

Conditional clauses and the shape of HAVE

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1. Introduction

A conditional sentence consists of two parts: a condition and a consequent. The consequent is realized as a matrix clause, and the condition is realized as a subordinate clause (as part of the matrix consequent). In the Nordic languages, the condition may either have the shape of a regular subordinate clause (1a), or it may be verb-initial (1b).

- (1) a. Om Ni hade kommit i tid hade jag blivit nöjd. (Swe.)
if you have.PAST come.SUP in time have.PAST I become.SUP satisfied
'If you had come on time, I would have been satisfied.'

- b. Hade ni kommit i tid hade jag blivit nöjd.
have.PAST you come.SUP in time have.PAST I become.SUP satisfied
'Had you come on time, I would have been satisfied.'

In Standard Swedish, verb-initial conditions must be sentence-initial; cf. (2), which is ungrammatical. However, examples corresponding to (2) occur in Swedish dialects, and in Danish, Faroese, Icelandic and Norwegian (Hulthén 1947:194, Thráinsson et al. 2004:323 f., Thráinsson 2005:149).

- (2) *Jag hade blivit nöjd hade ni kommit i tid. (Swe.)
I have.PAST become.SUP satisfied have.PAST you come.SUP in time

In both examples in (1), the condition is a constituent of the matrix clause (see further Bhatt & Pancheva 2006 and references cited there). Due to the V2-requirement, the matrix subject must follow the finite verb whenever the condition is in sentence-initial position (see [Bentzen 2014](#) for a discussion of V2). The proform *så* 'then' might sometimes intervene between the condition and the finite verb of the consequent, as in (3). This is, however, not specific to conditionals but is also common e.g. after an initial *when*-clause and even after lighter, non-clausal adverbials (see [Østbø 2014](#)), and it is not semantically restricted like English *then* (see e.g. Iatridou 1991 and von Stechow 1994 for discussion).

- (3) Hade ni kommit i tid (så) hade jag blivit nöjd. (Swe.)
have.PAST you come.SUP in time then have.PAST I become.SUP satisfied
 ‘Had you come on time, then I would have been satisfied.’

It is often possible to have the modal auxiliary *skulle* ‘would’ (or in Danish and Norwegian *vilde/ville* ‘would, wanted/intended to’) in the consequent clause, as in (4a). The use of *skulle* in the condition is more restricted. In Standard Swedish, *skulle* is not possible in the condition when the speaker knows that the proposition is unreal; cf. (4b), which is ungrammatical, with (4c), which is fine, but not counterfactual. In some dialects (particularly in Finland), *skulle* (or *sku*) is less restricted and also appears in the condition in unambiguously counterfactual contexts like (4b) (see e.g. Hulthén 1944:173).

- (4) a. Om jag hade varit tio år yngre (Swe.)
if I have.PAST be.SUP ten years younger
 skulle jag ha följt med dig igår.
would I have.INF follow.SUP with you yesterday
 ‘If I had been ten years younger, I would have come with you yesterday.’
- b. *Om jag skulle ha varit tio år yngre...
If I would have been ten years younger...
- c. Om han skulle åka, skulle jag...
if he would go.INF would I
 ‘If he would go, I would...’

In the Nordic languages, as in English and many other languages, counterfactuals with pluperfect morphology have a past tense reading, whereas preterite morphology yields a present tense counterfactual. This is often referred to as *tense shift*. Unambiguously counterfactual contexts often have double tense shift, and past perfect morphology then yields a present counterfactual.

It has been noted that the auxiliary HAVE can be morphologically reduced in some Nordic dialects, and particularly in counterfactual contexts; see (5). In examples like these, the auxiliary (*ha*) does not have any overt preterite morphology.

- (5) Dä ha kanske vari värre om han ha fått levt. (Swe.)
it have perhaps be.SUP worse if he have be.allowed.to.SUP live.SUP
 ‘It would perhaps have been worse if he had been allowed to live.’

(Nordberg 1985:75)

In some varieties, reduced HAVE seem to be morpho-phonologically underspecified for tense, and the same form is used for infinitive, present, past and counterfactual. Other dialects seem to have the form *ha* for infinitive and past tense (or counterfactual) but *har* in the present tense. Some (Norwegian) dialects

use the present tense form of the auxiliary in counterfactuals (and in the present perfect), but have a different form for non-finite and temporal past perfects (see e.g. Iversen 1918:56). We return to this in section 3 below. To my knowledge, no Nordic dialect has the simple present tense in a present counterfactual, i.e. lacks tense shift altogether.

