *had have [pp]* and *would have [pp]* between the spoken components of the two corpora. BNC evinces a larger number of contractions than COCA, which may be explained by the latter's spoken subcorpus containing unscripted radio and TV conversation where people may be more careful with their language (section 3.1.2). In addition, using the Web as a corpus is shown to considerably limit potential linguistic investigations and to be especially defective in allowing the replication of studies (cf. Lindquist 2009). WebCorp is used exclusively for qualitative analyses, capitalizing on the possibility to view the entire context in which a structure appears. However, this tool is unfit for quantitative studies because of frequently duplicated linguistic material and because the Web also contains commentary on the targeted structures, not just instances of the forms being naturally used (section 3.1.3).

Section 3.2 covers the results of the research employing BNC, COCA and WebCorp. The nonstandard constructions have always been found to alternate with the standard pluperfect or with the preterite and not with each other, as in the following example:

- (5) What would've happened in October of 2008 if the economy *hadn't melted* down, the financial crisis *hadn't have happened*, we don't really know. (COCA 2011 SPOK NBC_Matthews)

This casts serious doubts over the proposition that the contracted 'd in 'd *have [pp]* is sometimes mistakenly unpacked as *had* instead of *would*. Speakers and writers prefer either *had have [pp]* or *would have [pp]* as an alternative to the standard protasis *had [pp]*. *Had have [pp]*, *would have [pp]* and 'd *have [pp]* denote constructions whose elements are prone to undergo changes and combinations common to all English verb phrases. The middle auxiliary *have* is often found contracted to 've, a or of; when negated, *not* can also become contracted;

had have [pp] and *would have [pp]* can also be inverted. The *[pp]* slot for the past participle hides the fact that the structures can be passivised, as in

(6) I mean, *what if* her car *had of been broke* into. (BNC KB1 S_conv)

Moreover, they can be used in the progressive and combine with any kind of verbs or verb phrases, such as phrasal verbs:

(7) I think that if -- if there *wouldn't have been* that separation earlier on, this *wouldn't be going on*. (COCA 1995 SPOK Ind_Geraldo)

The nonstandard constructions appear after conditional *if*, *only if*, *even if*, *unless*, *suppose*, as well as after *wish*, *if only* and *what if*. The nonstandard protases combine with a variety of apodoses. The research also shows that *had* in *had have [pp]* as syntactically akin to a central modal, undergoing negation, inversion and ellipsis, just like *would* in nonstandard protasis *would have [pp]* does.

In terms of frequency (section 3.2.4), the standard *had [pp]* form in conditional protases and *wish* complements is undoubtedly heavily dominant. *Had have [pp]* is the more frequent nonstandard construction in BrE, having been found to appear almost twice as frequently in BNC as compared with *would have [pp]*. In contrast, protasis *would have [pp]* is the dominant nonstandard construction in AmE, where *had have [pp]* has a negligible presence. The data also supports Molencki's (1999) findings that protasis *had have [pp]* has a bias towards negation in the sense of a visible tendency to combine with *not* or other negative elements (section 3.2.5). This happens in clear opposition with both the standard form and the nonstandard protasis *would have [pp]* which are less frequently negated. It is speculated that the latter tendency is the default one, as counterfactual thinking tends to proceed by changing background elements, not by the complete negation of a situation (Akatsuka & Strauss 2000 and Frosch & Byrne 2012). Furthermore, in the question of the *had a* or *of [pp]* variants (section 3.2.6), it has not been possible to determine how frequently they are employed relative to the entire population. In BNC and COCA they appear in citations and speech transcriptions and thus represent a written image, an impression of what a speaker sounds like, not a writer's own language variety.

In terms of regional spread (section 3.2.7), COCA does not provide any demographic information, but using the available speaker information in the BNC *had have [pp]* has been shown to be widely spread in the United Kingdom. It makes an appearance in fourteen

different regional dialects, including Scottish, Irish, Welsh and the Home Counties. It is also found in nineteenth century literature written in the local dialect of Sheffield and Leeds. Protasis *would have [pp]*, on the other hand, already rare in BrE, is only registered in four regional dialects of BrE.

