

ACTIONALITY, ASPECT, TENSE, AND COUNTERFACTUALITY IN KUBAN KABARDIAN

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This paper presents fieldwork data on the interaction of actionality, aspect, and tense in counterfactual conditional clauses in the Kuban dialect of Kabardian, a polysynthetic Northwest Caucasian language. Kabardian shows non-trivial similarities to Romance languages in its use of the Imperfective Past suffix as a marker of counterfactuality – alone or as part of the complex Pluperfect marker where the Imperfect attaches to the Preterite (perfective past). I show that the choice between several types of marking in counterfactual protases (the plain Imperfect, the Pluperfect and the simple Preterite) primarily depends on actional class and viewpoint aspect: perfective counterfactuals employ either the Pluperfect or the Preterite, while imperfective counterfactuals require the Imperfect, which is in line with the more general distribution of these tense-aspect forms. Theoretical implications of tense-aspect marking in Kuban Kabardian counterfactual conditionals are also briefly discussed.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper describes the use of tense markers in counterfactual conditionals in the Kuban dialect of Kabardian (East Circassian, ISO 639-3: kbd), a polysynthetic Northwest Caucasian language.¹ Like many languages of the world, including some well-known European languages, Circassian languages systematically employ past tense morphology in counterfactual contexts. Kuban and other Kabardian varieties are similar to Romance languages in using the imperfective past tense in counterfactual conditionals, which may suggest invoking the prominent theory of “fake aspect” (Iatridou 2000; Bjorkman & Halpert 2013) in order to describe them. However, as my fieldwork investigation has revealed, the actual situation is much more complex. Possessing several distinct past tense markers, which, moreover, can combine with each other, Kuban Kabardian shows several strategies for marking counterfactual conditionals, whose distribution, as I will argue,

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primarily depends on actionality (situation type) and aspectual viewpoint. Therefore, aspect in Kuban Kabardian counterfactuals is not “fake”, but is relevant for the choice of marking.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. In Section 2 I will briefly discuss the relationships between past tense and counterfactuality cross-linguistically, and in Section 3 the necessary information about Kuban Kabardian, its tense system, and conditional clauses will be presented. In Section 4 I discuss my findings on the use of tense morphology in Kuban Kabardian counterfactuals, and Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. PAST TENSE AND COUNTERFACTUALITY

In many languages of the world, past tense markers are used in conditional clauses to mark counterfactuality; see, among others, Steele (1975), James (1982), Dahl (1997), Iatridou (2000), Van Linden & Verstraete (2008), Karawani (2014), and Hetterle (2015: 78–79). This is illustrated below by examples (1) from English and (2) from Lezgian. Note that in both languages past tense morphology appears both in the protasis and the apodosis of counterfactual conditionals; in the latter it combines with the future tense marker (English *would* = past tense of *will*). In English, the Simple Past tense is used in counterfactual clauses with present reference, as in (1a), while reference to the past requires the Past Perfect, as in (1b).

(1) English (Declerck & Reed 2001: 183)

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

(2) Lezgian (Nakh-Daghestanian > Lezgian, Russia; Haspelmath 1993: 396)

Eger am naq' ata-na-j-t'a,
 if she.ABS yesterday come-AOR-PST-COND

za am vokzal.d-a gürüşmiš iji-da-j.
 1SG.ERG she.ABS station-INESS meeting do-FUT-PST

‘If she had arrived yesterday, I would have met her at the station.’

The counterfactual function is especially characteristic of *pluperfects*, that is, grams used to denote past situations in some way “disconnected” from the present (see, for example Salkie 1989; Plungian & van der Auwera 2006; Sičinava 2013) and often expressed by an analytic or synthetic combination of two past markers. The counterfactual use of pluperfects is not necessarily restricted to past time reference. For instance, in English, the Past Perfect, as in example (1b), is also found in counterfactual conditionals with present reference (see example (3a)), and even with future reference (see example (3b)) (Declerck & Reed 2001: 177–182; on future counterfactuals in English and other languages, see Arregui 2007; Ippolito 2003; 2013; Patard 2014; von Prince 2019: 607–608), thus serving as a marker of counterfactuality *per se*.

(3) English (Declerck & Reed 2001: 178, 180)

- a. *If I **hadn't been** in the country now, I **wouldn't have been** able to attend your wedding.*
- b. *If you **had come** tomorrow, you **wouldn't have found** me at home.*

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

(4) Lezgian (Haspelmath 1993: 395)

Eger am paka ata-na-j-t'a,
if she.ABS tomorrow come-AOR-PST-COND
za am vokzal.d-a gürüşmiš iji-da-j.
1SG.ERG she.ABS station-INESS meeting do-FUT-PST

‘If she had arrived tomorrow, I would have met her at the station.’

These examples show that it is essential to keep temporal reference and epistemicity in conditionals strictly apart; see, for example, Declerck & Reed (2001) and Xrakovskij (2005). Thus, the claims by Ziegeler (1994: 31) and Iatridou (2000: 231) that counterfactuality in the future is logically impossible are a bit far-fetched, given that counterfactuality is the way speakers construe situations based on their knowledge and reasoning, rather than being a direct reflection of the real world (see von Prince 2015: 35–39; Patard 2018).

