
L'interaction entre modalité et temps verbaux en anglais

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- 1 Declerck (2006) argues at great length that the core meanings and the basic uses of the English tenses concern the expression of temporal relations. However, it is well-known that certain tenses have uses that are at the same time temporal and modal (for example, the future tense) and that certain tenses have uses that would seem to be purely modal rather than temporal (for example, the forms *had come* and *wouldn't have found* in *If you had come tomorrow instead of today, you wouldn't have found me at home*). In this article we will discuss some of these uses with a view to finding the answers to the following questions:

- (a) What is the origin of the modal interpretation of particular tense forms?
- (b) Why do only some tenses have modal uses?
- (c) Should we distinguish a 'modal indicative mood' next to the 'indicative mood', the 'imperative mood' and the 'subjunctive mood'?

1. The *I thought that . . .* -construction

- 2 This construction is analysed in detail in Declerck and Reed (2005). The main findings are the following. There are two modal uses of *I thought that . . .*, namely its use to express 'suspended factuality' (implicating present counterfactuality) of the complement clause, as in (1a), and its use to express discourse tentativeness, as in (1b).
- (1)
 - a. [What a surprise to meet you!] *I thought* you were in Australia!
 - b. [If you don't mind my asking,] *I thought* you might do me a favour.
- 3 In both cases *thought* is a normal preterite form: it locates the situation of thinking in the past and implies that the referent of the subject of *thought* did entertain the thought in question at some past time. The modal interpretations of the object clauses

of *thought* arise by way of implicature from the fact that the thinking is not located at the time of speech in spite of the fact that this is the most relevant time for the speaker (unless the sentence forms part of a discourse in the past tense). In other words, the use of the past tense is a conscious violation of Grice's (1975) 'Maxim of Relation (Relevance)'. Because he does not use *I think*, the speaker suggests that he is not committed to the current applicability of the proposition of the complement clause.

- 4 In the case of suspended factuality, as in (1a), the motivation for the expression of noncommitment is that the speaker wants to suggest that he is not sure whether the content of the complement clause would be true if applied to the present world. In the case of discourse tentativeness, as in (1b), the noncommitment is suggested because the speaker wishes to make the content of the complement clause appear unimportant (to himself) in the present.
- 5 These findings are relevant to the research questions (a)-(c) formulated above. The answer to question (a) [What is the origin of the modal interpretations?] is to be found in the conscious violation of the Gricean Maxim of Relevance by the use of the preterite where the present tense would be the unmarked choice. The answer to question (b) [Why do only some tenses allow modal interpretations?] is as follows. Although *I have thought* would also locate my thinking before S (speech time), it could not yield the two modal interpretations of *I thought* because in English there is an opposition between 'past time-sphere tenses' and 'present time-sphere tenses' (Declerck 2006: 152). Unlike the past tense (preterite), the present perfect locates the time of the situation referred to in the present time-sphere, more specifically, in the 'pre-present zone' within the latter, and in doing so expresses a link with the present. The preterite, by contrast, implies a contrast between the past and the present. This is the reason why the preterite has to be used in sentences like *He is no longer the brilliant scientist that he {was/ *has been}*. Needless to say, the modal interpretations of *thought* crucially depend on the presence of a sense of contrast between past and present.
- 6 As to question (c) [Do we need to posit a separate 'modal indicative mood?'], the answer is that the data in connection with *I thought that . . .* fail to suggest that this is necessary. The two modal interpretations follow from the normal temporal use of the preterite, viz. locating a situation in the past, and the violation of a Gricean Maxim. The important thing is that *thought* is a quite normal indicative tense form. The fact that it can produce modal interpretations does not support the view that there is a separate 'modal indicative mood' in English.

2. 'Formal anteriorization' or 'distancing'

- 7 By 'formal anteriorization' or 'distancing' (or 'modal backshifting') we mean the phenomenon that in certain contexts verb forms are replaced by forms that seem to express a higher degree of 'pastness' in order to produce a more 'distant' (remote from reality) interpretation. Compare the following:
 - (2)
 - a. *I will be happy if Sue comes.*
 - b. *I would be happy if Sue came*
 - c. *I would have been happy if Sue had come.*

