

Past tense and Counterfactuality in Makkan Arabic

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Roadmap

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1 Main Observations:

1. Makkan Arabic (MA) is a dialect of Arabic that is spoken in the Western region of Saudi Arabia known as Al-Hijazz with a population around 6,915,006 million people in 2022.
2. In MA, past tense loses its temporal interpretations in restricted structure, as illustrated in (1) with a complementizer *law*, contra to temporal past interpretations in (2) and (3).

Versus:

- (1) **law** kaan fiɖarti ?l-faraʔi ?ams, kaan ?anbasaTi
law kaan.Past.SG. attend.PRF.2,SG,F the-wedding yesterday, kaan.Past.SG enjoy.PRF.2,SG,F
 “If you had attended the wedding yesterday, you would have enjoyed it.”

(MA: CF, Past Orientation)

- (2) fiɖart ?l-faraʔi ?ams
attend-PRFV.1 the-wedding yesterday
 “I attended the wedding yesterday.”

(MA: Past Perfective)

- (3) kaan yifiɖur ?afraʔi fi s-saabig
kaan.Past.SG. attend.PRF.3.SG.M. weddings in the-past
 “She had attended weddings in the past.”

(MA: Past Perfect)

3. The above phenomenon in (1) versus (2) and (3) confirms Iatridou (2000)’s observation where past tense loses its temporal interpretations in counterfactual structures (CF) in languages like Modern Greek and English.

2 What is *law*?

1. In Classical grammar (Al-Ansaarie, 1964; Al-Muradi, 1992; Al-Kuwari, 2009, 2011, among others), conditional statements can be expressed by various complementizers, such as *?in*, *lamma*, *?iða*, *lawla*, *lawma* and *law*.
2. Each conditional complementizer expresses a specific interpretation, and I stipulate an independent semantic analysis for the complementizer *law*.
3. Let us compare the interpretations of complementizers *?iða* in (4) versus *law* in (5).

- (4) ?iða ti.zurtini fi bayti ?alaan, ʔa.ʔaxbiz.lik cheesecake
 If You.F.visit.IMP.1.me at home.my now, Fut.bake.IMP.1.for.you.F cheesecake
 ‘If you visit me at home now, I will bake a cheesecake for you.’ (MA: Present Possibility)

versus:

- (5) **law** tizurini fi bayti l-ʔaan, ʔaxbizlik cheesecake
 law visit.**IMPRF**.me.F at home **the-now**, bake.**IMPRF**.You.SG.F a.cheesecake
 “If you visit me at home now, I would bake a cheesecake for you.”
 (MA: CF, Present Orientation)

In example (5), the event of baking the cake is unlikely to happen at the utterance time for some reasons known to both speakers.

3 Tense & Aspect in AM:

Tense	Aspect	Example
Past	Perfective (PRFV)	katab “read”
Present	Imperfect (IMPRF)	yibtub “writes/ is writing”
Future		fiayiktub “will write”
Past progressive	Perfect (PRF)	kaan biyiktub “was writing”
Present Progressive		∅ biyiktub “is writing”
Past		kaan yiktub “had written” kaan kaatib “had written”

Note:

a. It is important to highlight that I follow Benmamoun (1999, 2000) in the use of perfective versus imperfective aspects as reference to past and present.

b. A few linguists have investigated the existence of perfect aspect in the aspectual system of a few varieties of Arabic, such as Fassi Fehri (2003) for Moroccan Arabic, Boneh (2010) for Syrian Arabic, and Abusulaiman (2019) for MA.

4 Key data:

More examples with the CF complementizer *law* versus *ʔða* below:

- (6) **law** kaan zurtini fi bayti ʔams, kaan xabazt.lik
 If **kaan.PST**.3.SG. visit.**PRF**.You.F.me at home.my yesterday, **kaan.PST**.3.SG. bake.**PRF**.1.F.for.You.
 cheesecake
 cheesecake
 ‘If you had visited me at home yesterday, I would have baked a cheesecake for you.’ (MA: CF, Past Orientation)
- (7) **law** tifiḍuri l-fiafla ʔala l-ʔagal saʔateen l-ʔaan, tinbasTi wi
 law attend.**IMPRF**.You.SG.F the-party at least two.hours **the-now**, enjoy.**IMPRF**.You.SG.F and
 tigdi wagt fielu maʔana
 spend.**IMPRF**.2.SG.F time nice with.us
 “If you attend the party at least for two hours now, you would enjoy and have a wonderful time with us.” (MA: CF, Present Orientation)
- (8) **law** fiḍarti l-fiafla ʔala l-ʔagal saʔateen bukra, kaan tinbasTi
 law attend.**PRFV**.You.F.SG. the-party at least two.hours **tomorrow**, **kaan.PST**.3.SG. enjoy.**PRF**.You.F.SG.
 wi tigdi wagt fielu maʔana
 and spend.**PRF**.You.F.SG. time nice with.us
 “If you attended the party at least for two hours tomorrow, you would have enjoyed and had a wonderful time with us.”
 (MA: CF, Future Orientation)
- (9) *ʔða* fiḍarti l-fiafla ʔala l-ʔagal saʔateen bukra, tinbasTi wi
ʔða attend.**PRFV**.2.SG.F the-party at least two.hours **tomorrow**, enjoy.**IMPRF**.You.F.SG. and
 tigdi wagt fielu maʔana
 spend.**IMPRF**.You.F.SG. time nice with.us
 “If you attended the party at least for two hours tomorrow, you would enjoy and have a wonderful time with us.”
 (MA: CF, Future Possibility)

- (10) ?iða ti.zurtini fi bayti l?aan, fia.ʔaxbiz.lik cheesecake
 If you.F.visit.**IMPRF**.me at home.my now, **Fut**.bake.**IMPRF**.1.for.you.F cheesecake
 ‘If you visit me at home now, I will bake a cheesecake for you.’