An influential “formalist” line of thinking about this propensity of pasts and pluperfects to occur in counterfactuals stems from Iatridou (2000) (see also Anand & Hacquard 2010; Karawani & Zeijlstra 2013; Ferreira 2014; 2016, among many others; similar ideas have been expressed in the cognitive-functional framework as well: see, for example Fleischmann 1989; Dancygier 1998). Iatridou and her followers assume that past morphemes in modal contexts, such as (1)–(4) above, do not express tense, but are “fake” and signal the “exclusion” of the current world from the set of worlds described by the clause (see a discussion in Patard 2014: 70–78). In addition to “fake” tense, the notion of “fake” aspect is also invoked (see Iatridou 2000; 2010; Bjorkman & Halpert 2013) in order to account for the occurrence of imperfective aspect (morphologically often merged with the past tense) in counterfactual conditionals referring to completed singular events, as for example in Romance languages. Consider the colloquial Italian “imperfect conditionals” shown in example (5), or the use of Imperfect morphology in French counterfactuals illustrated in examples (6) and (7).

(5) Italian (Ippolito 2004: 369, ex. 19)

Se arrivavi (IPF) prima, vedevi (IPF) il film dall'inizio.

‘If you had arrived earlier, you would have seen the movie from the beginning.’

(6) French (A. de Saint-Exupéry, *Le petit prince*, Ch. 21)²

Si les chasseurs dansaient (IPF) n'importe quand, les jours se ressembleraient (FUT+IPF) tous, et je n'aurais (FUT+IPF) point de vacances.

‘But if the hunters danced at just any time, every day would be like every other day, and I should never have any vacation at all.’

² Both the French original and its English translation are taken from <malyksiaze.net/us/ksiazka>, accessed 3 April 2020.

(7) French (P. Mérimée, *Lokis*, Ch. 8)³

Si vous vous étiez (AUX-IPF) bien pénétré (PTCP.PST) de la loi de transformation du sanscrit au lithuanien, vous auriez (AUX-FUT-IPF) reconnu (PTCP.PST) dans lokis le sanscrit arkcha ou riksha.

‘If you were thoroughly steeped in the law of transformation from the Sanskrit into Lithuanian, you would have recognized in *lokis* the Sanskrit *arkcha*, or *riksha*.’

In French, the Imperfect person-number paradigm occurs in both parts of the counterfactual conditional: in the apodosis, it attaches to the future stem of the verb, while in the protasis it marks the main verb in non-past contexts, as in (6), or the perfect auxiliary in past contexts, as in (7). Importantly, neither in Italian nor in French is the counterfactual use of the imperfective tenses restricted to semantically imperfective (durative or habitual) contexts, being perfectly compatible with single completed events, hence the notion of “fake imperfective” (see Anand & Hacquard 2010; Ferreira 2014; 2016 for more recent analyses of counterfactual imperfectives in Romance and other languages).

Alternative approaches to the use of tense and aspect in counterfactual conditionals have been proposed in work such as Arregui (2005; 2009), Ippolito (2003; 2004; 2013), Grønn (2013), and Patard (2014), or, in a very different vein, Dahl (1997); see von Prince (2019) for a critical overview and a novel proposal. In the following, I will not commit myself to any of the existing formal or informal frameworks and will not directly confirm or challenge any of them. Instead, my goals are empirical: I will present a detailed account of how counterfactuality interacts with actionality (Tatevosov 2002), grammatical (viewpoint) aspect, and temporal reference in Kuban Kabardian conditionals. Based on this, I will arrive at the conclusion that the choice of marking in Kuban Kabardian counterfactuals is sensitive to all of these parameters, but primarily to the aspectual ones, and hence poses potential problems for the “fake aspect” theory, which I will briefly discuss in Section 5.

3. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO KUBAN KABARDIAN

Kuban Kabardian is one of the western dialects of Kabardian, which, together with Adyghe (West Circassian), is one of the two languages forming the Circassian branch of the Northwest Caucasian (Abkhaz-Adyghean) language family (see Hewitt 1989; 2005; Arkadiev & Lander 2020). Like the closely related Besleney dialect, Kuban shows considerable differences from the eastern dialects of Kabardian and the standard language, as described, for example, by Colarusso (1992); the dialect is rather poorly documented, the only major publication being the overview in Kumakhov (1969). The data used in this paper were collected in the village of Lešepsəne (Blečepsin) in the Republic of Adygeya during field trips organized by the Russian State University for the Humanities and the Higher School of Economics (Moscow) in 2015 and 2016.