- 8 Sentence (2b) is the result of applying distancing to both verb forms of (2a). The result is that the 'open' condition (i.e. Sue may or may not come, but the speaker treats her coming as a real possibility) expressed by *if Sue comes* in (2a) is turned into a condition which is semantically 'tentative' (Declerck & Reed 2001: 93), i.e. *if Sue came* expresses that it is not impossible but rather unlikely that Sue will come. Sentence (2c) is the result of applying distancing to both verb forms of (2b). The result is that the tentative condition expressed by *if Sue came* is turned into a counterfactual one: Sue did not come (or, if *tomorrow* is added, will not come).
- 9 It should be noted that distancing is not the same thing as 'backshifting' (Jespersen 1932: 151) in indirect speech. Backshifting is the adaptation of the tense form of an independent clause when that clause is syntactically subordinated to a clause in the past tense: the original absolute tense (as in *I have seen her*) is replaced by a relative tense (as in *He claimed that he had seen her*). Unlike an absolute past tense form, which simply locates a situation in the past, a relative past tense form, which expresses simultaneity in a past 'temporal domain',¹ is never backshifted — see Declerck (2006: 384). Consider:
- (3) a. [He said:] "I *will be* happy when she *is* back." (*Will be* is an absolute tense form, while *is* is a relative tense form expressing simultaneity.)
b. He said that he *would be* happy when she *was* back. (Both forms are 'backshifted' forms and are therefore relative tense forms: *would be* expresses posteriority, while *was* expresses simultaneity with the time of the situation referred to by *would be*.)
 - (4) a. [He said:] "I *was* happy until you *came*." (*Was* is an absolute tense form, while *came* is a relative one — see Declerck 2006: 155).
b. He said that he *had been* happy until I *came*. (Only the absolute form is backshifted.)
 - (5) a. [He said:] "I *would be* happy if she *came*." (Both forms are distanced forms.)
b. He said that he *would be* happy if she *came*. (Neither form is backshifted because both are distanced forms.)
 - (6) a. [He said:] "I *would have been* happy if she *had come*." (Both forms are distanced forms.)
b. He said that he *would have been* happy if she *had come*. (Neither form is backshifted because both are distanced forms.)
- 10 Clearly, the gradual increase in semantic 'remoteness' (distance from reality) which we observe in conditionals like (2b) and (2c) is expressed by verb forms which are partly different from those resulting from applying backshifting to the same sentences in indirect speech: *would be happy* and *came* can become *would have been happy* and *had come* as a result of distancing — in (2c) — but not as a result of backshifting — see (5)-(6): (6b) is the indirect speech version, not of (5a) but of (6a). Moreover, we notice in (5b) and (6b) that distanced forms are not backshifted in indirect speech. Furthermore, while both absolute and relative past time-sphere tense forms can be distanced, as in (2b) and (2c), relative past time-sphere tense forms cannot be backshifted: this is why *would be* and *came* remain unchanged when (5a) is reported as (5b).
- 11 Besides conditionals like (2b)-(2c), there are other cases in which a tense form can or must be distanced. Here we can mention the well-known uses of 'modal pasts', which express either counterfactuality or discourse tentativeness, and of 'modal past perfects', which express a combination of anteriority and counterfactuality. A first use is illustrated by the following, where the present tense could be used in the head clause

but is replaced by the past tense for reasons of discourse tentativeness (i.e. to render the request less direct).

- (7)
 - a. I {*hoped/thought*} you could help me clean up this mess.
 - b. I {*wanted/hoped*} to have a word with you.
 - c. I *wondered* if you could spare me a minute.
- 12 Similarly, the preterite form of verbs like *expect*, *intend*, *hope*, *mean*, *suppose*, *want*, etc. can be distanced, so as to become a past perfect, in order to add the idea of counterfactuality (more specifically, the implicature of nonactualization) of the complement clause situation:
- (8)
 - a. I {*had hoped/had thought/had meant/had wanted*} to see her {*yesterday/today/tomorrow*}.
(Implicates: 'but I {*did not/do not/will not*} see her'.)
 - b. He {*had supposed/had thought/had expected*} that his mother would pay his debts.
(Implicates that she did not.)
- 13 After the verb *wish* (in any tense) and *if only*, a modal past expresses simultaneity plus counterfactuality, whereas a modal past perfect expresses a combination of anteriority and counterfactuality:
- (9)
 - a. {*If only/I wish/I wished*} I *had* her telephone number.
 - b. {*If only/I wish/I wished*} she *had given* me her telephone number.
- 14 Similarly, if the head clause uses a present time-sphere tense, a clause introduced by *as if* or *as though* uses a modal past to express simultaneity plus counterfactuality, and a modal past perfect to express anteriority plus counterfactuality:
- (10)
 - a. He {*has treated/treats/will treat*} me as if I *was* his slave.
 - b. People now avoid me as though I *had murdered* my parents.
- 15 In all these examples, the modal interpretations of the verb forms are due to the mechanism of modal distancing, and never to the context or to an implicature (though the modal interpretation itself may sometimes be an implicature, as in (8a-b).)
- 16 The above observations about distancing (formal anteriorization) are relevant to the research questions (a)-(c) formulated at the beginning of this article. We have noticed that distancing always results in the use of a past time-sphere tense (i.e. preterite, past perfect, conditional tense or conditional perfect). A present perfect can never be used as a distanced form. We have also seen that the modal interpretations of the examples discussed are always due to the mechanism of modal distancing and never to the context or to implicatures. Moreover, it has been pointed out that distancing is a different phenomenon from backshifting. Backshifting is an adaptation of a tense when the temporal relation to be expressed changes, and is therefore a natural mechanism in the English tense system. By contrast, distancing has nothing to do with a change of temporal relation but has no other purpose than to bring forth some modal interpretation. Verb forms like *would come* can be distanced (*would have come*) but cannot be backshifted. All this suggests that the use of formally anteriorized tenses has nothing to do with the working of the English tense system and therefore does not belong to the realm of the indicative mood. Clearly, there is some positive evidence

here supporting the existence of a 'modal indicative mood'. The fact that some modal preterite forms can be replaced by past subjunctives corroborates this conclusion:

- (11)
 - a. I wish I {was/were} dead.
 - b. He treats me as if I {was/were} his slave.
 - c. If Bill {was/were} here, Samantha wouldn't be here.