The ScanDiaSyn survey included a sentence that tested word order after an initial condition, and a sentence with a verb-initial condition with a reduced or present tense form of HAVE and a (present) counterfactual reading. In addition, the Swedish part of the survey included a counterfactual with a simple preterite or past subjunctive in the condition and *skulle* ‘would’ in the consequent, as well as a corresponding sentence with *skulle* ‘would’ also in the condition. Results from the Nordic Syntax Database (Lindstad et al. 2009) and the Nordic Dialect Corpus (Johannessen et al. 2009) are presented below.

2. Results

2.1 Nordic Syntax Database

Subject-verb order after initial condition

The survey included a sentence with an initial condition and subject-verb order in the matrix clause:

- (6) a. Hvis dere bare kommer i tide, (#263) (No.)
if you only come.PRES in time
 jeg blander meg ikke i det.
I blend.PRES me not in it
 ‘If you only come on time, I won’t interfere.’

- b. Om ni bara kommer i tid (#263) (Swe.)
if you only come.PRES in time
 jag blir nöjd och glad.
I become.PRES satisfied and happy.
 ‘If you only come on time, I will be satisfied and happy.’

The sentence involves a V2-violation, and it is therefore rejected in most locations in Norway, Finland and Sweden; see Map 1. However, it is accepted in a few locations, particularly in Central Norway, and it gets an intermediate score in several locations in Norway and a few places in Sweden.



Map 1: Subject-verb order after initial condition clause.

(#263: *Hvis dere bare kommer i tide, jeg blander meg ikke i det.* 'If you only come on time, I won't interfere.' / *Om ni bara kommer i tid, jag blir nöyd og glad.* 'If you only come on time, I will be satisfied and happy.')

(White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score).

Reduced/present auxiliary HAVE in a counterfactual sentence

One sentence tested the possibility of a reduced or present tense form of HAVE in a present counterfactual. The sentence involves a verb-initial condition:

(7) Ha/har jeg vært ti år yngre, (#992) (No.)

HAVE I be.PASTPART ten years younger

ha/har jeg studert fysikk.

HAVE I study.PASTPART physics

'Had I been ten years younger, I would have studied physics.'

This sentence is accepted in most locations in Central and Northern Norway and Sweden, and in Finland; see Map (2). It is, however, judged ungrammatical in Southern Norway and Sweden, and in a few locations in the northernmost parts (Norrbotten in Sweden and Finnmark in Norway).



Map 2: Counterfactual with reduced or present tense auxiliary HAVE.

(#992: *Ha/har jeg vært ti år yngre, ha/har jeg studert fysikk. 'Had I been ten years younger, I would have studied physics.'*)

(White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)

Present tense counterfactual with *skulle* 'would' in the consequent

The Swedish survey included a present counterfactual sentence with a simple past tense (subjunctive or indicative) in the condition and *skulle* + infinitive in the consequent. The condition is sentence-initial, and the proform *så* 'then' intervenes between condition and the matrix finite verb:

- (8) Om jag var/vore tio år yngre, (#1411) (Swe.)
 if I be.PAST/be.PAST.SUBJ ten years younger
 så skulle jag läsa fysik.
 so would I read.INF physics
 ‘If I were ten years younger, I would study physics.’

The sentence is accepted in all locations where it was tested, except in one location in Finland, where it gets an intermediate score; see Map 3.



Map 3: Present tense counterfactual with *skulle* ‘would’ in the consequent.

(#1411: *Om jag var/vore tio år yngre, så skulle jag läsa fysik. ‘If I were ten years younger, I would study physics.’*)

(White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)

Present tense counterfactual with *skulle* ‘would’ in a verb-initial condition

Sentence (#1412) tests the possibility of *skulle* ‘would’ + infinitive in the condition in an unambiguously counterfactual sentence. The condition is verb-initial, and it is not followed by *så* ‘then’:

(9) Skulle jag vara tio år yngre, (#1412) (Swe.)

would I be.INF ten years younger

skulle jag läsa fysik.

would I read.INF physics

‘If I were ten years younger, I would study physics.’