Like all Northwest Caucasian languages, Kuban Kabardian is characterized by left-branching word order, polysynthesis (see Lander & Testelefs 2017), and ergativity manifested in both verbal indexing and case marking of noun phrases (see Smeets 1992; Kumakhov & Vamling 2009). Also notable is the poor formal differentiation between nominals and verbs, with typical verbal morphology freely appearing with lexical bases whose translation equivalents in English

³ French original: <fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Lokis>, accessed 3 April 2020, English translation: <en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Writings_of_Prosper_Mérimée/Volume_5/Lokis>, accessed 3 April 2020.

or Russian are nouns or adjectives. The schematic structure of the Kuban Kabardian verbal complex is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The Kuban Kabardian verbal complex

prefixes						root	suffixes								
argument structure zone						pre-stem elements			stem			endings			
-10	-9	-8	-7	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
absolute	directional	subordinators	applicatives	dative	ergative	jussive	dynamicity	negation	causative	root	directionals, transitivity	TAM	plural	imperfect	subordinators, force

For the purposes of this paper, most of the morphosyntactic complexity of the Circassian polysynthetic verb can be ignored. What is relevant is that clausal subordination in these languages is also marked synthetically by means of non-finite forms such as nominalizations and converbs; see Klimenčenko (2014) on adverbial subordination in the Besleney dialect of Kabardian, closely related to and spoken in the vicinity of the Kuban dialect. Thus, one type of temporal clause is marked by the prefix $\hat{s}(\partial)$ - in slot -8, as shown in example (8), while conditional protases, both realis and irrealis, employ the suffix *-me* in slot +5; see example (9).

- (8) *sə-ǰə-š-jə-λaβ^wə-m* ʔ^wənç'əbze-xe-r s-tər-jə-χə-ž'-a
 1SG.ABS-DIR-TEMP-3SG.ERG-see-OBL key-PL-ABS 1SG.IO-LOC-3SG.ERG-take-RE-PST
 'When he saw me, he took the keys away from me.' (textual example)⁴

- (9) *zderovje-r mə-terez-me* p-x^we-hə-ne-ǰəm.
 health-ABS NEG-in.order-COND 2SG.IO-BEN-carry-FUT-NEG
 'If your health is weak, you won't bear (the hajj).' (textual example)

Let us now turn to the tense system. Like other Circassian languages (see Korotkova 2009 on Temirgoy Adyghe; Arkadiev 2014 on Shapsug Adyghe; Somin 2011 on Besleney Kabardian; see also Arkadiev 2017; Kljagina 2018 for general overviews), Kuban Kabardian has a two-layer tense system (see Kljagina 2016) consisting of “primary” tenses and “secondary” tenses formally based on the “primary” ones. The “primary” tenses include the unmarked Present, as in example (10); the Preterite (Simple Past) with the suffix *-a* (slot +2), as in example (11); the Imperfect with the suffix *-(t)e* (slot +4), as in example (12); and the Future with the suffix *-ne* (slot +2), as in example (13).

- (10) *ž'əstune a šəpe-r de jən-u d-ew-βe-λaβe.*
 now DEM place-ABS 1PL big-ADV 1PL.ERG-DYN-CAUS-valuable
 'Nowadays we value this place very much.' (textual example)

- (11) *dade-r mešine-xe-r š-a-še-m ǰe-k^w-a.*
 grandfather-ABS car-PL-ABS LOC-3PL.ERG-sell-OBL DIR-go-PST
 'Granddad came to the place where they sold cars.' (textual example)

4 Textual examples come from the small corpus of oral narratives collected during our fieldwork.

- (12) *β^wəneβ^w-jə nəbʒeβ^w-jə ja-dej qe-mə-k^w-u ja-zaq^we psew-xe-t.*
 neighbour-ADD friend-ADD 3PL.IO-at DIR-NEG-go-ADV 3PL.POSS-alone live-PL-IPF
 ‘Neither neighbours nor friends visited them, they lived alone.’ (textual example)
- (13) *we-rjə zeg^were-m qə-b-ne-sə-ne.*
 2SG-ADD once-OBL DIR-2SG.IO-LOC-reach-FUT
 ‘This will affect you as well sometime.’ (textual example)

The “secondary” tenses are formed by combining two or even three tense suffixes. The most notable of them are the tense forms constructed with the Imperfect suffix *-t(e)*, which, as described above, occurs in the slot to the right of that occupied by the other tense markers. The Imperfect can attach to the Preterite to form the Pluperfect in *-a-t(e)*, as in example (14), and to the Future to form the Irrealis in *-ne-t(e)*, as in example (15). Thus, the Imperfect functions as a “retrospective shift” marker (Plungian & van der Auwera 2006: 344) which attaches to forms already containing tense-aspect markers and “shifts” their interpretation into the past.

- (14) *ʃele-ʃe-g^were meq^wepe q-jə-č’-a-t*
 guy-young-some Maykop DIR-LOC-exit-PST-IPF
 ‘(Once) a young guy came from Maykop.’ (beginning of a story, textual example)⁵
- (15) *dwənej-m tje-t çəx^w-xe-m q-a-xe-z-βe-ʃə-ne-t*
 world-OBL LOC-stand person-PL-OBL DIR-3PL.IO-LOC-1SG.ERG-CAUS-know-FUT-IPF
 ‘I would have shown it to the people in the world.’ (textual example)

In counterfactual conditionals, the Pluperfect is one of the forms frequently found in the protasis, while the Irrealis almost invariably marks the apodosis, as in example (16).