3. The notion 'not-yet-factual at *t*'

3.1. Definition

- 17 As is well-known, finite clauses express tensed propositions, and propositions create 't-worlds', that is, 'possible worlds' which are anchored to a particular time *t*. Thus, *I will be in Paris tomorrow* creates a future *t*-world (*t* = tomorrow) of which the untensed proposition 'I be in Paris' is true. It is also generally assumed that finite clauses express one of the epistemic values figuring on the scale 'true – probably true – possibly true – unlikely to be true – false'. The actual world as we know it, and which we can refer to as the 'S-objective world' because it is temporally anchored to S (speech time), comprises every proposition that is true at S, i.e. any proposition that represents the actualization of a situation as 'factual-at-S'.²A situation is factual-at-S if it either actualizes at S (e.g. *I am writing an article, London lies on the Thames*) or has actualized before S (e.g. *Caesar was a Roman emperor*). A proposition is true of some 'hypothetical' *t*-world if it is probably true, possibly true or unlikely to be true of the S-objective world. Thus, *Jim may come tonight* represents John's coming as factual in a hypothetical future world. A proposition is true of a 'counterfactual' *t*-world if it is false of the S-objective world. Thus, [If] John had been here now . . . represents John's being here as factual in a counterfactual S-world (and hence as counterfactual in the objective S-world).
- 18 A clause representing a proposition as true in the objective S-world (e.g. *London lies on the Thames*) is not normally treated as modal. As far as propositions are concerned, 'hypothetical' and 'false' are the only accepted epistemic modal values. It follows that only a hypothetical or counterfactual situation can be the referent of a modal clause.
- 19 Although it is widely accepted, this view of epistemic modality is incomplete. Some hypothetical *t*-worlds can be characterized in terms of a modal concept which has been neglected in the literature on modality, viz. the idea that the relevant modal world is envisaged by the speaker but not yet factual at the time *t* to which it is anchored. This kind of *t*-world, which we will refer to as 'not-yet-factual at *t*', is evoked by any expression that has posteriority as part of its meaning. The clearest cases are those in which the reference is to a future world. Thus, *John will take the exam tomorrow* evokes a modal world which is not-yet-factual at S but is envisaged or predicted at S to become factual at some future time *t*. It follows that any situation that is temporally located in that future *t*-world by the future tense is 'not-yet-factual at S'.³Another type of example is *I saw Sam before she had seen me*. Here the situation of the *before*-clause is represented as not-yet-factual at the time of the head clause situation. The sentence can therefore be paraphrased as 'I saw Sam at a time when she had not yet seen me', or 'When I saw Sam, it was not yet a fact that she had seen me' — see section 3.2 below.
- 20 Sentences representing the actualization of a situation as not-yet-factual in a *t*-world combine two ideas, viz. 'counterfactual at *t*' and 'predicted or otherwise envisaged at *t*'.

The latter idea implies 'envisaged as possibly actualizing at a time posterior to t' , i.e. 'envisaged as factual in a hypothetical world that might exist at a time posterior to t' . Envisage thus refers to something weaker than prediction. It just means that the speaker reckons with the possibility that a situation will actualize.

- 21 We thus claim that the factuality value 'not-yet-factual at t' ' is a combination of the values 't-counterfactual' and 't-hypothetical'. Thus I will do it tomorrow implies that I am not doing it at S and have not done it before S (counterfactuality at S) and at the same time predicts or envisages my doing it in a hypothetical future world anchored to tomorrow. Since the combination of the values 't-counterfactual' and 't-hypothetical' is different from either of the constituting values, we conclude that there are not three but actually four theoretically possible factuality values, viz. [$\hat{}$ factual], [(purely) counterfactual], [$\hat{}$ (purely) hypothetical] and [$\hat{}$ not-yetfactual at t']. The latter three are possible realizations of 'nonfactual' ('not factual'). Unfortunately, this means that the term 'nonfactual' is potentially ambiguous. We have to distinguish carefully between the factuality value 'nonfactual' (which contrasts with 'factual' only) and the three subvalues which 'nonfactual' allows, viz. 'counterfactual', 'hypothetical' and 'not-yet-factual at t' '. In order to avoid confusion, it is better not to use the label 'nonfactual' in the sense of 'not-yet-factual at t' ', as I have done in earlier publications (e.g. Declerck 1991a: 105, 1991b: 153-154) in connection with not-yet-factual before-clauses (as in I saw him before he had seen me, which is interpreted as 'He had not yet seen me when I saw him' — see section 3.2below).
- 22 As a further illustration of the above claims, let us consider the following sentences:
- (12)
 - a. Abraham Lincoln abolished slavery.
 - b. Jimmy Carter is the President of the U.S.A.
 - c. [I'd be surprised] if Fred was helping his sister right now.
 - d. Joan will bake a cake tomorrow.
 - e. [John promised] that he would fix the car.
- 23 In (12a), the actualization is factual in the objective S-world. In (12b), the actualization is (purely) counterfactual in the objective S-world. The actualization referred to in the *if*-clause of (12c) is (purely) hypothetical in the speaker's S-world because the speaker does not really know whether Fred is helping his sister or not. In (12d), the actualization referred to is not-yet-factual in the speaker's S-world.⁴And the actualization of the situation referred to in the *that*-clause of (12e) is not-yet-factual in John's past t -world, i.e. in the objective world holding at the time when John made his promise.
- 24 It should be clear now that each of the terms 'factual', '(purely) counterfactual', '(purely) hypothetical' and 'not-yet-factual at t' ' can be used in two ways. Firstly, they can refer to one of the factuality values which the actualization of a situation has in a given t -world. Secondly, the four terms can also be applied to particular kinds of t -worlds. For example, the conditional world evoked by *I would feel safer if he was with me* is a subjective counterfactual S-world because the situations that are factual in this S-world are counterfactual in the objective S-world.
- 25 This means that the following conclusions have been reached:
- (a) There are four types of t -worlds. We can call them 'factual', 'purely counterfactual', 'purely hypothetical' and 'not-yetfactual at t' ', respectively.

