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# The epistemic uses of the English simple past and the French *imparfait*: When temporality conveys modality\*

Adeline Patard

This chapter explores the connection between past tense and modality in English and French. After arguing for a temporal definition of past tenses, I reinterpret the classical opposition between temporal uses and modal uses in terms of the speakers' referential or subjective intentionality. I further distinguish between the epistemic uses – which express the speaker's assessment of the probability of the denoted situation – and the illocutory uses – which express the speaker's degree of commitment in her speech act. I finally suggest an analysis of two epistemic uses of the English simple past and the French imperfect, namely their conditional use and optative use, thanks to the notion of dialogism, which refers to the heterogeneity of the enunciative sources of a given utterance.

**Keywords:** past tense, reference point, dialogism, English, French

## 1. Introduction

The observation that past tenses may convey modal meanings is well known and widely documented cross-linguistically.<sup>1</sup> This connection between past tense and modality is illustrated in the following uses of the English simple past (now *SP*) and the French imperfective past (now *IP*):

*Conditional (hypothetical) use*

- (1) a. *And if you **left** me I would suffer a great deal.* (R. Jaffe, *After the reunion*)  
b. *si un jour tu **partais** sans retour*  
if one day you **leave-PST.IPFV** without return  
*/ les fleurs perdraient leur parfum*  
*/ the flowers would lose their perfume*  
'if someday you **left** for ever / the flowers would lose their perfume' (É. Piaf)

*Optative use*

- (2) a. *I wish I **was** a punk rocker with flowers in my head* (S. Thom)  
b. *Ah! Si j' **étais** riche !*  
Ah! If I **be-PST.IPFV** rich!  
'Ah! If only I **was** rich !' (G. de Maupassant, *Les bijoux*)

*Suppositive use*

- (3) a. *Suppose you **were** a rose and I **was** a whip-poor-will.* (R. Miller)  
b. *Si c' **était** lui, le condé ?*  
If it **be-PST.IPFV** him, the cop ?  
'Suppose that it **was** him who was the cop ?' (J.-L. Degaudenzi, *Zone*)

*Hypothetical comparison*

- (4) a. *I'd like to live as if only love **mattered*** (T. Chapman)  
b. *chante la vie chante*  
sing the life sing  
*/ comme si tu **devais** mourir demain*  
*/ as if you **must-PST.IPFV** die tomorrow*  
'Sing life sing / as if you should die tomorrow' (M. Fugain)

In these examples, the past tense is associated with 'epistemic distance' whereby the eventuality described by the verb is presented as 'distant' from the speaker's reality, i.e. as very unlikely (cf. (1a), (1b), (3b), (4a) and (4b)) or unreal (cf. (2a), (2b) and (3a)).

These epistemic uses differ from the prototypical 'temporal' use of *SP* and *IP* exemplified in (5):

- (5) a. *It **was** dark all around / there **was** frost in the ground / when the tiger **broke** free* (Pink Floyd)  
b. *il **était** blond, il **était** beau /*  
*he **be-PST/IPFV** blond, he **be-PST/IPFV** beautiful /*  
*il **sentait** bon le sable chaud / mon légionnaire*  
*he smell- **PST/IPFV** good the sand warm / my legionnaire*  
'he was blond, he was beautiful / he smelt like warm sand / my legionnaire' (É. Piaf)

at least in two respects:

(1) the time reference: the denoted situation can be present (cf. (2a), (2b), (3a), (3b) and (4a)) or future (cf. (1a), (1b) and (4b)) in the epistemic uses whereas their interpretation is past in the prototypical use (cf. (5));

(2) the epistemic domain: as already noticed, the situation described in the epistemic use is interpreted as counterfactual, that is their factual status is suspended and called into question (cf. (1), (2), (3)). Contrastively, in the prototypical use, the situation pertains to the domain of reality for their factuality is asserted (cf. (5)).

This general observation about the polysemy of past tenses, as exemplified here in English and in French, has yielded a long-standing debate on the nature of the connection between past tense and epistemic distance and, more broadly, between temporality and modality. We wish to contribute to this debate by offering an original analysis based on the notion of 'dialogism'. In what follows, we will assume that the *SP* and the *IP* also refer to the past in their epistemic uses, but that past reference is covert in such uses due to their 'dialogic' interpretation.

The chapter will be organized as follows. In section 2, we argue for a temporal definition of *SP* and *IP*. In section 3, we introduce different distinctions among the different uses of the *SP* and *IP*, in order to clarify our definition of the 'epistemic uses' at stake in the chapter. Section 4 presents the notion of 'dialogism' and its possible application to the description of tenses uses. The last section is dedicated to the analysis of two epistemic uses of the *SP* and the *IP*, namely the conditional use and the optative use.

## 2. A temporal definition of the *SP* and the *IP*

Verbal tenses are traditionally defined thanks to temporal (and aspectual) features. Following this hypothesis, one usually posits that the *SP* and the *IP* encode past reference. This definition of past tense as meaning past is defended by scholars like James (1982), Comrie (1985), Fleischman (1989), Declerck (1991 and 2005), Smith (1991), Thieroff (1999) or Ippolito (2003) for *SP*, or by Imbs (1960), Vet (1980), Gosselin (1996), Wilmet (2003), Barceló & Bres (2006) or Patard (2007) for *IP*. This traditional conception can be contrasted with the ‘epistemic’ or ‘inactual’ definition of past tenses proposed by some linguists (cf. Damourette & Pichon 1911–1936, Langacker 1978 and 1991, Le Goffic 1995, Iatridou 2000, De Mulder & Brisard 2006, Brisard 2010). In this second view, past tense morphology does not denote past reference but indicates that the described situation is epistemically distant from the speaker’s present actuality.<sup>2</sup> The first subsection will seek to argue briefly for a temporal conception (against the ‘epistemic’ one).

### 2.1. *Past morphology means past*

We embrace the traditional view that the past morphology in the *SP* and the *IP* serves to refer to a past moment as a basic meaning. The main arguments for adopting this stance are the following.

First, as noticed by many authors, the ‘default’ or ‘prototypical’ interpretation of past morphology is clearly past. Hence the temporal reading automatically emerges in the absence of modal markers:

- (6) a. *She was sad.*
- b. *Il neigeait.*  
          It **snow-PST.IPFV**  
          ‘It **snowed** / **was snowing** (in the past)’

These observations seem more easily compatible with a temporal conception of past tense than with an inactual one.

Furthermore, cross-linguistic studies show (cf. James 1982, Fleischman 1989, Van linden & Verstraete 2008) that past tense cannot generally convey modal interpretations on their own, but they always necessitate to be combined with modal markers (such as *if* and *would* in English counterfactual conditionals). According to Dahl (1997: 100), this should be a problem for the inactual hypothesis since it is not clear why non-past interpretations of inactuality should be marked in supplementary ways, as opposed to its past interpretations.

James (1982), Dahl (1997), and Hogeweg (2009) also emphasize the ‘irregular and idiosyncratic’ character of past tense’s modal readings, as opposed to their temporal interpretations. Indeed, there is cross-linguistically (cf. James 1982) a considerable variation as to the contexts in which a past tense serves to convey counterfactuality. This irregularity of use may also surface in one given language. For instance in English, the use of the *SP* in counterfactual environments can be either obligatory (as in counterfactual conditionals or

optatives, cf. (1a) and (1b)), optional (7), or impossible (8):

- (7) a. *Imagine that Johny **was coming** tomorrow.*  
(adapted from Hogeweg 2009: 185)  
b. *Imagine that Johny **is coming** tomorrow.* (Hogeweg 2009: 185)
- (8) a. *Johny acts like he **\*was drunk** tonight.*  
(adapted from Hogeweg 2009: 186)  
b. *I have the recurrent dream I **\*was a gipsy**.*  
(adapted from Hogeweg 2009: 186)

On the contrary, the temporal uses of past tense are ‘fully regular and productive’ and need not be memorized by a user who can make generalizations to use it properly in such contexts (James 1982: 398). For the authors aforementioned, this asymmetry is not compatible with an inactual definition of past tenses but rather advocates for a past basic meaning.