- (16) *jə-β^we-m wə-qe-k^w-a-te-me dirjekterə-m w-jə-ʃte-ne-t.*
 POSS-time-OBL 2SG.ABS-DIR-go-PST-IPF-COND director-OBL 2SG.ABS-3SG.ERG-take-FUT-IPF
 ‘If you had come on time the director would have let you in.’ (elicited)

Previous analyses of conditional clauses in Circassian (see Kuznetsova 2009: 297–309; Korotkova 2009: 276–277 on Temirgoy Adyghe; Orlickaja 2008; Arkadiev 2014: 55–61 on Shapsug Adyghe; Klimenčenko 2014: 86–92 on Besleney Kabardian) have argued that the use of the Pluperfect is a feature of past counterfactual protases. Thus, for Shapsug Adyghe counterfactuals, Arkadiev (2014), following Iatridou (2000), has proposed that one of the two Preterite markers constituting the Pluperfect in this dialect contributes past temporal reference, while the other is “fake” and serves to encode irrealis, as in example (17).

- (17) Shapsug Adyghe (Arkadiev 2014: 58)
- k’ete b-βe-že-βa-βe-je-me ʔaʃ^wə tə-ʃx-e-ʃt^hə-β.*
 chicken 2SG.ERG-CAUS-roast-PST-PST-LNK-COND tasty 1PL.ABS-eat-ANTIP-FUT-PST
 ‘If you had (then) roasted a chicken, we would have had a good meal.’

5 The “stage setting” use at the beginning of narratives is a characteristic trait of pluperfect grams cross-linguistically; see, e.g. Plungian & van der Auwera (2006: 337); Sičinava (2008).

The same reasoning appears to follow from the description of conditional clauses in Besleney Kabardian by Klimentčenko (2014: 86–92). In realis conditional protases, tenses have their normal interpretation; see examples (18)–(20). Note that example (20) shows that the Future tense marker is not excluded from conditional clauses in Kabardian.

- (18) Besleney Kabardian (Klimentčenko 2014: 88–89)

χ^wən wə-s-šxə-ne-qəm wə-iskustvjene-me
ok 2SG.ABS-1SG.ERG-eat-FUT-NEG 2SG.ABS-artificial-COND
‘OK, I won’t eat you if you are artificial.’ (textual example)

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

- (20) *ali jə-urok-xe-r jə-šə-ž’ə-ne-me*
Ali POSS-lesson-PL-ABS 3SG.ERG-do-RE-FUT-COND
j-ane kanfet qə-r-jə-tə-ne.
POSS-mother sweets DIR-DAT-3SG.ERG-give-FUT
‘If Ali does (lit. will do) his homework, his mother will give him sweets.’

Counterfactuality is marked in both parts of the conditional by the Imperfect suffix; when it attaches to tense suffixes in the protasis they retain their temporal interpretation, as in examples (21) and (22). Not surprisingly, in counterfactuals with present tense reference, the Imperfect is the only tense marker, and its function is irrealis, not tense, as in example (23).

- (21) Besleney Kabardian (Klimentčenko 2014: 88–89)

d-jə-senehatə-r fə ja-mə-lex^w-a-te-me
1PL.PR-POSS-profession-ABS good 3PL.ERG-NEG-see-PST-IPF-COND
a-xe-r-jə a-bə k^we-ne-xe-te-qəm
DEM-PL-ABS-ADD DEM-OBL go-FUT-PL-IPF-NEG

‘If they (our children) had not loved our profession, they would not have gone there (to the university), too.’ (textual example)

- (22) *s-j-ane pš’edej qe-k^we-ne-te-me se sə-p-je-k^weč’ə-ne-t.*
1SG-POSS-mother tomorrow DIR-go-FUT-IPF-COND 1SG 1SG.ABS-LOC-DAT-meet-FUT-IPF
‘If mother were to arrive tomorrow, I would have met her.’

- (23) *ž’ə ž’əle-m de-s-xe-m [...] aχš’e q-a-x^we-lež’-te-me*
now village-OBL LOC-sit-PL-OBL money DIR-3PL.IO-BEN-work-IPF-COND
sabəj-xe-r-jə nahe-be zerə-χ^wə-ne-te-m d-jə-ʒəh tje-λ
child-PL-ABS-ADD more-many SBD-become-FUT-IPF-OBL 1PL.ABS-LOC-trust LOC-lie
‘We are sure that if the people now living in the village [...] earned (enough) money, there would have been more children.’ (textual example)

The picture above is consistent with the “fake imperfective” analysis of Modern Greek and French counterfactuals by Iatridou (2000). However, what is lacking in most descriptions of Circassian conditionals (and in Iatridou’s description of Greek ones as well), especially of

Kabardian ones, is information on their interaction with the aspect and actionality of verbs. Indeed, most if not all examples of counterfactual clauses reported so far involve telic events in the perfective aspect, as in (16), (17), and (21). However, given that the secondary past tense/irrealis marking is carried out by the Imperfect, whose function as a primary tense is to mark past imperfective (durative and habitual) contexts as in example (12) above, the following questions arise:

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

In my research I decided to address these questions for Kuban Kabardian by eliciting data on both telic and atelic verbs and on both perfective and imperfective contexts. The results of my investigation are presented in the next section.