- (b) The same four labels can be used for the four (mutually exclusive) factuality values that (the actualizations of) situations can have in given t-worlds.
 - (c) 'Not-yet-factual at t' combines the ideas 'counterfactual at t' and 'hypothetical at t'. However, it is incompatible with the idea 'purely counterfactual at t' as well as with the idea 'purely hypothetical at t'.
- 26 In sum, the factuality values that may be applicable to a given nonfactual t-world can be represented as in figure 1.

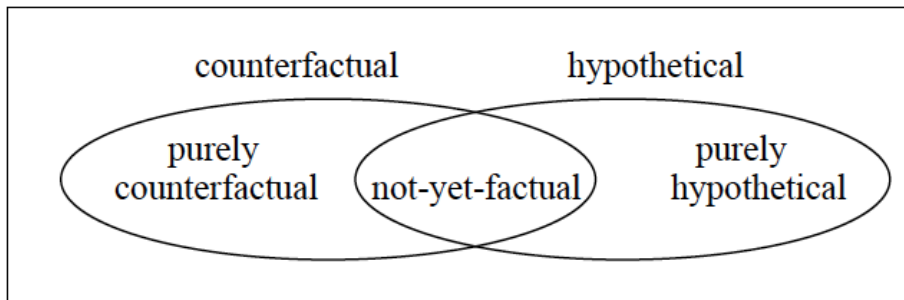


Figure 1. – Representation of the factuality values in nonfactual t-worlds

3.2 Cases of situations represented as not-yet-factual at t

- 27 As noted above, a situation that is referred to in the future tense is typically not-yet-factual in the objective S-world. Similarly, a situation that is temporally located posterior to a past time, as in [*John promised that*] *he would fix the car*, is not-yet-factual in the objective world holding at that past time.
- 28 In certain contexts, 'not-yet-factuality at t' can be expressed by modal indicative tense forms, more specifically by the past tense and the conditional tense. In those cases the 'pastness' of the tense cannot be explained in terms of location in time or purely temporal relations. For instance, the preterite may refer to a future situation rather than to a past one. The 'pastness' of the tense must therefore be due to modal distancing. The following illustrate this:
- (13)
 - a. It is (high) time we *changed* the code. (The situation of our changing the code is not-yet-factual in the objective S-world: though it has not actualized yet, its actualization is envisaged for the future.)
 - b. I'd rather you *left* next week. (similar)
 - c. I wish it *would stop* raining. (The stopping of the rain is not-yet-factual in the speaker's S-world. Its actualization in a future world is envisaged as a possibility, however slight.)
- 29 In (13a-b), 'not-yet-factuality as S' is expressed by the preterite. In (13c), it has to be expressed by the conditional tense because (as we have seen in section 2) after *I wish* the preterite is reserved for the expression of S-counterfactuality. Thus, in *I wish I had a son*, the situation of my having a son is represented as counterfactual in the objective S-world.
- 30 Needless to say, 'formal anteriorization' (modal distancing) is essential in examples like *It's high time we fixed the car*, since the 'not-yet-factual at S' meaning cannot be expressed by **It's high time we fix the car*. In *I wish John would kill his wife* the expression of posteriority creates the not-yet-factual meaning, while the anteriorization of the

marker of posteriority (*will*) produces a tentative interpretation, i.e. the possibility that John will kill his wife is seen as rather unlikely. The above sentence can be compared with *I hope John twill/*wouldu kill his wife*, where the second aspect of meaning cannot be expressed.

31 The tenses used to express not-yet-factuality in t-worlds that hold at a time other than S (i.e. in the past or future) are the same as those used in connection with S-worlds:

- (14)
 - a. It was (high) time we *changed* the code.
 - b. I wished it *would stop* raining.
 - c. [When we return from our holiday] it will be (high) time we *changed* the code.
 - d. Before the end of the day you will wish that it *would stop* raining.

32 This illustrates that, unlike backshifting, modal distancing happens independently of the nature of the tense used in the head clause.

33 Another typical context in which a not-yet-factual meaning can be produced by modal distancing consists of sentences involving a *before*-clauses in the past perfect. These can represent the actualization of the situation referred to as not-yet-factual in the t-world that holds at the time of (the actualization of) the head clause situation. For example:

- (15)
 - a. I saw Sam before she *had seen* me.
 - b. [Another fifteen to twenty thousand snakes perished in the winter of 1998-9,] when a sudden frost caught them before they *had descended* below the frost line. (www)

34 The actualization of the *before*-clause situation is represented here as not-yet-factual at the time of the actualization of the head clause situation. Thus, in (15a) it can be paraphrased in either of the following ways:

- (16)
 - a. I saw Sam at a time when she had not yet seen me.
 - b. Sam had not yet seen me when I saw her.

35 These paraphrases make it clear that the interpretation of the *before*-clause is neither factual nor purely counterfactual in the past t-world in which my seeing Sam is factual. A t-factual interpretation of the *before*-clause would be triggered by the past tense:

- (17) I saw Sam before she *saw* me. (= 'We saw each other, but I saw her first.' Note that there is reference to two different past t-worlds here: that in which my seeing Sam is t-factual and that in which Sam seeing me is t-factual. The latter t-world follows the former in time. This posteriority relation is exclusively expressed by *before*.)