We can quote a last observation by James (1982) and Dahl (1997) who point out that past tenses in their modal uses do not serve to describe situations that are contrary to facts but to express “a greater degree of distance with reality”. This is typically observed in ‘future less vivid’ conditionals, where the denoted situation refers to a future unlikely event:<sup>3</sup>

- (9) a. *If he **took** that syrup, he would get better.* (Iatridou 2000: 249)  
b. *If he **takes** that syrup, he will get better.*
- (10) a. *S’ il **venait** demain,*  
If he **come-PST.IPFV** tomorrow  
*je lui donnerais l’ argent.*  
I him would give the money  
‘If he **came** tomorrow, I would give him the money’ (James 1982: 388)
- b. *S’ il **vient** demain,*  
If he **come-PRS** tomorrow,  
*je lui donnerai l’ argent.*  
I him will give the money  
‘If he **comes** tomorrow, I will give him the money’

Here, by comparison with the present forms (cf. *takes* and *vient*), the past forms (cf. *took* and *venait*) present the situation as improbable, but the latter is not completely excluded from the speaker’s (future) reality. For James, the inactual hypothesis fails to explain why past tenses convey lesser probability in these contexts rather than a complete absence of reality, predicted by the putative inactuality of these forms.

Following these observations, we hypothesize that the *SP* and of the *IP* have a basic temporal meaning: they encode past time reference. In the next subsection we specify what they exactly refer to in the past. This will also permit us to introduce the notion of (grammatical) aspect.

## 2.2. Tense and aspect

Since Reichenbach (1947) at least, it is quite trivial to say that tenses do not directly describe a relationship between the denoted situation and the time of speech (now *S*), but that this relation is always mediated by one or more ‘reference point(s)’. As pointed by Klein (2009: 45), the necessity for a ‘reference point’ to describe the semantics of past tense may appear in an elementary sentence like:

(11) *Eva’s cat was dead.* (Klein 2009: 45)

If past tenses only encoded the precedence of the situation in relation to *S*, then the situation [Eva’s cat be dead] would hold before *S* but not during *S*, which is of course not what is meant (Eva’s cat is still dead at the present time). That is why linguists usually posit a past ‘reference point’ to which the past tense refers to. Accordingly the situation [Eva’s cat be dead] is said to be true for the past time span denoted by the reference point (at a given past time, it was the case that Eva’s cat is dead) but this does not impede the situation to be also true at other times (Eva’s cat is still dead at the present time).

Linguists have suggested many hypotheses as regards the nature of these reference points. Although the question is still a matter of debate, it is reasonable to think that their number varies according to the tense used and that they may play different roles depending on the context.<sup>4</sup> In the present study, we distinguish two functions they usually fulfill for any tenses. That is the reference point(s) stated by a given tense may serve:

(1) as a *topic time* (Klein 1994): the reference point refers to the time span about which a particular utterance makes an assertion (or ask a question) ;

(2) as a *viewpoint*<sup>5</sup> (Smith 1991, Klein 1994, Gosselin 1996): the reference point functions as a vantage point from which the situation is viewed.

These two specific functions may be related respectively to the temporal and aspectual semantic content of a tense morpheme:

(1) *Tense* (or temporal location) concerns the relationship between *S* and the topic time. Thus we hypothesize that past tenses denote a past topic time: they are meant to talk about a past moment.

(2) *Aspect* concerns the relationship between a viewpoint and the situation. One can distinguish three aspectual categories:

– *imperfective aspect* indicates that the viewpoint is embedded within the time of the situation, thus excluding the boundaries of the situation (cf. Smith 1991, Klein 1994, Gosselin 1996);

– *perfective aspect* indicates a strict simultaneity between the viewpoint and the situation, thus including the boundaries of the situation (cf. Gosselin 1996);

– *neutral aspect* encodes no specific relation between the viewpoint and the situation, this relation is then usually determined by the context (mostly the actionality of the verb, but not only) (cf. Smith 1991).

Finally, we would like to notice that the topic time equates the viewpoint in most tense forms, as for the *SP* and the *IP*, but this is not obligatory the case.

We can now define, in the next subsection, the semantics of the *SP* and *IP*.

### 2.3. Definition

We defined the basic meaning of the *SP* and *IP* in terms of temporal and aspectual semantic features. Accordingly, the meaning of the *SP* is characterized by two features:

- [past]: it refers to a past topic time, i.e. the *SP* licenses an assertion about a past moment ; the prototypical interpretation of this past feature is that the situation is true at a certain past time (cf. (12) and (13) below) ;
- [neutral]: the viewpoint on the situation (defined by the topic time) is not specified by the *SP*. Consequently, the *SP* can give rise to imperfective (12) or perfective interpretations (13) depending on the context:

(12) *yesterday love was such an easy game to play* (The Beatles)

(13) *I left my hand and my heart on the dance floor* (Lady Gaga)

Likewise, the meaning of the *IP* is characterized by two features:

- [past]: it refers to a past topic time, i.e. the *IP* licenses an assertion about a past moment (cf. (14) below);
- [imperfective]: the viewpoint (defined by the topic time) is embedded within the time of the situation; the *IP* thus excludes the boundaries of the situation and is generally associated with an imperfective interpretation of the situation (cf. (14)).<sup>6</sup>

(14) *elle avait quelque chose d'un ange*  
she **have-PST.IPFV** some thing of an angel  
'she looked like an angel' (G. Brassens)

In the next section, we introduce two distinctions concerning the different uses of the *SP* and *IP*: 'temporal' versus 'modal' uses and 'epistemic' versus 'illocutory' uses.

## 3. Remarks on the uses of tenses

### 3.1. 'Temporal' versus 'modal' uses

The first distinction is intended to clarify what we conceive as the 'modal' uses of indicative tenses. Crucially, the distinction between 'temporal uses' and 'modal uses' should not be seen as an exclusive dichotomy between temporality and modality whereby 'temporal uses' exclude modal meaning(s) and *vice versa*. Indeed, indicative tenses convey a modal meaning of 'realis' or 'factuality' – typically they present the situation described as being the case at a past / present / future moment – which is to be contrasted with the 'irrealis', 'virtual' or 'non-factual' modality of the subjunctive forms (cf. *inter alia* Martin 1983, Givón 1994, Soutet 2000, Palmer 2001).<sup>7</sup> So, as markers of the indicative mood, indicative tenses in English and French have a modal import, which is reflected in their prototypical 'temporal uses' where they enable the speaker to ground the situation in the factual world, as past, present or future.

Besides, every tense entails specific modal implications due to human experience of the passing of time. The modal dimension of the experienced time is acknowledged since antiquity and may be formulated as follows (at least for Western cultures): we experience time as an ‘irreversible flow’ with the present time corresponding to a modal cut between what is ‘possible’ or ‘indeterminate’ and what is ‘irrevocable’ (Gosselin 2005: 89, 2009: 138).<sup>8,9</sup> Thus, due to our experience of time, past tenses generally implicate for us that the eventuality is irrevocably factual and future tenses usually involve that the eventuality remains possible and uncertain. These implicatures explain the acceptability judgments of examples (15):

- (15) a. *It rained yesterday, \*BUT MAYBE NOT.*  
b. *It will rain tomorrow, BUT MAYBE NOT.*

In sum, English and French verbal tenses in their ‘temporal uses’ also convey modality, both at the semantic level (as indicative mood markers) and pragmatic level (due to our experience of time).

Reciprocally, the ‘modal’ uses of tenses also involve some kind of temporality insofar as they anchor the eventuality in time, albeit not (always) in the factual world. The epistemic uses of the simple past typically convey non-past reference (cf. *supra* examples (1a), (2a), (3a) and (4a)) that can be contextually interpreted as present or future. And so does the epistemic(ally used) imparfait (*supra* examples (1b), (2b), (3b) and (4b)).

We must conclude from what precedes that temporality and modality do not exclude each other in the so-called ‘temporal’ and ‘modal’ uses of indicatives tenses, but are intricately related in both types of usages. Nevertheless we still use the distinction between ‘temporal’ and ‘modal’ uses, but, in a different sense, as reflecting the intentionality of the speaker, i.e. her communicative purpose when choosing a specific verbal forms (instead of another). If the intentionality is referential and mainly concerned with the temporal anchorage of the situation (or the viewpoint on the situation) in time, we consider the use as ‘temporal’. Thus, when using a past form in examples (5) aforementioned, the speaker only intends to inform the hearer about situations that were the case in the past.