4. THE FINDINGS

The exposition below is based upon a questionnaire containing about fifty sentences with predicates from different actional classes (stative and dynamic, punctual and durative, telic and atelic; on identifying actional classes of predicates in Circassian see Arkadiev 2009), combined with different aspectual viewpoints (perfective and imperfective, the latter both durative and habitual) and different temporal localizations (mainly present and past, but also future). All in all, I collected material from seven consultants, all of them women aged 28–50, most of them teachers at the local school. All questionnaire sentences were initially presented in Russian with an explicit context; in particular, imperfective vs. perfective interpretations were specifically targeted by appropriate temporal adverbials. Kuban Kabardian translations were then modified by substituting the elicited tense form with other possible tense forms, and were checked with consultants for grammaticality and possible interpretations.⁶ This allowed me to discover not only semantic contrasts, some of them subtle enough to be evident only to a subset of the consultants, but also a considerable degree of free variation.

The overall distribution of tense forms in Kuban Kabardian counterfactual protases is shown in Table 2. The table has two lacunae in the domain of future reference, for which I do not have sufficient data.

Table 2 Tense forms in Kuban Kabardian counterfactual protases

tense	eventuality type	imperfective		perfective
		durative	habitual	
past	telic	IPF		PST(-IPF)
	atelic	IPF	IPF / PST(-IPF)	PST(-IPF)
	states	IPF / PST(-IPF)		
present		IPF / PST(-IPF)		—
future	telic	?		PST-IPF / FUT-IPF
	atelic	IPF / PST(-IPF) / FUT-IPF		?

⁶ Some forms were checked with only a subset of the consultants.

The table reveals two important facts. First, imperfective contexts, regardless of temporal interpretation, are overwhelmingly covered by the simple Imperfect. Second, the Pluperfect (PST-IPF) is optional in counterfactuals, being almost always substitutable by the simple Preterite. Below I will elaborate on both of these findings.

Starting with the first question put forward at the end of the previous section (the marking of counterfactuality in imperfective contexts), given the seemingly free combinatory possibilities of tense suffixes in Kabardian, one could expect past imperfective counterfactuality to be expressed by two instances of the Imperfect suffix, like in the Shapsug Adyghe example in (15) above: the first Imperfect would express its “literal” temporal and aspectual value, while the second one would be “fake” and mark just the irrealis modality (see the discussion of such an analysis in Section 5). However, this expectation is not borne out due to the morphological ban on the doubling of the Imperfect: no forms in **te-te-me* IPF-IPF-COND have ever been accepted by any of the consultants, neither are they mentioned in any of the available sources on Kabardian. Now, since the doubling of the Imperfect is impossible, past imperfective counterfactuals could in principle be expressed in one of the following ways:

a) by the Pluperfect (*-a-te-me* PST-IPF-COND), neutralizing the aspectual distinction between perfective and imperfective;

b) by the Imperfect (*-te-me* IPF-COND), neutralizing the modal distinction between realis and irrealis protases and the temporal distinction between past and present.

As the data reveals, Kuban Kabardian clearly follows the second strategy. Past imperfective counterfactuals are strictly opposed to past perfective counterfactuals, at least with telic verbs, by means of the Imperfect vs. the Pluperfect; see examples (24a) vs. (24b). In (24a), the use of the Imperfect yields a progressive interpretation of the protasis, while the Pluperfect in (24b) implies a completed event.

(24a) *də-qə-šə-kʷ-a-te-m* *šhambəj* *polə-r* *jə-pχenčʼ-te-me*
 1PL.ABS-DIR-TEMP-go-PST-IPF-OBL Shkhambi floor-ABS 3PL.ERG-sweep-IPF-COND

wəne-m *də-š-jə-βe-he-ne-te-qəm.*
 house-OBL 1PL.ABS-LOC-3SG.ERG-CAUS-enter-FUT-IPF-NEG

‘If Shkhambi had been sweeping the floor at the moment when we had come, he would not have let us into the house.’

(24b) *də-qə-šə-kʷ-a-te-m* *šhambəj* *polə-r* *jə-pχenčʼ-a-te-me*
 1PL.ABS-DIR-TEMP-go-PST-IPF-OBL Shkhambi floor-ABS 3PL.ERG-sweep-PST-IPF-COND

wəne-m *də-š-jə-βe-he-ne-te-qəm.*
 house-OBL 1PL.ABS-LOC-3SG.ERG-CAUS-enter-FUT-IPF-NEG

‘If Shkhambi had (already) swept the floor by the time we had come, he would not have let us into the house.’

At least some of my consultants have similar intuitions with respect to atelic activity verbs as well: see examples (25a) vs. (25b), where, in parallel with the examples in (24), the Imperfect implies a progressive reading, while the Pluperfect yields an interpretation of a temporally bounded activity.

- (25a) *də-šə-k^we-ž'-a-m* *d-j-ane* *laže-te-me*
 1PL.ABS-TEMP-go-RE-PST-OBL 1PL-POSS-mother work-IPF-COND

də-dej qə-še-č'ə-fə-ne-te-qəm.
 1PL-at DIR-LOC-exit-HBL-FUT-IPF-NEG

'If mother had been working when we had arrived she wouldn't have been able to come out (she would have been occupied).'