(MA: Present Possibility)

Interestingly, the CF complement *law* always invokes counterfactuality regardless of the type of the predicate—stative or eventive—inside the antecedent clause, as in (11), (12), (13) and (14).

- (11) **law** ʔusfourik ma kaan maat l-ʔusbouʔ l-madie, kaan ʔaʔtraytallu
 law bird.your.F not **kaan.Past**.3.SG. die.**PRF**.3.SG.M the-week the-last, **kaan.Past**.3.SG. buy.**PRF**.I.for.it.
 gafaʃ ʒadeed
 cage new
 ‘If your bird had not died last week, I would have bought it a new cage.’ (MA: CF, Past orientation)

- (12) **law** ʔusfourik ma maat li.bukra, kaan ʔaʔtareelu gafaʃ ʒadeed
 law bird.your.F not die.**PERFV**.3.SG.M. until.tomorrow, **kaan.Past**.3.SG. buy.**PRF**.I.him cage new
 ‘If your bird did not die until tomorrow, I would have bought it a new cage.’

(MA: CF, Present to future)

- (13) **law** ʔusfourik ma yimout l?aan, aʔtraytallu gafaʃ ʒadeed
 law bird.your.F not die.**IMPRF**.3.SG.M. the-now, buy.**IMPRF**.I.for.it. cage new
 ‘If your bird does not die now, I would buy it a new cage’

(MA: CF, Present Orientation)

However, the following example (14) needs to be tested:

- (14) **!law** ʔusfourik ma kaan maat l-ʔusbouʔ l-ʒaay,
 law bird.your.F not **kaan.Past**.3.SG. die.**PRF**.3.SG.M. **the-week the-next**, **kaan.Past**.3.SG.
 kaan ʔaʔtraytallu gafaʃ ʒadeed
 buy.**PRF**.3.SG.him gate new
 ‘If your bird had not died next week, I would not have bought it a new cage.’ (MA: CF, Future orientation(!))

5 Research Questions:

1. Is MA past tense *real* or *fake*?
2. What is the semantic computation of the past in these environments?
3. What is the formal account for the CF complementizer *law*?

6 Discussion:

1. Diversity is rich across languages relative to expressing counterfactual conditionals. Counterfactual markings are possible to be lexically encoded by a specific complementizer in certain languages.
2. To the best of my knowledge, the only formal account that has investigated this phenomenon in Arabic is by Karawani (2014) for Palestinian Arabic (PA).
3. Following Ippolito (2013) and von Prince (2019) for “back-shifting” process, we shift eventualities from the evaluation world w at the evaluation time t into other possible worlds in the past.
4. We intuitively compare those worlds that have similar eventualities to w and t , in lights of Lewis (1973); Arregui (2005); Ippolito (2002, 2013). This is considered the first parameter “Similarity Parameter” (SIM) by Ippolito (2002, 2013).
5. In addition to the SIM parameter, we compare those closest worlds that are historically compatible with the evaluation world w at the evaluation time t . This is the second parameter “Historical Parameter” (HIST) by Ippolito (2002, 2013).
6. Therefore, MA past tense is best to be treated as a *real* tense rather than as a *fake* one in CF sentences with *law*.
7. Based on Cinque (1999)’s hierarchical structure, the CF complementizer *law* seems to scope over tense and aspect phrases. This scope effect licenses counterfactuality—in the spirit of Condoravdi (2001)’s analysis on the ambiguity of “might have” in English.

7 Proposal:

Here is an alternative proposal that is specifically tailored for a CF statement with the CF complementizer *law* relative to the following previous works Kratzer (1977, 1981, 1991) and then followed by Ippolito (2013):

1. Counterfactuality is lexically encoded in the case of the CF complementizer *law*. The proposed denotation is as follows in (15).

$$(15) \quad [[\mathbf{law}]]^{c,g,w,t} = \lambda p \in D_{\langle st \rangle} . \lambda q \in D_{\langle st \rangle} . \forall w' [p(w')=1 \rightarrow q(w')=1]$$

2. The predicted structure for the CF statement in MA will be as in (16):

$$(16) \quad (\text{PAST (PERF}_{\text{kaan}} (\forall \subseteq (\text{Law (SIM (HIST)(\varphi)) (\psi))))})$$

Siding with Ippolito (2013), the covert modal operator quantifies over two parameter: (1) the similarity (SIM) parameter and (2) the historical (HIST) parameter.

3. In lights of Hacquard (2006)'s default pragmatical principle "Preservation of Events Description Across Worlds, PED", I also propose the following:
 - a. Preserving the properties of events inside all CF worlds that are closest to the property of event in the evaluation world w at the evaluation time t .
 - b. Also, those closest worlds are historically compatible with the evaluation world w at the evaluation time t . I can call it "Preservation of Counterfactuality Description Across Worlds".
 - b. The function of this default pragmatic principle is to preserve properties of events across similar worlds that are historically compatible with the evaluation world w at the evaluation time t with the CF complementizer *law*; for instance, $\langle w' \langle_w w' \rangle$ reads as ' w' is closer to w than w'' '.

8 Summary:

1. Counterfactuality can be lexically encoded by a specific CF marking as in the case of *law*.
2. The empirical data supports the back-shifting process is triggered by the use of past perfect in the CF statements.
3. Accordingly, past tense is best to be treated as *real*, rather than *fake*.
4. An alternative pragmatic proposal regarding preserving properties of events across similar worlds to the evaluation worlds w at the evaluation time t , and that are also historically compatible in the past.

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