36 A purely counterfactual interpretation of the *before*-clause situation would be triggered by the conditional perfect:

- (18)
 - a. I saw Sam just before she *would have seen* me [if I had not quickly turned into a side street].
 - b. I paid the electricity bill two days before the company *would have cut off* my supply. (The conditional perfect is possible because of the implicit condition 'if I had not paid the bill'.)

37 The interpretation which *had seen* does receive in *I saw Sam before she had seen me* is a 'not-yet-factual at t' reading: in the world anchored to the time of my seeing Sam, the situation of her seeing me was counterfactual but its actualization was envisaged. 'Envisage' here refers to a weaker notion than prediction. It just means that I reckoned

with the possibility of her seeing me. Nothing is said about whether she also saw me or not — see footnote 5.

- 38 Another case in which a not-yet-factual reading is possible concerns adverbial *until*-clauses and *before*-clauses depending on a finite or nonfinite clause which itself depends on a head clause whose verb is an intensional verb like *intend*, *decide*, *promise*, etc., which implies that the actualization of the situation of the complement clause is posterior to the time of the intensional attitude (i.e. the intention, decision, promise, etc.). In such a context, the subjective world in which the actualization of the situation of the temporal clause introduced by *until* or *before* is factual is posterior to the t-world in which the making of the decision, promise, etc. is factual. Compare:
- (19)
 - a. Meg nagged Tim until he gave in. (Both situations are interpreted as factual in the objective S-world.)
 - b. Meg decided to nag Tim until he gave in. (The *until*-clause situation was not-yet-factual at the time of the beginning of the nagging and the nagging itself was not-yet-factual at the time when Meg made her decision. It follows that the *until*-clause situation was also not-yet-factual at the time of Meg's decision. Note that we do not know from this sentence whether or not Tim eventually gave in.)
 - c. Meg nagged Tim for three weeks before he gave in. (Both situations are represented as factual in the objective S-world.)
 - d. Meg decided {to wait/that she would wait} for some time before she replied to Tim's letter. (The *before*-clause situation was not-yet-factual at the time of the beginning of the waiting, which was itself not-yet-factual at the time when Meg made her decision. It follows that the *before*-clause situation was also not-yet-factual at the time of Meg's decision. Note that we do not know from this sentence whether or not Meg eventually replied to Tim's letter.)
- 39 Other temporal clauses depending on an infinitive clause functioning as object of *decided*, *promised*, *intended*, etc. are interpreted as not-yet-factual, not in the t-world in which the infinitival clause situation actualizes, but in the t-world in which the decision, promise, etc. actualizes:
- (20) I intended to call up Bill {when he was at home/after Meg had left/ while he was at his office}. (The time clause situation is factual in the hypothetical t-world in which my calling up Bill is factual, but both these situations — my calling up Bill and the time clause situation — are not-yet-factual at the time of my intention, i.e. they are not-yet-factual in the objective S-world in which the existence of the relevant intention is a past fact.)
- 40 In this example, the 'not-yet-factual at t' interpretation is not induced by the temporal conjunction (as is the case in *I saw Sam before she had seen me* — see section 3.3) but by the relation of posteriority that is implicit in the meaning of the verb *intend*.

3.3. The origins of 'not-yet-factuality at t' and the means of expression

- 41 As noted in 3.1, 'not-yet-factuality at t' always requires reference to a posterior time. This is self-evident in connection with examples like *John will kill you*, *I thought that John would kill you* and *I wish John would kill you*. It is also clear in *It's high time we fixed the car*, where fixing the car can only be envisaged for the future, and in *I decided to tell him the truth {when/after/while} he came in*, in which not only the telling but also the

actualization of the time clause situation can only be interpreted as following the decision.

42 Posteriority also plays a crucial role in *before*-clauses. To see this clearly, it is necessary to say something more about the temporal structure that is expressed by a sentence involving a not-yet-factual *before*-clause. Let us consider the following example:

- (21) I saw Tim before he *had seen* me.

43 The *before*-clause here receives a not-yet-factual interpretation: the sentence can be paraphrased 'I saw Tim at a time when he had not yet seen me' or 'Tim had not yet seen me when I saw him'. As explained in Declerck (1991b: 153-154, 2006: 709-710), the temporal structure of the sentence is as follows:

- (a) *Saw* locates the situation (of my seeing Tim) in the past, thus representing it as a past fact.
- (b) *Before* means 'before the time that'.⁵This means that *before* locates an implicit t_1 posterior to the time of *saw*.
- (c) Since t_1 is posterior to the time (t) of *saw*, the t_1 -world anchored to t_1 is not-yet-factual at (t = the time of *saw*).
- (d) *Had seen* represents Tim's seeing me as anterior to the implicit t_1 .