In terms of meaning (section 3.3), there is a very important distinction between purely counterfactual conditionals and hypothetical or imaginary conditionals, “in which the content of the *if*-clause is entertained as a possibility neither in accordance to reality nor necessarily inconsistent with it” (Taylor 1997: 302). The study checks whether the nonstandard *had have [pp]* and *would have [pp]* are in any way restricted as to the meanings of the protases they appear in by comparison with the standard *had [pp]*. Both *had have [pp]* and *would have [pp]* can express counterfactuality in the restricted sense of “contrary-to-fact”, as in:

(8) The PC wasn't stolen. *If it had have been the other way round*, and the PC was taken, there would be absolutely no way that Revolution would have existed.
(WebCorp)

The nonstandard constructions can also appear in hypothetical conditionals in the context of different scenarios where alternative solutions have the same weight. The following examples show that the forms are used even when a pure supposition is put forward and there is no relation to fact or truth:

(9) [Discussion about the identity of Jack the Ripper.] Many people thought the royal family was in someway connected to this case because the Queen's grandson has been rumoured to have visited several whore houses. If this was the case, some of these prostitutes may have his children. This would need to be covered up, in which case, the royal family would have hired assassins to kill the prostitutes in question. Another rumour was that it was the Queen's surgeon. *If it had have been the Queens surgeon* it would have been difficult to prove as probing into royal affairs would have been very difficult. This could have been classed as conspiring against the Queen, and trying to frame her for a part in the murders. (WebCorp)

(10) [At the beginning of the problem a variable $K=\{10, 50\}$.] However, *if K would have been 50*, then analyzing the two possibilities: 1st setter does 10 tasks and 2nd setter does 20 tasks. Cost is $10 \times 60 + 50 \times 70 = 4100$. 2nd setter does all 30 tasks. Cost is $50 \times 80 = 4000$. (WebCorp)

The research shows that even when the structures appear after *wish*, which is typically strictly counterfactual, the situation may still be imaginary, a thought experiment. Furthermore, the nonstandard structures can also appear in doubly remote conditionals (section 3.3.2) which are characterised by the presence of the time adverbs *tomorrow* or *today* in the protasis or apodosis and which have present or future time reference instead of the much more common past time reference:

(11) And just yesterday Investigator Derrick Broze drove right into the center of the very camp holding the drills to get a close look. *If he had have gone today* he would probably be met with considerable resistance. (WebCorp)

(12) I'm always looking for more... for the next thing... but I can honestly say that *if I would have died today* I would have been at peace with the way I lived my life and the experiences I had around the world. (WebCorp)

Overall, the data indicates meaning categories such as counterfactuality and the true versus false distinction gradually break down when faced with the complexity of real-life language usage. It must be added that *had have [pp]* has not been found to appear in conjunction with *as if*, although this complex conjunction is known to introduce counterfactuality (Athanasiadou & Dirven 1997b and Tynan & Lavin 1997).

There is also considerable evidence that *had have [pp]* can supplant standard *had [pp]* in conveying past-in-past (section 3.3.4), in the absence of any conditional, wishful or otherwise counterfactual environment, as in the following example:

(13) "By that time, teachers *had have met* new students and kids felt more at home in the community," Ms. Ryerson said. "We're ready to start the academic year." (WebCorp)

The collected data contains many examples where *would* in *would have [pp]* cannot be interpreted as volitional because of the nature of the subject (section 3.3.5). It is argued that the 'willingness' interpretation of *would* is a grammarian's whim and that the semantic bleaching of *would* is complete in Present Day English. In addition, there are legitimate uses of *would have [pp]* in conditional protases (section 3.3.6) as reasoning may start with the possible consequence of an action:

(14) She kept getting bones in her mouth and each time she took one out O'Hara appeared to be looking in her direction. If it *would have caught* Meredith's attention

she wouldn't have minded a bone lodging in her gullet, but then there was always the risk he might think she was merely coughing -- she could choke for nothing. (BNC FNU W_fict_prose)

and there may be embedded conditionals whose apodoses appear after *if*:

(15) In cases with a significant research and development component, the initial question will be whether the parties would have competed with one another in the research and development sphere but for the transaction. *If they would not have competed* in R &D, because one or more would not have undertaken the activity without a collaborator, that should be the end of the story -- there can be no competitive concerns when no competition would have existed in the absence of the transaction. # *If the parties would have engaged* in separate R&D efforts but for the transaction, the government will attempt to assess what technologies compete with those that the parties are developing, how many firms compete in the development of the same or competing technologies... (COCA 1995 ACAD CanadaLaw)

On average, the research reports on the many difficulties in distinguishing the standard and nonstandard uses of counterfactual *would have [pp]*.