Conversely, if the speaker’s intentionality is not primarily concerned with the temporal grounding of the situation (or the viewpoint on the situation) in time, but rather corresponds to a modal attitude conveyed by the tense employed, we call this type of use ‘modal’. Hence, in examples (1)–(4), the speaker does not wish to communicate the pastness of the situations (or of their viewpoint), but the epistemic status, i.e. the unlikelihood or unreality of the situations. For this reason, we consider these uses as ‘modal’.

The speaker’s referential or modal intentionality can be revealed by means of substitution tests. If one tense can be replaced by another in a given context and if this substitution does entail a different modal interpretation (e.g. a different epistemic status of the situation), then the use can be considered ‘modal’. To illustrate this, we derive (16) from (1) by replacing the past tense in the protasis by a present tense:



- (16) a. *And if you **leave** (/left) me I will (/would) suffer a great deal*  
 b. *si un jour tu **pars** (/partais) sans retour*  
 if one day you **leave-PRS** (/PST.IPFV) without return  
 / *les fleurs perdront (/perdraient) leur parfum*  
 / the flowers will lose (/would lose) their perfume  
 ‘if someday you **leave** (/left) for ever / the flowers will (/would) lose their perfume’

From an interpretative viewpoint, the contrast between the past forms (*left* and *partais*) and the present forms (*leave* and *pars*) is epistemic: with the past forms, the situation (the hearer’s leaving) appears to be very unlikely whereas, with the present tenses, it is interpreted as more probable (cf. also James 1982, Iatridou 2000, Ogihara 2000, Dancygier & Sweetser 2005: chap. 3, Patard & Vermeulen 2010). As a result, the past tenses are motivated by a modal intentionality: they are used to convey information about the epistemic status of the situation.

Conversely, if the substitution gives rise to a different temporal interpretation (e.g. present-time reference instead of a past-time reference), then the use is seen as ‘temporal’, as in (17) derived from (5):

- (17) a. *it **is** (/was) dark all around / there **is** (/was) frost in the ground / when the tiger **breaks** (/broke) free*  
 b. *il est (/était) blond, il est (/était) beau /*  
 he **be-PRS** (/PST.IPFV) blond, he **be-PRS** (/PST.IPFV) beautiful /  
*il sent (/sentait) bon le sable chaud*  
 he **smell-PRS** (/PST.IPFV) good the sand warm  
 ‘he **is** (/was) blond, he **is** (/was) beautiful / he **smells** (/smelt) like warm sand’

The contrast between the past forms (*was*, *broke*, *était* and *sentait*) and the present forms (*is*, *breaks*, *est* and *sent*) results in a different referential interpretation: the past tenses induce a past time reference and the present tenses a present time reference.

Finally we would like to notice that the proposed distinction does not constitute an exclusive opposition between two different kinds of usage. Indeed, some specific uses, like the *IP* expressing a ‘thwarted imminence’ (cf. (18)), possess the characteristics of both usage types: they are temporal and modal (from a communicative standpoint).<sup>10</sup> Let us consider the following examples:

- (18) a. *Une seconde de plus [le taureau] l’ **éventrait**.*  
 One second of more the bull him **gore-PST.IPFV**  
 ‘One more second and the bull **would have gored** (/gored him) him’  
 (Flaubert)  
 b. *Une seconde de plus [le taureau] l’ **éventra**.*  
 One second of more the bull him **gore-PST.PFV**  
 ‘One more second and the bull **gored** him’  
 c. *Une seconde de plus [le taureau] l’ **éventre**.*  
 One second of more the bull him **gore-PRS**  
 ‘One more second and the bull **will gore** him’

The difference between the two first examples lies on the use of the *IP* in (18a) and of the past perfective tense in (18b). This aspectual contrast (between a past imperfective and a past perfective) entails two different epistemic interpretations: with the *IP*, the situation is primarily interpreted as counterfactual in the past, whereas it is interpreted as past and factual with the past perfective.<sup>11</sup> Hence we must conclude that the use of the *IP* in (18a) is ‘modal’ and motivated by an epistemic intentionality.

Now considering the contrast between the use of the *IP* in (18a) and the use of the present tense in (18c), it brings about two different temporal interpretations, namely a past interpretation with the *IP* and a non-past interpretation with the present tense.<sup>12</sup> As a conclusion, this use of the *IP* is also temporal (not only modal) since it serves to anchor the situation in the past as well.

The proposed definition of ‘temporal’ and ‘modal’ uses in terms of intentionality seeks to clarify the distinction between both usage types and make predictions (using the substitution test) as regards the classification of a given use in one or the other category. It also underlines the fact that temporality and modality do not exclude each other in the usage of verbal tenses, but that a given use can be both temporal and modal in different respects.

### 3.2. ‘Epistemic’ versus ‘illocutory’ uses

We now introduce a second distinction within the category of the modal uses, namely between ‘epistemic’ uses and ‘illocutory’ uses. We briefly evoked the first category in the introduction. The epistemic uses are motivated by an ‘epistemic’ intentionality of the speaker: by using one or another tense, the speaker expresses some ‘judgment’ regarding the degree of uncertainty or probability of the situation described (cf. Auwera & Plungian 1998: 81). Thus, when using the *SP* and *IP* (cf. utterances (1)–(4)), the speaker intends to present the situation as improbable.

By contrast, the ‘illocutory’ uses are characterized by a distinct communicative purpose. Instead of an epistemic intentionality, the use of a specific tense is motivated by the expression of an illocutory posture of the speaker, i.e. a more or less important commitment in her speech act and a particular attitude towards the hearer. Typically, the illocutory uses of the *SP* and the *IP* produce politeness, as in (19):

#### *Attenuative use*

- (19) a. *I wanted (/want) to ask you to do me a favour.* (O. Wilde, *Woman’s world*)  
 b. *je voulais (/veux) te dire que je t’attends*  
 I **want-PST**.**IPFV** (/PR)S you tell that I you wait-PRS  
 ‘I **wanted** (/want) to tell you that I’m waiting for you’ (M. Jonasz)

In (18), the speaker uses the *SP* (*wanted*) and the *IP* (*voulais*) instead of the present tense (*want* and *veux*) to mitigate her request (19a) or her assumption (19b), i.e. to attenuate the illocutory force of the speech act. Put differently, the speaker shows a lesser commitment in her speech act (by presenting it indirectly)

and, in doing so, she preserves the hearer's 'face' by softening a potentially 'threatening act' (Brown & Levinson 1987).<sup>13</sup>

As for the distinction between 'temporal' and 'modal' uses, the distinction between epistemic uses and illocutory uses does not delimit two discrete categories of usage, but one single use may exhibit both an epistemic and illocutory intentionality. This is the case in examples (20) and (21):

*Suggestion*

- (20) a. *It's high time you were (/are) all in bed !* (E. Lewis, *Alice's adventures in Wonderland*)  
 b. *si on s'en allait (/va) ?*  
 if one leave-PST/IPFV (/PRS) ?  
 'Shall we go ?' (P. Gide, *Les faux-monnayeurs*)

*Preludic use*

- (21) *Moi j' étais (/suis) le papa,*  
 Me I be-PST/IPFV (/PRS) the daddy,  
*et, toi, tu étais (/es) la maman.*  
 and you you be-PST/IPFV (/PRS) the mommy.  
 'Me, I'm the daddy and, you, you're the mommy' (Warnant 1966)

In (20), *were* and *s'en allait* produce a specific epistemic interpretation (cf. Declerck 2006 and this volume, Patard 2009): these past forms stress the not-yet-factuality of the situation, as opposed to the present forms (*are* and *s'en va*). This epistemic meaning further entails a particular illocutory posture of the speaker. As the non-factuality of the situation is highlighted, the speaker's suggestion sounds more tentative and polite: the speaker leaves to the hearer the choice to see the situation as factual (or not) and to validate it (or not) in her act. Thus, the past tense also mitigates the proposed suggestion. As a conclusion, the *SP* and the *IP* here convey both an epistemic non-factuality and a decreased illocutory force.