44 At first sight this seems a purely temporal structure, which only involves times and temporal relations. The times are the times of the actualizations of the situations referred to by *saw* and *had seen*, plus the implicit time t_1 inherent in the meaning of *before*. The temporal relations are the relation expressed by the preterite (= 'past relative to S ') and the relation expressed by the past perfect (= 'anterior to a t in a past temporal domain'), plus the posteriority relation (= ' t_1 posterior to t ') expressed by *before* (but not by a tense form). However, there are two factors that induce the reading that the situation of Tim's seeing me was not yet a fact at the time when I saw him. One is the fact that the situation of Tim's seeing me is temporally related to an implicit posterior time t_1 . The other is the fact that the tense in the *before*-clause is 'modally distanced' ('formally anteriorized'): we use *had seen* instead of the past tense form *saw*. This tense choice is important, because *I saw Tim before he saw me* is naturally interpreted as meaning that Tim did see me after I had seen him.⁶The same is true of *before*-clauses referring to the future: to convey the not-yet-factual reading we will use the present perfect (*I will see Tim before he has seen me*) although there is no purely temporal reason to express anteriority. The reason for using *has seen* is that the unmarked interpretation of the corresponding present tense form *sees* in *I will see Tim before he sees me* is different, viz. 'Tim will see me, but only after I have seen him first.' We therefore need to apply modal distancing to get a not-yet-factual reading.

45 In sum, the use of a past perfect or present perfect in a *before*-clause that is to receive a not-yet-factual-at- t interpretation is not the result of the application of a principle that is inherent in the English tense system (like backshifting) but is the result of the application of the principle of 'modal distancing' ('formal anteriorization') which has no other purpose than to produce a modal interpretation. In general, distancing strengthens the sense of hypotheticality (compare *If he comes . . .* with *If he came . . .*) or expresses counterfactuality (as in *If he had come . . .*). However, in *before*-clauses it evokes a 'not-yet-factual at t ' reading. As noted before, distancing can produce shifts (e.g. from *would be* to *would have been*) which cannot be effected by backshifting. This means that, unlike backshifting, modal distancing is not a mechanism that is inherent

in the English tense system (see also section 2 above). As noted before, backshifting typically occurs in indirect speech, for example, when *John {died/has died}* is reported as *I told Bill that John had died*. This kind of backshifting is no more than the phenomenon that anteriority to a past orientation time has to be expressed by the past perfect whereas anteriority to S has to be expressed by the past tense or the present perfect. By contrast, the modal distancing which we observe in the *before*-clauses of *I saw him before he had seen me* and of *I will see him before he has seen me* is the phenomenon that a tense form expressing anteriority (to the implicit *t* inherent in the meaning of *before*) is used instead of a tense form expressing simultaneity. The purpose is purely modal, in this case to convey a 'not-yet-factual at *t*' interpretation of the *before* clause situation. The fact that an anteriorized form is used in not-yet-factual *before*-clauses is therefore not surprising. We noted in section 2 that using an anteriority form where there is no purely temporal reason for using it is a widespread device to trigger particular epistemic modal meanings. For example, instead of saying *I intended to visit him*, which merely expresses that at some past time I had the intention of visiting him, we can use *I had intended to visit him* to express that, in spite of my past intention, I did not and will not visit him. Distancing here triggers a counterfactual interpretation of the situation referred to in the infinitive clause. As we have seen, the same mechanism can also induce tentative modality, as in *I wanted to have a word with you* and *I would be happy if she arrived tomorrow*, which are tentative versions of *I want to have a word with you* and *I will be happy if she arrives tomorrow*.

4. 'Strong' versus 'weak' not-yet-factual interpretations

46 We can speak of 'strong not-yet-factuality' if, as in the above examples, the expression of posteriority is accompanied by formal anteriorization of the tense form. We can speak of 'weak not-yet-factuality' if there is posteriority but no anteriorization (distancing), as in the following examples:

- (22)
 - a. *I will visit them tomorrow*. (The actualization of the situation is located in a *t*-world that is posterior to the speaker's *S*-world. This implies that my visit is not-yet-factual at *S*.)
 - b. *John promised that he would visit me the next day*. (The actualization of the situation is located in a *t*-world that is posterior to the past *t*-world in which the making of the promise is factual. This implies that John's visit was not-yet-factual at the time of his promise.)
 - c. *I decided to wait until the shop opened*. (similar)

47 These examples illustrate the obvious fact that any situation whose actualization is conceived of as posterior to a time *t* is not yet factual at *t*. This is 'weak not-yet-factuality': the idea of 'not-yet-factual at *t*' inevitably forms part of the interpretation of the clause, but it is not the predominant aspect of meaning. Strong not-yet-factuality means that the extra mechanism of modal distancing puts emphasis on the idea of not-yet-factuality. In other words, whereas there is weak not-yet-factuality at *t* whenever a situation is posterior to the *t* in question, there is strong not-yet-factuality only if the 'not-yet-factual at *t*' meaning is *linguistically emphasized* by the use of an anteriorized tense form. In some cases this use is obligatory. The following examples further illustrate the distinction:

- (23)

- a. “[We think] it’s time something’s *done*,” says Donald Skadden. (Wall Street Journal) (The sentence in the present tense only expresses weak not-yet-factuality. It just means ‘It is time to do something’ – a meaning which can also be expressed by *It’s time something should be done*. The idea that nothing has been done yet is not foregrounded.)
 - b. It’s time something *was done* [about it]. (In this case strong not-yet-factuality is expressed. The idea ‘It is time to do something about it’ forms part of the interpretation, but the foregrounded aspect of meaning is the idea that nothing has been done about it yet. The combination of these two ideas naturally leads to the interpretation that something should already have been done about it, i.e. that taking measures has been postponed for too long.)
- 48 For at least some speakers, *before*-clauses need not use an anteriorized form if a t-factual reading is ruled out by the context in which the *before*-clause is used. For example, compare the following:
- (24)
 - a. She read the letter before I *read* it.
 - b. She read the letter before I *had read* it.
 - c. She tore up the letter before I *{had read/read}*it.
- 49 Because of the posteriority relation expressed by *before*, the situation of my reading the letter is automatically weakly not-yet-factual in the t-world in which the actualization of the head clause situation is factual. The function of using the anteriorized (distanced) form *had read* in (24b) is therefore to bring not-yet-factuality into focus, because the use of *read* in (24a) suggests that I read the letter too. In the latter case the speaker focuses on the t-factuality of the *before*-clause situation in the objective S-world rather than on the not-yet-factuality of the situation in the anterior t-world established by the head clause in the past tense. In (24c), the head clause pragmatically excludes the possibility of actualization of the *before*-clause situation, so that the idea of not-yet-factuality comes to the fore regardless of whether there is anteriorization or not. This explains why at least some speakers can replace *had read* with *read* without creating confusion.