According to Teleman et al (1999/4:647), the use of *skulle* ‘would’ in the condition in irreal contexts can vary between individuals, but *skulle* is probably more common in Northern and Central Sweden, than in the south and southwest. This is largely supported by the results of the survey. Sentence (#1412) is accepted in many parts of Sweden, and in all locations in Finland; see Map 4. It is rejected in a few locations, particularly in Southeastern Sweden. It also receives an intermediate score in several locations in Sweden.



Map 4: Counterfactual with *skulle* ‘would’ in the verb-initial condition. (#1412: *Skulle jag vara tio år yngre, skulle jag läsa fysik. ‘If I were ten years younger, I would study physics.’*)

(White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)

2.2 Nordic Dialect Corpus

Reduced or present forms of auxiliary HAVE

The Norwegian part of the Nordic Dialect Corpus includes ample examples of reduced (e.g. *ha/he/a/e*) or present tense (*har*) forms of HAVE for expected past forms (*hadde/hade*), and not only in counterfactual contexts; examples are given in (10). The Swedish part of the corpus is not fully transcribed to phonetic form and has therefore not been investigated.

(10) a. *kansj en ha drottje litt mæir vatten*

maybe it HAVE use.PASTPART little more water

‘Maybe it had used up a bit more water’

(heroeyMR_04gk, Western Norway; phonetic transcription)

b. *pluss ann ha våre på Svallbar i fjornten da*

plus he HAVE be.PASTPART on Svalbard for fourteen day

‘Plus he had been on Svalbard for fourteen days’

(lyngdal_03gm, Southern Norway; phonetic transcription)

c. *viss n har sjløppa å kjørt der omm*

if it have.PRES avoid.PASTPART to drive.PASTPART there around

så ha i følt att de va tryggaræ

then HAVE I feel.PASTPART that it be.PAST safer

‘if it hadn’t had to drive around there, I would have felt that it was safer’

(rauma_04gk, Western Norway; phonetic transcription)

The reduced/present forms are spread across Norway, and they occur also in Southern Norway where sentence (#992) was rejected. It is perhaps possible that the form of HAVE used in the survey does not correspond to the reduced form in the dialect, and that this accounts for the discrepancy. It should, however, also be noted that the reduced/present forms typically alternate with full (past) forms. What factors determine the alternation between forms has not been investigated (but see below).

3. Discussion

3.1 Other data sources

Nordberg (1985) investigates the use of the reduced form *ha* for past tense *hade* in the language spoken in Eskilstuna (a town in Central Sweden). In this study, 0.2 % of the examples with past tense possessive HAVE and 42.6 % of the examples with past tense temporal HAVE involved a reduced form of HAVE.¹ It has sometimes been argued that the reduction of the preterite form of temporal HAVE is only possible in counterfactual contexts, but in older varieties of Swedish, some speakers (almost) always have the reduced form; see Table 1. Also in (fairly) modern varieties, like that spoken in Eskilstuna in the 60's, HAVE is sometimes also reduced in factual contexts, although the frequency is considerably lower than in counterfactuals.

	Counterfactual contexts	Factual contexts	Other	TOTAL
Eskilstuna (1967)	28/31 (90 %)	25/106 (24 %)	14/23 (61 %)	67/160 (42 %)
Gustaf Ericsson (1875)	11/12 (92 %)	7/7 (100 %)	5/5 (100 %)	23/24 (96 %)
Agneta Horn (1657)	30/33 (91 %)	15/15 (100 %)	10/10 (100 %)	55/58 (95 %)

Table 1: *Ha* for *hade*. Reduced forms of HAVE in pluperfects (data from Nordberg 1985:82).

It is possible that some of the factual examples in Table 1 are not unambiguous past perfects, whereas all of (or nearly all) of the counterfactuals are. Nordberg (1985) gives the example in (11) as an example of reduction of a preterite form of HAVE. However, since a perfect with a durative adverbial need not have a universal reading (where the participial eventuality holds at the reference time), also a present perfect reading is possible.

- (11) Ryd, han ha bott många år i Lilla Peking. (Swe.)
Ryd he HAVE live.SUP many years in Little Beijing
 ‘Ryd, he had lived many years in Little Beijing.’ (Spoken when Ryd has lived 20 years in a different place.)
 (Nordberg 1985:78)

It is therefore likely that the difference between counterfactuals and other contexts is even somewhat bigger than the data in Table 1 suggests, or at least that many examples that are not counterfactual are ambiguous between a present and a past perfect.