- (25b) *də-šə-k^we-ž'-a-m* *d-j-ane* *lež-a-te-me*
 1PL.ABS-TEMP-go-RE-PST-OBL 1PL-POSS-mother work-PST-IPF-COND

də-dej qə-še-č'ə-fə-ne-te-qəm.
 1PL-at DIR-LOC-exit-HBL-FUT-IPF-NEG

'If mother had (already) worked by the time of our arrival, she would not have been able to come out (she would have been too tired).'

This aspectual restriction on the use of the Pluperfect accords well with the observation by Kljagina (2016) that the Kuban Kabardian Pluperfect does not in general occur in imperfective contexts; see example (26) with a discontinuous past habitual interpretation, where only the plain Imperfect, but not the Pluperfect, is allowed.

- (26) (Kljagina 2016: 20, ex. 23a)

a-r *jəpeč'e pšedgəž-č'e fade* *je-fe-t* / **je-f-a-t*.
 DEM-ABS before morning-INS booze DAT-drink-IPF / *DAT-drink-PST-IPF

'In earlier times he used to drink booze in the morning (but now he doesn't have such a habit any more).'

Conditional protases with plain Imperfect marking are underspecified with respect to both reality status and tense; thus, the Imperfect may appear in realis conditionals, as in example (27), as well as in present counterfactuals, as in example (28), and even in future counterfactuals, as in example (29).

- (27) *jəpeč'e turcije-m* *wə-k^we-te-me,*
 before Turkey-OBL 2SG.ABS-go-IPF-COND

tərk^w-bze *šə-z-we-mə-be-çəx^w-a-r* *ləw?*
 Turk-language REL.RSN-REFL.IO-2SG.ERG-NEG-CAUS-know-PST-ABS what

'If you have been to Turkey before, why didn't you learn Turkish?'

- (28) *ž'əpstu weš'x q-je-mə-š'x-te-me* *qe-t-k^wehə-ne-t.*
 now rain DIR-DAT-NEG-rain-IPF-COND DIR-1PL.ERG-go.around-FUT-IPF

'If it weren't raining now we would have gone for a walk.'

- (29) *pšedej* *themex^we-max^we-te-me* *de* *də-lež'e-ne-te-qəm.*
 tomorrow Sunday-day-IPF-COND we 1PL.ABS-work-FUT-IPF-NEG

'If tomorrow had been Sunday we wouldn't work.'

In fact, it is only the marking of the apodosis that distinguishes between realis and unrealis conditionals, the latter consistently employing the combination Future+Imperfect: *-ne-t(e)*.

If we now focus on non-telic predicates, we observe that with statives the aspectual distinction appears to be neutralized: my consultants allow both Imperfect and Pluperfect in past counterfactual contexts with statives without any tangible difference in meaning; see example (30).

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

This is in line with the tendency for the distinction between the perfective and the imperfective past tenses to be neutralized with stative verbs in Circassian; see example (31), showing a discontinuous past state expressed by the Pluperfect, which, as has just been said, is not used in imperfective contexts with dynamic verbs.

- (31) (Kljagina 2016: 16, ex. 14d)
s-jə-wənč'əbze-r stolə-m tje-λ-a-t.
 1SG.PR-POSS-key-ABS table-OBL LOC-lie-PST-IPF
 'My keys were lying on the table (and now they are not there).'

Moreover, such neutralization is attested with dynamic atelic verbs as well, especially in past habitual counterfactuals; see example (32). Here the Pluperfect is allowed in free variation with the Imperfect, even by those speakers who assign to it a perfective interpretation in episodic contexts like (25b) above.

- (32) *neḡabe neḡə-be.re wə-ž'ej-a-te-me / wə-ž'ej-te-me*
 last.year more-often 2SG.ABS-sleep-PST-IPF-COND / 2SG.ABS-sleep-IPF-COND
neḡ-maše.re w-je-zeš'ə-ne-t.
 more-rarely 2SG.ABS-DAT-get.tired-FUT-IPF
 'If you had slept more last year you would have been less tired.'

The Pluperfect is barred from habitual contexts only with telic verbs, as shown by examples (33a) and (33b), with the same clear aspectual contrast as in (24a,b) above.

- (33a) *neḡabe wə-qə-č'erə-mə-x^w-te-me*
 last.year 2SG.ABS-DIR-LOC-NEG-fall-IPF-COND
školə-m wə-qə-š-a-x^wə-ne-te-qəm
 school-OBL 2SG.ABS-DIR-LOC-3PL.ERG-drive-FUT-IPF-NEG
 'If you had not (regularly / *once) arrived late last year, they would not have excluded you from school.'
- (33b) *neḡabe wə-qə-č'erə-mə-x^w-a-te-me*
 last.year 2SG.ABS-DIR-LOC-NEG-fall-PST-IPF-COND
školə-m wə-qə-š-a-x^wə-ne-te-qəm
 school-OBL 2SG.ABS-DIR-LOC-3PL.ERG-drive-FUT-IPF-NEG
 'If you had not (once / *regularly) arrived late last year, they would not have excluded you from school.'

The picture presented so far is complicated by the previously mentioned fact that the use of the Pluperfect is not obligatory even in past counterfactuals; the Preterite can be used in such contexts instead, as in example (34).