4.1. Strong ‘not-yet-factuality at t’ and the research questions

- 50 The first two research questions were: ‘Why do only some tenses have modal uses?’ and ‘What is the origin of a modal interpretation?’. The answers are simple. The origin of a strong ‘not-yet-factual at t’ interpretation is the application of the rule of formal anteriorization (modal distancing). The possibilities allowed by this rule are well-defined. As a rule, the distanced form has to be a preterite (*If he came . . .*), a past perfect (*If she had come . . .*), a conditional tense form (*I would be happy if . . .*) or a conditional perfect (*I would have been happy if . . .*). In other words, a distanced form is a past time-sphere form, not a present time-sphere tense form like a present tense, a future tense, a present perfect,⁷ or a future perfect. So, it naturally follows from the origin of the modal ‘not-yet-factual at t’ interpretation that only some tense forms can express this reading.
- 51 The third research question was whether we should distinguish a ‘modal indicative mood’ next to the ‘indicative mood’, the ‘imperative mood’ and the ‘subjunctive mood’. The fact that unlike backshifting, distancing is not a mechanism inherent in the English tense system suggests that the answer to this question is positive.

5. The status of the 'future tense': tense or mood?

- 52 The issue is also pertinent to the moot point whether *will* in *Bill will arrive tomorrow* is a future tense auxiliary or a modal auxiliary. Quirk et al. (1985: 213) claim that “there is no future tense in English” and that *will* is a “modal verb”. The modality in question is said to be prediction. Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 208) speak of “the lack of a future tense in English” and claim that futurity is a use of *will* that falls “within the general idea of epistemic modality” (p. 188) but they do not specify what kind of epistemic modality is expressed in *Bill will arrive tomorrow*. This point of view is shared by many other linguists. However, our position, defended in Declerck (1991a: 8-13, 2006: 102-106), is that *will arrive* is a future tense form because it locates Bill’s arrival in the future. We subscribe to Lyons’ (1977: 68) and Comrie’s (1985: 9) view that tense is a grammaticalized means of locating the actualization of a situation in time. Linguistically speaking, *will arrive* does exactly this (viz. locate a situation in time) and nothing else. It is therefore a future tense form.⁸Of course, it is true that the predicted situation is not-yet-factual at S, but this is simply because any situation that is predicted to actualize later than S is not yet factual at S. This is a question of how the objective world is rather than of how it is linguistically *represented*. As is true of any tense, the function of the future tense is to represent a situation as actualizing at a particular time. If the time in question is represented as posterior to S, the situation is automatically not-yet-factual at S (in the weak sense of the term). There is nothing in a future tense form to hint at the possibility of strong not-yet-factuality: there is no anteriorization or any other formal means of focusing attention on ‘not-yet-factuality at S’.
- 53 Moreover, in connection with the future tense, the idea ‘not-yet-factual at S’ appears to have the strength of an implicature only. There are sentences in the future tense in which the idea is blocked (= prevented from arising) or cancelled by an element in the sentence or in its context or by our pragmatic knowledge of the world. Consider:
- (25)
 - a. I will still be here tomorrow. (*Still* blocks the implicature that I am not yet here at S.)
 - b. [For the moment you can’t beat me. You’ll be able to beat me when I’m fifty] because you *will be* ten years younger than me. (The addressee is already ten years younger than the speaker, but it is only when the speaker becomes fifty that this difference of age will play a decisive role. The future tense is used here to put the ‘temporal focus’ (Declerck 2006: 573-576) on that future time.)
- 54 Similarly, the sentence *John will be in London tomorrow* does not rule out the possibility that John is already in London at S, so that the sentence can be used in a context inducing this interpretation. However, it actually only predicates something of tomorrow and locates John’s being in London at that time. It does not say anything about the present. In the same way as *John was in London yesterday* implicates that John is no longer in London at S, *John will be in London tomorrow* implicates that John is not yet in London at S. These implicatures are due to the Gricean Maxim of Relation (relevance): other things being equal, the present is more relevant to the speaker than the past or the future. So, if a situation is actualizing at S, it should in principle be referred to in the present tense. If another tense is used, the hearer has a right to conclude that the situation is not actualizing at S. However, this conclusion is a cancellable implicature, as is clear from *John was in London yesterday — in fact, he still is*.

Conclusion

55 We have drawn attention to a number of cases in which a tense form has a modal implication or implicature. Some of these (for example, the modal interpretations of the object clauses of *I thought that . . .*) follow naturally from the use of a mechanism that is inherent in the English tense system (e.g. using the past tense to put the 'temporal focus' on the past rather than on the present). However, there are also cases in which a modal interpretation, especially that of strong not-yet-factuality at *t*, is the result of formal anteriorization (modal distancing) of a verb form — a mechanism which has no other use and therefore does not form part of the English tense system. We can hardly escape the conclusion that these anteriorized verb forms do not form part of the indicative mood in English, hence that we have to assume the existence of a separate 'modal indicative mood' in English.