3.2 Theoretical issues regarding the shape of HAVE

It is sometimes assumed that preterite morphology expresses distance from the speech situation, either in terms of time or world (see e.g. Iatridou 2000, Julien 2003). In (12a), the preterite form is interpreted as expressing distance from the world of the speaker, and the sentence therefore has a present tense counterfactual reading. In (12b), the preterite morphology of the auxiliary receives a modal interpretation, but the participle contributes past tense semantics (see e.g. Julien 2001, Larsson 2009, McFadden & Alexiadou 2010 for discussion); (12b) is a past tense counterfactual.

- (12) a. I wish I had a car at present.
 b. I wish I had had a car back then.
 (Iatridou 2000:239)

As noted, pluperfect morphology can also occur in present tense counterfactuals; cf. (13a) and (13b). According to Teleman et al. (1999/4:645 f.), past tense morphology for a present tense reading (or pluperfect morphology for past tense) expresses that the proposition is either unlikely or unreal. When the pluperfect is used in a present tense context (i.e. with double tense shift), the interpretation is unambiguously counterfactual (cf. Sundqvist 1955).

- (13) a. Om jag hade varit tio år yngre (Swe.)
 if I have.PAST be.SUP ten years younger
 skulle jag ha följt med dig nu/igår.
 would I have.INF follow.SUP with you now/yesterday
 'If I had been ten years younger, I would have come with you now/yesterday.'
- b. Om jag vore tio år yngre
 if I be.PAST.SUBJ ten years younger
 hade jag följt med dig nu/*igår.
 have.PAST I follow.SUP with you now/yesterday
 'If I were ten years younger, I would go with you now.'

In many Nordic varieties (as in English), present perfect morphology cannot yield a (present) counterfactual reading. In these varieties (including Standard Swedish), (14) is judged as ungrammatical, both on a present and a past counterfactual reading. It would then seem that only *finite* past tense

morphology can be used to express distance from the world of the speaker, in these varieties. The past morphology of the participle can only get a temporal reading.

- (14) *Om jag har varit tio år yngre (Swe.)
 if I have.PRES be.SUP ten years younger
 skulle jag ha följt med dig nu/igår.
 would I have.INF follow.SUP with you now/yesterday

The results of the ScanDiaSyn survey show that there is variation with respect to the morphology in (present) counterfactuals. Some speakers allow *skulle* ‘would’ in the condition in unambiguously counterfactual contexts (Map 4), and some speakers have a reduced form of HAVE or present perfect morphology in counterfactuals (Map 2). With an analysis along the lines sketched above, the participle (non-finite past morphology) can contribute counterfactual semantics in varieties where examples like (14) are grammatical. This seems to be the case in many parts of Northern Norway. There are in fact varieties of Norwegian that more generally have participle morphology (for expected infinitives) in modal contexts, and where the participle sometimes behaves like a finite, subjunctive, verb form (see Eide 2011 and [Larsson 2014](#)). Given that a past counterfactual requires two layers of past morphology, we do however not expect examples like (14) in *past* counterfactual contexts, at least as long as HAVE expresses a present tense (and is not a tense neutral form; cf. below). Past counterfactuals were, however, not investigated.

Something else must then be said about the reduced forms of HAVE. In Finland, auxiliary HAVE is more generally reduced from standard *ha(ve)r* or *hade* to *a*, which is simply underspecified for tense. The same form is in other words used in both present and past perfects, and in counterfactuals. Possessive HAVE is, on the other hand, generally not reduced. The appearance of forms *ha* or *a* for past tense *hade* is not completely parallel to reduction of *sade* ‘said’ to *sa* or to a more general omission of past tense endings (for certain groups of verbs) which is possible in many varieties of Swedish. Since there is no morphological distinction between present and past perfects in these dialects, we cannot tell whether the participle can contribute counterfactual meaning or not.

In Sweden, reduced forms of HAVE are most common in (and sometimes restricted to) counterfactual contexts, and they occur in both present and past counterfactuals. It is plausible that the difference in frequency also corresponds to a difference in grammaticality at least for some speakers, and that is also what has been assumed in previous work (see Nordberg 1985). In this case, certain Present-Day Swedish varieties have a restriction that the preterite-ending *-de* can only be dropped from auxiliary HAVE when it does not express temporal meaning.

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¹ In Swedish, finite present and past tense forms of the auxiliary HAVE can be omitted in subordinate clauses (see e.g. Julien 2002, Andréasson et al 2002, Larsson 2009 and [Garbacz & Larsson 2014](#)).