As regards the prelude (or pretend game) use of tenses (cf. example (21)), the literature on the topic usually describes two different functions for the prelude tense.<sup>14, 15</sup> These functions may be referred to, following Lodge (1978), as 'reality-switching' and 'self-effacement'. Accordingly the *IP* in the examples aforementioned (*étais* and *étais*) first signals a switch from the real world to the imaginary world of the game, hence producing an epistemic meaning of unreality (cf. Warnant 1966, Fleischman 1989 and 1995, Patard 2010). As a second function, the imparfait allows for the speaker to show an attitude of self-effacement and make less assertive propositions about the game (Patard 2010). This attitude of self-effacement may be seen as a specific illocutory posture whereby the speaker softens propositions that may appear as 'potentially threatening' for the hearer's 'face' (Brown & Levinson 1987). In conclusion, the prelude use of the *IP* must be considered as both 'modal' and 'illocutory'.

The aim of this section was to clarify our definition of 'epistemic use'. Accordingly an epistemic use of a tense is a type of 'modal' use insofar as it is primarily motivated by a modal 'intentionality': the speaker wishes to express a certain subjective attitude (about the content of the utterance or towards the

hearer). In their epistemic use, tenses express some ‘judgment of the speaker’ regarding the degree of uncertainty or probability of the situation described. By contrast, illocutory uses are concerned with the expression of an ‘illocutory’ attitude towards the hearer in the situation of communication.

In the following sections, we focus on the epistemic uses *stricto sensu*. This means that the illocutory uses (cf. (19)) and epistemic-illocutory uses (cf. (20) and (21)) aforementioned will not be treated in the rest of the study. But, before turning to the epistemic uses of the *SP* and *IP*, we first present the notion of dialogism and its possible application to the analysis of verbal tenses. This notion will then enable us (in section 5) to account for the connection between pastness and counterfactuality in the epistemic uses of the *SP* and *IP*.

## 4. Dialogism and verbal tenses

### 4.1. The notion of dialogism

This notion, originally introduced by Bakhtine (cf. Bakhtine 1977, 1984), gave rise to several linguistic theories of enunciation that refer either to ‘dialogism’ or ‘polyphony’ (cf. Ducrot 1984, Nølke *et al.* 2004, Bres *et al.* 2005, Bres & Mellet 2009, Birkelund *et al.* 2009). In the following analysis, we will adopt the dialogic model developed by Bres (Bres 1999, 2001; Bres & Vérine 2002, Bres & Nowakowska 2005), which he uses to account for the pragmatics of some French verbal tenses (Bres 2003, 2005, 2009).

The fundamental idea underlying the notion of dialogism (or ‘polyphony’) is ‘the constituent orientation’ of any utterance towards other utterances (Bres & Nowakowska 2005: 139), that is no utterance is produced from scratch, but always presupposes previous utterances with which it dialogues. Hence Bres considers dialogism as an ‘inner dialogue’ within an utterance, as opposed to the external dialogue of turn-takings in conversation. More precisely, dialogism refers for him to:

*la capacité de l'énoncé à faire entendre, outre la voix de l'énonciateur, une (ou plusieurs) autre(s) voix qui le feuilletent énonciativement*

‘the capacity of the utterance to imply, besides the voice of the enunciator-speaker, one or several other voices that also contribute to the utterance’ (Bres 2001: 83)

The notion of dialogism further emphasizes the different roles of speaker in the utterance act. For Bres (2003: 113), the speaker takes on both the functions of ‘locutor’ and ‘enunciator’:

- the ‘locutor’ is responsible for the locutory dimension of an utterance act, i.e. for its material generation;
- the ‘enunciator’ is responsible for the enunciative interpretation of the utterance, i.e. he determines, as the subjective source of the utterance, the interpretation of deictic and modal expressions.

To describe dialogic utterances, Bres calls for Bally's distinction between *modus* and *dictum*. For Bally (1965: 36–38), each utterance can be analyzed in two elements:

- the *dictum*, which is a representation corresponding to the propositional content of an utterance;

- the *modus*,<sup>16</sup> which corresponds to the ‘reaction’ or attitude of the ‘modal subject’ (or ‘enunciator’) towards the *dictum*.

Then, for Bres, an utterance is ‘monologic’ when the *modus* directly applies to a *dictum*. This definition can be captured by equation (22) and is exemplified in (23):

$$(22) \quad \text{monologic utterance} = \{ \text{modus} + [\text{dictum}] \}$$

- (23) *Les trois otages des Khmers rouges ont été assassinés.*  
The three hostages of the Khmer rouge have been murdered.  
‘The three western hostages of the Khmer rouge have been murdered’  
(Bres 2001: 85)

Here, the *dictum* [the three western hostages be murdered] is associated with an assertive *modus*. (23) is therefore monologic.

On the contrary, an utterance is ‘dialogic’ when the *modus* does not directly apply to a *dictum*, but to an item that already has the status of an utterance, i.e. a *dictum* that is already assigned a *modus*. In other words, in a dialogic utterance, what is in the scope of the *modus*, is not a *dictum* alone, but a *dictum* already ‘modalized’ by another *modus*. Dialogic utterances can be characterized by equation (24) and (25) offers an illustration:

$$(24) \quad \text{dialogic utterance} = \{ \text{modus}_2 + \{ \text{modus}_1 + [\text{dictum}] \} \}$$

- (25) *Les trois otages des Khmers rouges ont **bien** été assassinés.*  
The three hostages of the Khmer rouge have **indeed** been murdered.  
‘The three hostages of the Khmer rouge have **indeed** been murdered’  
(Bres 2001: 85)

Here, the utterance is dialogic because the adverb *bien* (‘indeed’) presupposes a previous utterance, corresponding to example (23), which it confirms. In other words, *bien* conveys an epistemic modality (*modus*<sub>2</sub>) - some certainty about the situation – that is not assigned to a *dictum*, but to a presupposed utterance, i.e. a *modus*<sub>1</sub> – an assertive modality – already attributed to a *dictum*.

Finally Bres suggests analyzing dialogism as an enunciative splitting (2005: 23). Accordingly he discriminates two enunciative sources:

- the ‘primary enunciator’ or ‘enunciator-speaker’ called E<sub>1</sub> who is responsible for the utterance; the generated utterance (E) is characterized as the ‘embedding utterance’;

- one or more ‘secondary enunciators’ called e<sub>1</sub> whose enunciations (e) can also contribute to generate E; these enunciations are referred to as the ‘embedded utterances’.

Hence, in example (24), the adverb *bien* (‘indeed’), presupposes besides the utterance E uttered by E<sub>1</sub>, another utterance e uttered by a secondary enunciator e<sub>1</sub>, which corresponds to (23).

This characterization of dialogic utterances is summarized in Figure 1.

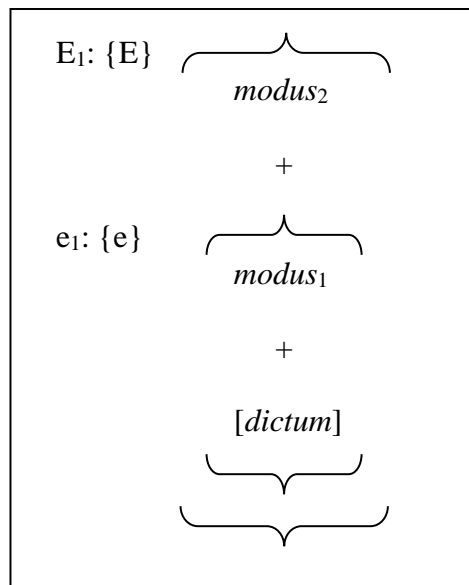


Figure 1. Enunciative structure of a dialogic utterance

Finally, we wish to emphasize that the embedded utterance (e) of a dialogic utterance is not necessarily an utterance that has been actually uttered by a *locutor*. Utterance e is only a presupposed utterance that is distinct from the embedding utterance, though contributing to it. For instance, the embedded utterance (e) can refer to a belief, a thought or an opinion ascribed to the hearer or to a third person (e.g. the *doxa*). Thus, in the dialogic theory elaborated by Bres, utterance acts are not restricted to acts possessing a locutory dimension, but include any enunciative act corresponding to the application of a *modus* to a *dictum*.