- (34) *jəb^we-m wə-ǰe-k^w-a-me dirjekterə-m w-jə-šte-ne-t.*
 on.time-OBL 2SG.ABS-DIR-go-PST-COND director-OBL 2SG.ABS-3SG.ERG-take-FUT-IPF
 ‘If you had come on time the director would have let you in.’

Moreover, the Preterite can also replace the Imperfect with statives (see example (35)), and with habitual atelic verbs (see example (36)), but not with telic verbs, as shown by the deviant example (37).

- (35) *dəb^wase s-jə-ǰ^weš’ə-r wəne-m ǰe-s-a-me*
 yesterday 1SG.POSS-brother-ABS house-OBL LOC-sit-PST-COND
ǰə-p-x^wə-tje-we-ne-t.
 DIR-2SG.IO-BEN-LOC-hit-FUT-IPF
 ‘If my brother had been at home yesterday he would have called you.’ – cf. (30)

- (36) *jələs-k^w-a-m neχə-be.re wə-ž’ej-a-me*
 year-go-PST-OBL more-often 2SG.ABS-sleep-PST-COND
neχ-maše.re w-je-zeš’ə-ne-t.
 more-rarely 2SG.ABS-DAT-get.tired-FUT-IPF
 ‘If you had slept more last year you would have been less tired.’ – cf. (32)

- (37) *#səhata-r t^wə-m swande sup jə-ke-v-a-me*
 hour-ABS two-OBL Swande soup 3SG.ERG-CAUS-boil-PST-COND
jə-peš’ə-m tjeljevizerə-r xe-ke-ne-ke-ne-te-ǰəm.
 POSS-room-OBL television-ABS LOC-CAUS-be.lit-RES-FUT-IPF-NEG
 ‘If at two o’clock Swande had already finished cooking (*had been cooking) soup, the TV set in her room wouldn’t have been turned on.’ (pragmatically odd under the assumption that Swande turns the TV set on only when she is in her room)

Finally, the Preterite is not excluded even from present tense contexts, as shown by example (38), which was accepted by two of my consultants.

- (38) *s-j-ade ž’əpstune ž’ej-a-me bž’e-r x^we-š-a-we*
 1SG.PR-POSS-father now sleep-PST-COND door-ABS BEN-do-RES-ADV
šə-tə-ne-t
 LOC-stand-FUT-IPF
 ‘If my father were sleeping now, his door would be closed.’

Such a use of the Preterite instead of the Pluperfect, and especially instead of the Imperfect, as in (38), seems to be a marked option not accepted by all speakers in all contexts, but still robustly attested. This shows that the use of the Pluperfect in counterfactuals is probably perceived by the speakers of Kuban Kabardian as somewhat redundant. Note that just like the Imperfect, the Preterite does not unambiguously mark the protasis as counterfactual; see example (39) with a realis conditional.

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

On the other hand, there is an observable tendency to use the Pluperfect in non-past counterfactual contexts, including the future ones, testifying to its becoming a default marker of counterfactuality *per se*, regardless of temporal reference. This is illustrated by examples (40)–(42).

- (40) *ž’əpstu weš’x q-je-mə-š’x-a-te-me qe-t-k^wehə-ne-t*
 now rain DIR-DAT-NEG-rain-PST-IPF-COND DIR-1PL.ERG-go.around-FUT-IPF
 ‘If it were not raining now, we would go for a walk.’

- (41) *aslan ž’əle-m naχə-bere qe-k^w-a-te-me*
 Aslan village-OBL more-often DIR-go-PST-IPF-COND
zeč’e-m-jə ja-g^wepe-ne-t
 all-OBL-ADD 3PL.PR+POSS-joy-FUT-IPF
 ‘If Aslan came to the village more often, everyone would be happy.’

- (42) *tha wjəkepsew newbe aχš’e-r qə-zerə-z-e-p-t-a-m-č’e*
 thanks today money-ABS DIR-SBD-1SG.IO-DAT-2SG.ERG-give-PST-OBL-INS
awe pšedej-jə qə-z-e-p-t-a-te-me deχ^we-ne-t.
 but tomorrow-ADD DIR-1SG.IO-DAT-2SG.ERG-give-PST-IPF-COND good-FUT-IPF
 ‘Thanks for giving me money today, but if you had given it to me tomorrow, it would also have been fine.’

Note that in examples (40) and (41) we see the Pluperfect in clearly imperfective (durative and habitual, respectively) contexts with dynamic verbs – a use strictly precluded with past time reference. Examples like (40)–(42) are not numerous and were accepted only by a minority of my consultants; however, their existence, even if marginal, seems indicative of the tendency to generalize the Pluperfect to non-past counterfactual contexts. As already noted above, a similar development has occurred in English and a number of other languages; see the discussion in Dahl (1997).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As the material presented in Section 4 shows, the marking of counterfactuality in Kuban Kabardian (and, *mutatis mutandis*, most probably in other Kabardian varieties as well) is achieved by means of a non-trivial interplay of actionality, aspect, and tense. Of these parameters, the last one, that is, temporal reference, seems to be the least important: all of the markers surveyed, even the Pluperfect, are in principle compatible with past, present, and future interpretations; with respect to the Pluperfect this points towards its development into a specialized marker of counterfactuality. By contrast, the aspectual distinctions (perfective vs. imperfective, and, within the latter category, durative vs. habitual), as well as the actional ones (static vs. dynamic, and, within the latter category, atelic vs. telic), constrain the morphological expression of counterfactuality in important ways. Indeed, the most robust contrast is the one between

the bare Imperfect in imperfective contexts and the Pluperfect or Preterite in perfective contexts with telic verbs.