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NOTES

1. A temporal domain is a set of times which is such that each time is related to one of the other times by a tense form. See Declerck (1991a: 20, 2006: 121) for a more detailed definition.
2. We use *situation* as a cover-term for anything that can be expressed by a verb phrase. According to Lyons (1997), a situation is either a state, an action, a process (= change, development) or an event (= a nonagentive dynamic situation, e.g. a fall). The term *actualize* is used as a cover-term for all the verbs that are typically associated with a kind of situation. The sentence *The situation is actualizing* can thus be said of a state that is holding, an action that is being performed, a change that is taking place or an event that is happening. In what follows, 'the situation' will often be shorthand for 'the actualization of the situation'. Thus, the formulation 'The preterite locates the situation in the past' is short for 'The preterite locates the actualization of the situation referred to in the past'.
3. When referring to the future tense in this article we will especially be concerned with its modal implication. This does not alter the fact that we treat the future tense as a real tense – see note 5 on page 62.
4. It should be noted, however, that not all sentences in the future tense yield a 'not-yet-factual at S' interpretation. As we will see in section 4, this reading is an implicature which can be blocked by another constituent of the sentence (as in *I will still be here tomorrow*) or cancelled by contextual information or by pragmatic knowledge.
5. The conjunction *before* has developed from a phrase of the form 'before the time that' or 'before then that', variously realized in Old English as *toforan þam timan þe*, *foran to þam timan þe* and *toforan þam þe* – see Mitchell (1987: 379). The reduction to *before that* in Middle English, and later to *before*, has not changed this meaning. *Before* still means 'before the time that', in which *the time* functions as an implicit orientation time as far as the use of the tense in the *before*-clause is concerned. That is, in *I saw Tim before he had seen me*, the form *had seen* represents Tim's seeing me as anterior to an implicit $t_{[Q]}$, thus locating it in the $t_{[Q]}$ -world which is not-yet-factual at t . Hence the not-yet-factual interpretation of the *before*-clause, which is vague as to the question whether or not Tim saw me after I saw him. This vagueness can be resolved by the context, as in *I saw Tim before he had seen me, so I called out his name* versus *I saw Tim before he had seen me, so I had time to hide into a porch because I didn't want him to see me*.
6. However, it will be pointed out at the end of section 3.4 that at least for some speakers the tense of the *before*-clause does not need to be 'anteriorized' if a t-factual reading is already ruled out by the context in which the *before*-clause is used. An illustration of this is *He burned the letter before I read it*.
7. As we have seen, there is only one exception to this rule, viz. the use of the present perfect (rather than the present tense) in the not-yet-factual *before*-clauses of sentences like *I will try to see him before he has seen me*.
8. Declerck (2006: 105-106) argues that the 'predictability' sense of *That will be the milkman* (which is similar to French *Ce sera le laitier*) follows from the fact that the speaker uses the future tense to put the 'temporal focus' on some future time: "*That'll be the milkman* implies something like 'as you will see when you open the door'." This means that *will be* is a normal future tense form which is used in accordance with one of the principles inherent in the English tense system, viz. that the choice of tense can be determined by the choice of 'temporal focus'.

RÉSUMÉS

Cet article se veut une réflexion sur des emplois particuliers de temps verbaux qui engendrent une interprétation modale. L'auteur explique deux mécanismes qui sont à la base de l'interprétation modale et de ce fait indique les raisons pour lesquelles ces implications modales sont uniquement associées à certaines formes verbales. Il défend l'hypothèse que le premier mécanisme, un choix marqué de 'temporal focus', est aussi utilisé différemment dans le système verbal en anglais, ce qui implique que la forme verbale en question est tout d'abord un indicatif. Mais le deuxième mécanisme, appelé « modal distancing », ne fait pas partie intégrante du système verbal en anglais. Ce constat implique qu'en anglais, il est nécessaire de distinguer un 'mode indicatif modal' à côté du mode indicatif. L'analyse proposée permet à l'auteur de souligner l'importance d'un type de modalité épistémique qui est souvent négligé, à savoir l'idée que la situation n'est pas encore réalisée au moment du repère.

This article examines a number of cases in which the special use of a tense form produces a modal interpretation. The author describes two mechanisms leading to such an interpretation and in doing so explains why only some tenses can yield modal readings. He argues that the first mechanism (*viz.* a marked choice of 'temporal focus') is also used in other ways in the English tense system, so that the resulting tense forms are normal indicative forms. However, the second mechanism (called 'modal distancing') does not form part of the English tense system. This supports the view that next to the indicative mood we also need to posit a 'modal indicative mood' in English. One of the interesting features of the article is that it draws attention to an epistemic modal value that is usually neglected, namely the idea that a situation is 'not-yet-factual at t'.

INDEX

Mots-clés : anglais, distanciation modale, focalisation temporelle, modalité, mode indicatif modal, not-yet-factual at time t, temps

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AUTEUR

RENAAT DECLERCK

K.U. Leuven Campus Kortrijk E. Sabbelaan 53, B-Kortrijk 8500, Belgium

renaat.declerck@kuleuven-kortrijk.be