#### 4.2. The dialogic uses of tenses

As noticed by some authors (*inter alia* Donaire 1998, Haillet 2000, Mellet 2000, Vuillaume 2001, Bres 2009, Patard 2007, Patard & Vermeulen 2010), some tenses may have a dialogic interpretation. In these cases, they indicate the presence of a secondary enunciator  $e_1$  responsible for an embedded utterance e. This is typically the case for the *SP* and the *IP* in sequence of tenses:

(26) a. *Somebody told me you **had** a boyfriend who **looked like** a girlfriend.* (The Killers)

b. *Tu m' as dit qu' t' en **avais** assez*  
 You me has told that you of it **have-PST.IPFV** enough  
 'You told me that you'd **got** enough' (Les cowboys fringuants)

Here the *SP* (*had, looked like*) and the *IP* (*avais*) can be considered dialogic because they signal, thanks to their temporal meaning [past], that a secondary utterance act has taken place in the past. In a context of indirect speech, this secondary utterance act corresponds to the speech act made linguistically explicit by the syntactic embedding and the reporting verbs *told* and *as dit*. Put differently, the past reference point denoted by the *SP* and the *IP* (cf. *supra* 1.2), which usually functions as a topic time and aspectual vantage point, here serves to refer to a secondary enunciator  $e_1$ . Hence, by locating this secondary enunciator  $e_1$  in the past, the *SP* and the *IP* mark the existence of two distinct enunciative sources. This enunciative splitting may be analyzed as follows:

- a primary enunciator (or 'locutor-enunciator')  $E_1$  is responsible for the embedding utterances E (26a) and (26b);
- besides this primary enunciator, a secondary enunciator  $e_1$  is responsible for an embedded utterance  $e$  that can be reconstructed as: {she has a boyfriend who looks like a girlfriend} for (26a) and {j'en ai assez} ('I've got enough') for (26b); this secondary enunciator  $e_1$  is referred to in (26a) by *somebody* and in (26b) by *tu*.

We may further notice that, what is situated in the past by the dialogic *SP* or *IP*, is not the described situation itself, but its utterance by a secondary enunciator  $e_1$ . As a consequence, the situation is not necessarily the case in the past, but can also hold in the present or in the future, as show examples (27):<sup>17</sup>

(27) a. *John told me yesterday that he **was coming** (TODAY / TOMORROW).*

b. *Jean m'a dit hier qu'il **venait** (AUJOURD'HUI / DEMAIN).*

Finally, we wish to underline that not every tense can exhibit dialogical uses. Indeed, dialogic interpretations of tenses, i.e. the fact that the reference point denoted by a tense refers to a secondary enunciator  $e_1$ , is determined by temporal and aspectual constraints.<sup>18</sup> When the dialogic interpretation presupposes a past utterance act, as is the case with the *SP* and the *IP*, the tenses should be able to recreate in the past the same aspectual conditions that hold for a present time utterance. Now, it has been observed that the combination of a present tense with a perfective aspect is functionally infelicitous (Comrie 1976, Bybee *et al.* 1994: 83, Gosselin 1996: 86, Giorgi and Pianesi 1997, Smith 2007). Consequently, when the utterance act is past, the same incompatibility holds. This predicts that the situation *cannot be viewed perfectly* from the past reference point corresponding to the secondary utterance time. It ensues that the past tenses producing a perfective interpretation cannot have a dialogic reading. Let us consider examples (27') derived from utterances (27):

- (27') a. *John told me yesterday that he **came** (the day before).*  
 b. *Jean dit qu' il **vint** (le jour précédent).<sup>19</sup>*  
 John said that he **come-PST.PFV** (the day preceding)  
 'John said that he **came** (the preceding day)'

In (27'a), the *SP* conveys a perfective viewpoint with *come* because eventive verbs generally triggers a perfective reading with the *SP* (Quirk *et al.* 1985, Smith 1991, Leech 2004). Since a perfective viewpoint is not compatible with an utterance act (be it present or past), the situation is interpreted as being the case at a preceding time (e.g. *the day before*). Consequently the past reference point denoted by the *SP* does not equate anymore the position of the secondary enunciator  $e_1$ , but is anterior to it. Thus the *SP* cannot be dialogically interpreted. In order to get the dialogic reading, the *SP* must be combined with the progressive form (cf. (27a)). Indeed, by presenting the situation as ongoing (from the reference point), the progressive form imposes an imperfective viewpoint on the situation compatible with the dialogic interpretation.

Similarly, the French past perfective in (27'b) expresses a perfective viewpoint that cannot be simultaneous with the past utterance act. It follows that the past reference point denoted by the perfective past is seen as prior to the position of the secondary enunciator  $e_1$ . As a result, the interpretation is monologic: the situation is said to have occurred before the utterance act.

In sum, a past tense may have a dialogic interpretation if *the past reference point refers to a secondary enunciator  $e_1$* . The *SP* and the *IP* can have dialogic uses, as opposed to the French past perfective, because they allow for an imperfective viewpoint on the situation that may trigger (under specific conditions) a dialogic interpretation.

## 5. The conditional and the optative uses of the *SP* and the *IP*

We focus in this section on two epistemic uses of the *SP* and the *IP*, namely the conditional and optative uses. We first point out some facts about the conditional and optative uses in English and French that any account should seek to explain. Then we give a brief description of the conditional and optative constructions in English and French. Finally, thanks to this description, we present a dialogic analysis that suggests an enunciative connection between past reference and counterfactuality in these particular contexts.

### 5.1. Preliminary observations

a. The first fact to be explained is the exact nature of the epistemic modality conveyed by the *SP* and the *IP* in their conditional and optative uses. As previously noticed, the *SP* and the *IP* in their conditional use do not necessarily entail that the situation is contrary to facts, they may also present it as possible but improbable. Examples (29) and (30) illustrate both cases:



- (29) a. *if I **had** longer arms I would push the clouds away* (Task force)  
 b. *moi si j' **étais** un homme, je serais capitaine*  
 me if I **be-PST.IPFV** a man, I would be captain.  
 'me if I **was** a man, I would be a captain' (D. Tell)
- (30) a. *And if you **left** me I would suffer a great deal.* (R. Jaffe, *After the reunion*)  
 b. *si un jour tu **partais** sans retour /*  
 if one day you **leave-PST.IPFV** without return /  
*les fleurs perdraient leur parfum*  
 the flowers would lose their perfume  
 'if someday you **left** for ever / the flowers would lose their perfume' (É. Piaf)

Some authors (James 1982, Martin 1991, Gosselin 1999, Iatridou 2000) have noticed that the contrary-to-fact reading is not triggered by the past forms, but by other contextual elements such as the speaker's knowledge about the situation's reality and the present or future anchorage of the situation (which is partly determined by the actionality of the verb, cf. Martin 1991, Gosselin 1999).

The same observations can be made for the optative usage of the *SP* and the *IP*, even though the interpretation is most frequently contrary to facts (due to the same aforementioned parameters):

- (31) a. *If only I **could** win the lottery !*  
 b. *Si seulement je **gagnais** au loto !*  
 If only I **win-PST.IPFV** at the lottery !  
 'If only I **won** the lottery !'