If we look once again at the distribution of individual forms and affixes, we may observe that the Imperfect *-t(e)* serves as a marker of counterfactuality *par excellence* only in non-past contexts and, as part of the complex Pluperfect, in past perfective (and some habitual) contexts. By contrast, in most imperfective contexts the Imperfect does not specify either reality status or temporal reference. Given that the Imperfect forms part of the Pluperfect, which in its independent uses is largely limited to perfective contexts (such as anterior in the past or annulled result), as opposed to imperfective ones (past habitual situations no longer holding at present, as in (25)), where the plain Imperfect prevails, there is no reason to consider the use of the Imperfect in counterfactuals as “fake” – at least, it is no more “fake” than in its use in the Pluperfect in general.

On the other hand, the distribution of the Imperfect suffix can possibly be accommodated under the “fake aspect” theory if we assume that in syntax the Imperfect as a marker of irrealis can attach to the “real” Imperfect, with morphological haplology then deleting the second occurrence of the marker (IPF-IPF > IPF). The distribution of the “fake” Imperfect under this assumption is schematized in Table 3; IPF* stands for “Imperfect as irrealis”.

Table 3 The distribution of the Imperfect under the “fake aspect” analysis

tense	eventuality type	imperfective		perfective
		durative	habitual	
past	telic	IPF-IPF*		PST-IPF*
	atelic	IPF-IPF*	IPF-IPF* / PST-IPF*	PST-IPF*
	states	IPF-IPF* / PST-IPF*		
present		IPF* / PST-IPF*		—
future	telic	?		PST-IPF* / FUT-IPF*
	atelic	IPF-IPF* / PST-IPF* / FUT-IPF*		?

Such an analysis is in principle viable, even though morphological haplology is not independently observed in Kabardian; however, it cannot account for the fact that the use of the Imperfect marker as a secondary modal operator inducing counterfactual interpretations is non-obligatory even in past perfective counterfactuals, where the simple Preterite can appear instead. Examples such as (34)–(36) above suggest that the expression of counterfactuality in Kuban Kabardian can be achieved solely by Irrealis (FUT-IPF) marking in the apodosis, with the protasis being underspecified with respect to reality status. Note that the same is true of protases with the plain Imperfect, as shown in examples (27)–(29). On the other hand, the fact that the Preterite can, even if only marginally, appear instead of the Imperfect in present counterfactuals, as shown in example (38) above, can be reconciled with the Iatridou-style theory (Iatridou 2000) only if one assumes that the Preterite can function as a “fake” tense marker, too. Possible empirical support for such an assumption comes from the following fact: past perfective counterfactuals with telic verbs marginally attest forms with “double Preterite” in *-ɸ-a*, as shown in example (43). The suffix *-ɸ(e)* is the historically original allomorph of the Preterite suffix, occurring only before other suffixes in slot +2.

- (43) *dəɸ^wase meʃine-r mə-q^wate-ɸ-a-me mədej də-ʃə-sə-ne-te-qəm*
 yesterday car-ABS NEG-break-PST-PST-COND here 1SG.ABS-LOC-sit-FUT-IPF-NEG

‘If the car had not broken down yesterday, we would not be sitting here.’

The double Preterite *-a* in Kabardian is a marginal and archaic form (as testified by the wide use of its etymological counterpart in Adyghe; see Korotkova 2009 for a detailed analysis) going through the process of being ousted by the innovative Pluperfect *-a-te*; however, it is still attested in free variation with the latter, including in counterfactual protases. This suggests that the use of the plain Preterite in counterfactual contexts might also be an archaic feature in Kuban Kabardian.

Regardless of how the material presented above is accounted for in formal or informal theories of tense, aspect, and modality, I hope to have shown that, first, Circassian languages present novel and relevant data in some ways surprisingly similar to that of the better-known European languages, and, second, that an adequate account of conditional clauses in a given language should include a variety of possible actional classes and aspectual viewpoints.

ABBREVIATIONS

#	infelicitous	INS	instrumental
1	1st person	IO	indirect object
2	2nd person	IPF	imperfect
3	3rd person	LNK	linking morpheme
ABS	absolutive	LOC	locative preverb
ADD	additive	NEG	negation
ADV	adverbializer	OBL	oblique
AOR	aorist	PL	plural
ANTIP	antipassive	POSS	possessive
AUX	auxiliary	POT	potential
BEN	benefactive	PR	possessor
CAUS	causative	PST	past
COM	comitative	PTCP	participle
COND	conditional	RE	refactive
DAT	dative applicative	REL	relativizer
DEM	demonstrative	RES	resultative
DIR	directional preverb	REFL	reflexive
DYN	dynamic	RSN	reason
ERG	ergative	SBD	subordinator
FUT	future	SG	singular
HBL	habilitive	TAM	tense-aspect-mood
INESS	inessive	TEMP	temporal subordination

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