The fourth chapter of the thesis studies grammarians', prescriptivists', and the general public's attitudes towards the nonstandard structures and other related constructions since the eighteenth century. Eighteenth-century grammars (section 4.1) document the formation of standards in grammar writing and standards in the 'proper' use of English. Robert Lowth's *A Short Introduction to English Grammar with Critical Notes* (1792), Joseph Priestley's *The Rudiments of English Grammar* (1768) and Lindley's Murray's *English Grammar* (1795) are provided considerable space and are mined for information about or related to the nonstandard structures. The 'conjunctive'/'subjunctive' paradigm coalescing with the indicative was a major issue. Conditionals were given far less attention than they are given today, yet the grammars recorded variation. It used to be possible not to have a modal verb phrase in the apodosis, counterfactual past conditionals effectively evincing the same *had [pp]* structure in both the protasis and the apodosis. The survey of thirteen grammars published in the nineteenth-century (section 4.2) uncovers the following main issues: a carry-over and continuation of the subjunctive-indicative debate; the identification of an equivalence between *had* and *would* in modal idioms such as *had rather*, *had better* and others; the view that 'd is

incorrectly rendered as *had* in modal idioms; a rejection of the perfect after certain verbs which already situate the sentence in the past and produce counterfactuality; an entrenched emphasis on rules and the correct use of tenses. There is unmistakable continuity and repetition in the grammars and usage guides of the previous centuries which become unshakable heritage for the twentieth (section 4.3). Prohibitions against the use of the nonstandard *had have [pp]* are found as late as Curme's great traditional reference grammar (1931) and in several usage guides, as well as in comments on the Web.

Had have [pp] has been found to have been negatively commented on as early as Hogson (1881) in Britain and Webster's *Dissertations on the English Language* (first published in 1789) in America. The perception of protasis *would have [pp]* as problematic appears to have come about much later, around the beginning of the twentieth century. Of the possible characteristics attributed to the nonstandard forms, it is their perceived incorrectness which dominates. Reasons why these forms have come to be considered nonstandard include the fact that they had no place in the rigid grammatical system borrowed from Latin and that they were not recorded and legitimised in traditional grammars.

The thesis' conclusions (part 5) take the discussion further and propose that older analyses need to be reconsidered. Specifically, the conjecture that *had have [pp]* and *would have [pp]* are the same phenomenon originating in '*d have [pp]*' is refuted on the basis of the available evidence. The two forms are much more likely to have had separate sources. Protasis *would have [pp]*, unlike *had have [pp]*, is probably the result of an analogical development replicating older past conditionals in English which had identical pluperfect (originating in a subjunctive) verb forms in both the protasis and apodosis. It is also argued that *had have [pp]* cannot be regarded as marker of counterfactuality since the contexts where it is found are not all counterfactual and since it does not conform to Dahl's (1997) proposed counterfactual marker's cycle. Instead, it is proposed to interpret *had* as a failed, unproductive modal originating in a subjunctive form, which became identical with the past indicative form, and which then needed *have [pp]* to mark past time reference. By analogy, in terms of meaning (modality) and form (lack of inflections), this *had* adhered to the emerging class of core modals in Middle English. Counterfactual *had have [pp]* as a grammatical structure is therefore the result of the reanalysis of *had* and is now a fossil. It can be viewed as the result

of a branching in the grammaticalisation of Old English *habban* (*have*). Several means of verifying this proposal are also discussed.

If *had* in *had have [pp]* is analysed as a modal, then the thesis that nonfinite *have [pp]* has been a marker of irrealis is rejected, and *have [pp]* is treated as indicating anteriority only. It also leads to the conjecture that anteriority-only *had have [pp]* (see section 3.3.4) may not be related to the nonstandard protasis *had have [pp]*, but is possibly akin to similar structures where there is a semantically empty doubling of perfective auxiliaries in language varieties outside English, as in the following example (from Barbiers 2008: 17):

“On a eu mis de l’eau sur les chaises.
one has had put of the water on the chairs.

They have put water on the chairs. (Franco-Provençal)”

Whether the stigmatization of the nonstandard protasis *would have [pp]* and *had have [pp]* structures has had an influence on the results of the corpus investigation is open for debate. Prescriptivism may explain why the constructions are so infrequent in written as opposed to spoken English, but little more than that.

While the present thesis has managed to provide a number of answers, the subject matter deserves further study. More could be gained from an extensive diachronic investigation using corpora covering Middle to Present Day English. Has *had have [pp]* been declining in frequency and have its combinatorial capabilities shrunk over the decades, as the current research suggests? It may also be worthwhile to incorporate the structures’ diachronic development in a theoretical framework, for which purpose grammaticalisation is a possible candidate.

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