One can conclude that the *SP* and the *IP* do not involve a complete absence of reality in their conditional and optative uses, but rather convey "a greater degree of distance with reality" (James 1982: 388).

b. The second observation concerns the temporal grounding of the situation. In French, the *IP* can only have a non-past interpretation (Iatridou 2000). Thus, depending on the context (Martin 1991, Gosselin 1999), the situation belongs to the present (cf. (29b)) or to the future (cf. (30b) and (31b)). The same remark can be made for English: the denoted situation can be either present (cf. (29a) and (31a)) or future (cf. (30a)).

c. A third set of phenomena has been referred to by Iatridou (2000) as 'fake aspect' and concerns the fact that, in some languages like French, the imperfective tense in conditionals and optatives is not necessarily interpreted imperfectively, but can also be associated with perfective readings. For instance, in examples (30b) and (31b), the supposed situations, *partir* ('leave') and *gagner* ('win'), are considered as completed. By contrast, as noticed by Iatridou (2000: 257), the English progressive form is never fake in the same contexts, but always presents the situation as ongoing:

- (32) a. *If I **was marrying** a beautiful girl like Nancy, I would be nervous* (C. Duff Scott, *Nancy's unconditional love*)  
 b. *I wish you **were telling** the truth.* (H. Manton Lodge, *Plain Jayne*)

This contrast between the French imperfective tense and the English progressive form should also be explained.

d. The last observation concerns the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations of the *SP* and *IP* with other tense forms. First, we may observe that the *SP* and the *IP* cannot be replaced by the other tenses that may also refer to a past situation in English and in French, namely the English present perfect and the French passé simple (past perfective) and passé composé (present perfect). These incompatibilities are exemplified in (30') and (31') derived from (30) and (31):

- (30') a. *and if you \*have left me I would suffer a great deal*  
 b. *si un jour tu \*partis / \*es parti sans retour*  
 if one day you **leave-PST.PFV** / **leave-PRS.PRF** without return  
 / les fleurs perdraient leur parfum  
 / the flowers would lose their perfume  
 'if someday you **had left/have left** for ever / the flowers would lose their perfume'
- (31') a. *If only I \*have won the lottery !*  
 b. *Si seulement je \*gagnai / \*ai gagné au loto !*  
 If only I **win-PST.PFV** / **win-PRS.PRF** at the lottery  
 'If only I **had won/have won** the lottery !'

Note that the French passé simple becomes possible in counterfactual conditionals if the conditional tense in the apodosis is replaced by a second passé simple:

- (33) *Si elle acquiesça à sa demande [de mariage],*  
 if she **acquiesce-PST.PFV** to his marriage proposal  
*ils furent (à coup sûr) les plus heureux des humains.*  
 they **be-PST.PFV** (for sure) the happiest of human beings  
 'If she **accepted** his marriage proposal, they **were** for sure the happiest human beings' (Voltaire, *Candide* < Leeman 2001: 223)

One may conclude that the passé simple is not incompatible with conditionals expressing a hypothesis, but with the conditional tense in the apodosis.

The same remarks can be made for the English present perfect and the French passé composé. These tenses can occur in the protasis provided that a present (simple or perfect) form substitutes for the *would* form / conditional tense in the apodosis:

- (34) a. *If you have waited until now to start gift shopping, you probably have missed out on the best deals. (Ebony December 1998)*  
 b. *Si tu as perdu une méchante langue,*  
 If you **have-PRS lose.PTCP** a nasty tongue  
*tu as beaucoup gagné.*  
 you **have-PRS** a lot **win-PTCP**  
 'If you've lost a nasty tongue, you've won a lot'  
 (F. Petrarca De Grenaille, *Le sage résolu contre la fortune et contre la mort*)

We may deduce from this that the English present perfect and the French passé composé are not incompatible either with counterfactual conditionals, but with a *would* form / conditional tense in the apodosis.

We may finally remarks that the non-past counterfactual reading of the *SP* and the *IP* requires the use of the English *would* form and the French conditional tense in the apodosis. If, instead of the latter, another verb form occurs, the non-past interpretation is not possible any more. For instance, if a second *SP* or *IP* stands in the place of the *would* form / conditional tense in the apodosis, the situation necessarily belongs to the past:

- (35) a. *If he was spying on me, he didn't see anything.* (E. Payno, *The Bandits from Rio Frio*)  
 b. *S' il était l' ami de d'Artagnan,*  
 If he **be-PST.IPFV** the friend of d'Artagnan  
*il était l' ennemi du cardinal*  
 he **be-PST.IPFV** the enemy of the cardinal  
 'If he **was** d'Artagnan's friend, he **was** the enemy of the cardinal' (Dumas, *Les trois mousquetaires*)

This seems to show that the non-past counterfactual interpretation of conditionals, and so the epistemic reading of the *SP* and the *IP*, is to be connected with the use of the *would* form / conditional tense in the apodosis.

In the next section, we seek to provide an explanation for those facts while presenting our analysis of the conditional and optative uses of the *SP* and the *IP*.

## 5.2. A dialogic account

To account for the conditional and optative uses of the *SP* and the *IP*, we first need to analyze the semantic contribution of the different elements making up the conditional and optative constructions. By means of this description, we then try to show that the *SP* and the *IP* bring about a dialogic interpretation in these uses and that the epistemic effect observed (of lesser probability) is partly derived from this dialogic interpretation.

### 5.2.1. A brief description of the conditional and optative constructions

In the conditional construction, three elements seem to contribute more or less directly to the counterfactual interpretation of the *SP* and the *IP*. The first element to consider is the conjunctions *if* and *si*. These conjunctions give access to a possible world either distinct or unrelated to the real world (Declerck & Reed 2001), or, in terms of mental spaces, these conjunctions are space-builders which set up a hypothetical mental space distinct from the speaker's base space (Fauconnier 1994, Dancygier & Sweetser 2005). So *if* and *si* enable the speaker to consider the situation described in the protasis without committing herself to its reality (cf. Vairel 1982, Caudal & Roussarie 2005, Monte 2009).

The second element is the conditional construction itself. There is an extensive literature on the subject, but, for the purpose of our analysis, we only retain the following fact: what is asserted by a conditional sentence is the  $p \rightarrow q$  relationship. Following Vairel (1982), Cornulier (1985) and Dancygier & Sweetser (2005), among others, we assume that this link between  $p$  and  $q$  is

fundamentally causal or implicational in nature: the situation denoted by p logically entails the situation denoted by q.<sup>20</sup> This link connecting the antecedent p to the consequent q will prove to be crucial in accounting for the epistemic interpretation of the *SP* and the *IP* in counterfactual conditionals (cf. section 4.2.2).

The last element is the verb form in the apodosis, namely the *would* form in English and the conditional tense in French. The conditional tense has been extensively studied in French and most accounts today agree on the dialogic or polyphonic nature of this tense (Abouda 1997, Donaire 1998, Vuillaume 2001, Haillet 2002, Bres 2009, Patard & Vermeulen 2010). According to this view, the conditional tense marks that the denoted situation is not directly asserted by the speaker, but is considered from the viewpoint of a (past) secondary enunciator  $e_1$ . It follows that the speaker does not commit herself to the reality of the situation but presupposes a secondary enunciator  $e_1$  who is actually responsible for the utterance of  $e$ . The dialogic or polyphonic meaning of the conditional tense is best illustrated in its evidential use:

- (36) *Hakimullah Mehsud*                      *serait*                      *mort*  
 Hakimullah Mehsud                      **be-COND**                      dead  
*selon*                      *un*                      *responsable*                      *américain*.  
 according to a leader                      american  
 ‘Hakimullah Mehsud is dead according to an American political leader’ (AFP)

Here the conditional tense *serait* (‘would be’) indicates that the utterance  $e$  {Hakimullah Mehsud be dead} is not that of the speaker (the *AFP*), but that of another enunciator  $e_1$  (*un responsable américain*, ‘an American political leader’).<sup>21</sup>

The same analysis may be suggested for the English *would* form in some of its uses. First, morphologically speaking, the *would* form exhibits the features of a future-in-the-past, like the French conditional tense. Then, some authors have argued that the dialogic nature of the French conditional is directly related to its basic meaning of future-in-the-past (Bres 2009, Vermeulen & Patard 2010), so this could be the same for the English *would* form. Moreover, the English *would* form is clearly dialogic in some uses, such as in sequence of tenses:

- (37) *The horse told the boy that he would help him get out of there.* (V. Barnouw, *Wisconsin Chippewa Myths and tales*)

In this example, *would* signals that the utterance {I will help you get out of there} has been uttered by a past secondary enunciator  $e_1$  (*the horse*). Accordingly, we may hypothesize that the English *would* form has acquired a dialogic meaning in the uses it has in common with the French conditional tense. In such uses, it thus presupposes a past secondary enunciator  $e_1$  responsible for the utterance of the situation.

As regards the optative use, it displays a common feature with the conditional use: the reality of the situation is suspended, due to different contextual elements. In the French optatives (cf. (2b) and (31b)) and in the English *if*-optatives (cf. (31a)), suspended reality is conveyed by conjunctions *si* and *if* (cf. *supra* about the meaning of *si* and *if*). In the English *wish*-optatives

(cf. (2a), and (32b), suspended reality is lexically marked by the verb *wish*.

We will now see in the last section how these different elements trigger a dialogic interpretation of the *SP* and the *IP*.

#### 4.2.2. The dialogic interpretation of the *SP* and *IP*

We defend the hypothesis that the *SP* and the *IP* are interpreted dialogically in their conditional and optative uses, i.e. the past reference point they denote also serves to refer to a secondary enunciator  $e_1$ . The dialogical interpretation arises due to the interplay of the contextual elements described in the previous section.

a. In the conditional use, three elements interact with the aspectual and temporal meaning of the *SP* and the *IP*, but the triggering parameter is the *would* form / conditional tense in the apodosis. We recall examples (29) for the sake of the analysis:

- (29) a. *if I had longer arms I would push the clouds away* (Task force)  
b. *moi si j' étais un homme, je serais capitaine*  
me if I **be-PST.IPFV** a man, I would be captain.  
'me if I **was** a man, I would be a captain' (D. Tell)

As previously seen, we assume that the *would* form and the conditional tense are dialogic: they presuppose a past enunciator  $e_1$ . Combined with the conditional construction, these forms call for a dialogic tense in the protasis. Indeed, the conditional construction asserts an implicational  $p \rightarrow q$  relationship, whereby the situation  $q$  is presented as the consequent of the situation  $p$  (cf. section 5.2.1). Therefore, if a past enunciator  $e_1$  is responsible for the utterance of  $q$ , the supposition of  $p$  also necessarily falls under the responsibility of  $e_1$ : in order to make an assertion about  $p \rightarrow q$ , the enunciator of  $p$  and  $q$  must be the same. In sum, the  $p \rightarrow q$  relationship implies that, if  $q$  is dialogic, then  $p$  is also dialogic.

As a consequence, the *would* form and the conditional tense in the apodosis require a dialogic tense able to refer to a past enunciator  $e_1$ , namely a *SP* and *IP*. In this interaction, the conjunctions *if* and *si* also favor (but without imposing it) a dialogic interpretation of the used tenses insofar as they imply that the speaker does not commit herself to the situation's reality, and so that the reality of the situation is possibly assumed by an enunciator  $e_1$ .

The dialogism of the *SP* and the *IP* in the protasis stems from the following enunciative splitting:

- the locutor-enunciator  $E_1$  (i.e. the speaker) is responsible for the conditional utterances  $E$  corresponding to (29a) and (29b);
- a past secondary enunciator  $e_1$  is responsible for the utterances  $e$  {I have longer arms} and {Je suis un homme} ('I'm a man').

At this point, we can give an explanation of the first fact noted in section 5.1, i.e. the sense of lesser probability conveyed by the *SP* and the *IP* in the counterfactual conditionals: lesser probability originates in the dialogic interpretation of these tenses. In fact, the speaker, by presupposing a previous utterance of  $p$ , is in a way refusing to vouch for the reality of the situation described in the protasis. The speaker thus states that the one who is actually vouching for the situation's reality is a past enunciator. In doing so, he does not assume the reality of the situation and may appear to be questioning it, so that

the situation is interpreted as unlikely. In a nutshell, by leaving the utterance of *p* to a past enunciator  $e_1$ , the speaker keeps her distance from the reality of the situation, thus involving an epistemic judgment about the lesser probability of the situation.

Several facts support the dialogic analysis of the *SP* and the *IP* in their conditional use. First the dialogic interpretation is confirmed by a linguistic test suggested by Gosselin (1999) to account for the conditional use of the *IP* (Lewis (1973) suggests a similar paraphrase for English).<sup>22</sup> This test consists in using the phrase *c'est vrai que* (or *it is true that* in English) in the protasis. We then obtain examples (29')

- (29') a. *if IT WAS TRUE that I have longer arms I would push the clouds away*  
 b. *si C' ETAIT VRAI que je suis un homme,*  
     if IT **BE-PST.IPFV** TRUE THAT I **be-PRS** a man,  
     *je serais capitaine.*  
     I **be-COND** captain.  
     'if IT WAS TRUE THAT I **am** a man, I would be a captain'

We observe that the *SP* and the *IP* do not apply directly to the situation described by the verb, which is in the present (*have, suis*), but on *it is true that* and *c'est vrai que*. In other words, what the *SP* and the *IP* locate in the past, is the application of a *modus* to the *dictum* (the reality of the situation is asserted), i.e. the utterance of *p* (cf. *supra* 4.1). Hence the *SP* and the *IP* signal that the utterances {I have longer arms} and {Je suis un homme} are those of a past secondary enunciator  $e_1$  distinct from the actual speaker. This dialogical interpretation thus explains the second fact mentioned in section 5.1, namely the non-past reading of the *SP* and the *IP* in the conditional use: what is past, is not the situation itself, but its utterance by an enunciator  $e_1$ .

By contrast, the English present perfect, the French passé simple and passé composé prove to be monologic in the same contexts. Let us apply the test to examples (33) and (34):

- (33') *S' IL EST VRAI QU' elle acquiesça à sa demande ,*  
     If IT **BE-PRS** TRUE THAT she **acquiesce-PST.PFV** to his proposal  
     *ils furent (à coup sûr) les plus heureux des humains.*  
     they **be-PST.PFV** (for sure) the happiest of the human beings  
     'If IT **IS** TRUE THAT she **accepted** his marriage proposal, they **were** for sure  
     the happiest human beings'
- (34') a. *If it IS TRUE THAT you have waited until now to start gift shopping, you probably have missed out on the best deals.*  
 b. *S' IL EST VRAI QUE tu as perdu une méchante langue,*  
     If IT **IS** TRUE THAT you **have-PRS lose.PTCP** a nasty tongue  
     *tu as beaucoup gagné.*  
     you **have-PRS** a lot **win-PTCP**  
     'If IT **IS** TRUE THAT you've **lost** a nasty tongue, you've **won** a lot'

Indeed, the passé simple, the passé composé and the present perfect do not apply to the *modus* expressed by *it is true that* and *il est vrai que*, but to the situation (*acquiesça, have waited* and *as perdu*), i.e. to the *dictum*. Hence, what they locate in the past is the situation itself, not its utterance by a secondary enunciator  $e_1$ .

This confirms that the *passé simple*, the *passé composé* and the present perfect cannot be dialogic (cf. *supra* 4.2), which explains why they are incompatible with a *would* form or a conditional tense in the apodosis (cf. *supra* 5.1).

The role of the *would* form and the conditional tense in the dialogic interpretation is corroborated by another fact. As already noticed in 5.1, if one replaces these forms by another tense in the apodosis, e.g. a second *SP* or *IP*, then the dialogic interpretation of the protasis also vanishes, as shown by examples (35') derived from (35):

- (35') a. *If IT IS TRUE THAT he was spying on me, he didn't see anything.*  
 b. *S' il EST VRAI QU' il était l' ami de d'Artagnan,*  
 if it **BE-PRS** TRUE THAT he **be-PST.IPFV** the friend of d'Artagnan,  
*il était l' ennemi du cardinal.*  
 he **be-PST.IPFV** the enemy of the cardinal  
 'If IT IS TRUE THAT he was d'Artagnan's friend, he was the enemy of the cardinal'

The *SP* and the *IP* do not apply any more to the *modus* (*it is true that* or *c'est vrai que*), but to the situation that is therefore located in the past. One may conclude that, without a *would* form or a conditional tense in the apodosis, the *SP* and the *IP* cannot be interpreted dialogically. That is why the non-past reading of the *SP* and the *IP* requires the use of a *would* form / conditional tense in the apodosis (cf. section 5.1).

b. We also hypothesize that the *SP* and the *IP* are dialogic in their optative use. The dialogic interpretation stems from different elements. First, the reality of the situation is suspended by the linguistic context, by means of the conjunctions *if* or *si* in *if*-optatives, or by the lexical item *wish* in *wish*-optatives (cf. *supra* 5.2). Moreover, the sentences of the form [*if only* p (!)] and [*si (seulement)* p (!)] appear in French and English as a conventional means to express wishes, so that the wished situation p is always interpreted as unreal, or at least as very unlikely.<sup>23</sup> In *wish*-optatives, this job is of course done by the verb *wish*. Consequently, we suggest that the dialogic interpretation is triggered by the fact that the situation's reality is questioned in the optative context. Thus this type of context requires a tense able to express "a greater degree of distance with reality" (James 1982), i.e. a dialogic *SP* or *IP*.

The dialogic interpretation of the *SP* and the *IP* is confirmed by Gosselin's test. Let us consider examples (2'):

- (2') a. *I wish IT WAS TRUE THAT I'm (/was) a punk rocker with flowers in my head*  
<sub>24</sub>  
 b. *Ah! si C' ETAIT VRAI QUE je suis riche !*  
 Ah! if IT **BE-PST.IPFV** TRUE THAT I **be-PRS** rich !  
 'Ah! if only IT WAS TRUE THAT I'm rich !'

As for the conditional use, the *SP* and the *IP* do not directly apply to the situation (*I be a punk rocker* and *je être riche*) but to its moralization by a *modus*: *it was true that* and *c'était vrai que*. Hence the *SP* and the *IP* indicate that the utterances {I'm a punk rocker} and {Je suis riche} are those of a past secondary enunciator *e*<sub>1</sub> distinct from the actual speaker. Furthermore, as the speaker refuses to vouch

for the situation's reality, the latter is seen as improbable.

The last fact that remains to be explained is the 'fake aspect' (Iatridou 2000) to be observed in both the conditional and optative uses of the *IP*. The *IP* seems to have a fake aspect here, i.e. it does not necessarily entail an imperfective interpretation, because the aspectual vantage point serves to refer to a secondary enunciator. As a consequence, its function is not to give a certain viewpoint on the situation anymore, but to say something about the utterance of the situation. In other words, what is asserted, is not the situation's reality (in that case an aspectual viewpoint is required), but its utterance by a past enunciator. Accordingly, since it takes on the function of an enunciator  $e_1$ , the past reference point no longer plays the role of an aspectual vantage point. Nevertheless, as we saw previously (*supra* 4.2), the imperfective morphology is not "fake" insofar as it is required by the dialogical interpretation.

For English, the picture is a bit different: the imperfective morphology (i.e. the progressive form) is always 'real' (*supra* 5.1). The reason is that the *SP* does not need to be combined with a progressive form to be interpreted dialogically (*supra* 4.2). It follows that the interpretation of a past enunciator  $e_1$  relies on the sole *SP*, and that a progressive form can then possibly provide an actual imperfective viewpoint on the situation (cf. (32)).

## 5. Conclusion

The question asked in introduction was: what is the link between pastness and epistemic distance in the epistemic uses of the *SP* and the *IP*? Instead of positing a metaphorical link as has been argued by some authors (cf. Imbs 1960, James 1982, Vairel 1982, Fleischman 1989), we suggest an enunciative connection by means of the notion of dialogism. Hence we have tried to demonstrate that the epistemic meaning attached to the *SP* and the *IP* in counterfactual conditionals and optatives originates in the dialogic reading of their aspecto-temporal basic meaning. Indeed, when interpreted dialogically, the *SP* and the *IP* can refer to a past secondary enunciator responsible for the utterance of the situation. In doing so, they enable the speaker to keep a distance from the situation's reality and therefore to imply a sense of lesser probability.

As a final conclusion, the *SP* and the *IP* are neither temporal nor modal, but they can combine, in interaction with different contextual parameters, temporality and modality. Such is the case in their epistemic uses where temporality conveys epistemicity.

## Notes

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P6/44).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *inter alia* James 1982, Comrie 1985, Fleischman 1989, Thieroff 1999, Van linden & Verstraete 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Depending on the context, this epistemic distance can be interpreted temporally and give rise to a past reading, or be interpreted modally and bring about counterfactuality.

<sup>3</sup> According to us, past tenses also express lesser probability in ‘counterfactual’ conditionals, but due to the interaction with contextual elements (notably world knowledge and actionality, cf. Martin 1991, Gosselin 1999 and Iatridou 2000) the situation is finally interpreted as contrary to facts (cf. section 4.2).

<sup>4</sup> For instance, it is generally admitted that conditional past requires at least one more reference point (cf. Declerck 1986, Gosselin 1996).

<sup>5</sup> The term is used by Smith (1991).

<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the *IP* is not incompatible with a perfective interpretation (cf. its narrative use), but, in that case, it is the context that is responsible for the perfective viewpoint (cf. Vettters & De Mulder 2003, and Bres 2005).

<sup>7</sup> See also Gosselin 2009 (section 8.8) for a discussion of the unreal value of the subjunctive forms.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Plato (Protagoras, 324b), Aristotle (Nichomachean Ethics VII).

<sup>9</sup> A similar epistemic conception of time is the ‘branching-futures’ model discussed by Tedeschi (1981) that treats time as having a tree-like structure. In this view, the past (with respect to any point in time) must be regarded as one, while the future is represented as having an infinite set of possible ramifications.

<sup>10</sup> It is known in the French-speaking literature as the ‘emploi contrefactuel’ or ‘emploi d’imminence contrecarrée’ (cf. Berthonneau & Kleiber 2003, Bres 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the factual reading is not excluded either, though it seems less probable. In the latter case, we would have an instance of ‘imparfait narratif’ (cf. Berthonneau & Kleiber 2003, Bres 2006).

<sup>12</sup> From a modal point of view, the present in the utterance indicates that the eventuality is possible in the near future.

<sup>13</sup> See Berthonneau & Kleiber (1994) and Patard & Richard (2011) for a more detailed analysis of the attenuative uses of the *IP*. To our knowledge, there is no specific study on the attenuative uses of *SP* in English, though it is mentioned in more general works (cf. Leech 1971, Quirk *et al.* 1985, Fleischman 1989).

<sup>14</sup> The label ‘preludic’ is suggested by Warnant (1966) inasmuch as this use typically occurs during the negotiation of the content of the game that prefaces the game itself.

<sup>15</sup> See Warnant (1966), Lodge (1978), Musatti & Orsolini (1993), Kauppinen (1996), Patard (2010) for specific studies on the preludic use of tenses in several languages. According to these, the preludic tense(s) may be an imperfective past, a simple past and/or a conditional tense, depending on the language. In French, both the imparfait and the conditional tense may occur in a preludic context (cf. Patard 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Bally’s *modus* can be compared to Palmer’s *propositional modality* (2001).

<sup>17</sup> Note that the progressive forms is obligatory here to get a dialogic interpretation of the *SP*. Without the progressive form, the *SP* entails a relative reading, i.e. locates the situation in the past of the secondary utterance act denoted by the reporting verbs (e.g. *John told me that he came (the day before)*).

This fact will be explained at the end of the section.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Patard (2007) and Bres (2009) for a detailed analysis of the origin of the dialogic interpretation of tenses.

<sup>19</sup> We modified a bit utterance (27) to make possible the use of the passé simple by replacing the passé composé in the matrix clause (*a dit*) by another passé simple (*dit*). The sentence obtained sounds much more formal than with the passé composé, but is still perfectly correct.

<sup>20</sup> In addition to connecting two states of affairs, conditional sentences may also link a state of affairs with an utterance (i.e., in ‘Austinian’ conditionals, cf. Corminboeuf 2010) or two utterances (cf. Vairel 1982, Monte 2009).

<sup>21</sup> AFP stands for Agence France Presse.

<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, Gosselin does not analyze the phenomenon triggered by the test in terms of dialogism.

<sup>23</sup> It is reasonable to think that *if*-optatives derive from hypothetical conditionals in which the apodosis (probably resembling: *it would be great/ it would be so much better* or *ce serait tellement bien/mieux*) has been elided.

<sup>24</sup> With the expression ‘it was true that’, both the simple past and the simple present are possible in the subclause. The former is more ‘standard’ in this context, but the latter may also occur, as illustrated this attested example:

Ex. I wish IT WAS TRUE THAT I **do look** like her. ([www.ilovehateamerica.com](http://www.ilovehateamerica.com))

Here, we draw attention to the use of the simple present in the second subclause (‘I wish it was true that I’m’), because this use reveals the enunciative structure of the utterance.

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