

The English Modal *had*

Daniel Siddiqi and Andrew Carnie
Carleton University and University of Arizona
daniel_siddiqi@carleton.ca and carnie@u.arizona.edu

There exists a non-standard counterfactual construction in English, often called the "plupluperfect" or "superpluperfect" (Wilson 1993), that is created from the combination of *had* + *have* (1):

1. a. **If I had have** known about John, I wouldn't have come.
b. It would have been better **had I have been** there.
c. **If I had have been** there, I could have helped.

It is often reduced to one of many phonological and orthographic variants, many of which create homophonous forms with another counterfactual construction employing *would* + *have* (2):

2. a. **If I'd have known**, I could have helped. (ambiguous)
b. **If I had've known**, I could've helped.
c. **If I had of known**, I could of helped.
d. **If I'da' known**, I coulda' helped. (ambiguous)

The construction, while non-standard, is certainly not new-- it dates as far back as the 15th century when English began to use analytical constructions rather than subjunctive voice for counterfactuals (Moelecki 2000). A number of different arguments have been postulated for the construction: that it is a redundant repetition of the perfect marker (Wilson 1993; Huddleston & Pullum 2002); that the second *have* contributes the counterfactual meaning (and is thus an irrealis marker) (Molencki 2000); that it is a phonological harmony effect (Molencki 2000); and that it is a psychological effect (Boyland 1995). This construction is separate from the other two instances in English where two *haves* can appear together: 1) the combination of perfect and possessive main verb (e.g. *I have had this book for too long*) and 2) the combination of perfect and the obligation pseudo-modal (e.g. *I have had to leave for some time*). In fact, all four forms of *have* (the perfect marker, the counterfactual modal, the pseudo-modal, and the main verb) can co-occur (e.g. *We would have been done already if John hadn't have had to have his way*). The purpose of this short paper is to argue based on distributional evidence that the simplest account of this pattern is that the first *have*, which is always realized as *had*, is in fact an irrealis modal and the second is just a standard instance of perfect aspect.

The unlikelihood of a phonological account. The modal *had* undergoes V to T movement past Neg or is projecting a TP above Neg (*If I had not have been there...*) and it also undergoes T to C movement (*Had I have been there...*). In both positions, the movement results in an intervening head separating *had* from the *have* that marks perfect aspect. This indicates that it is a separate syntactic element from the second *have*, strongly suggesting that a non-syntactic account, such as phonological accounts, are unlikely.

Complimentary distribution with other modals. The *had* + *have* construction cannot co-occur with other modals, even those that carry counterfactual meaning. *Had* + *have* is in complimentary distribution with every other modal + perfect voice construction.

3. a. *If I **would have have** been there, I could have helped.

- b. *If I **could have have** been there, I could have helped.

Dialectal Variation with *would + have*. The *had +have* construction is in dialectical variation and carries the precisely same meaning of the also non-standard counterfactual *would + have* construction (Huddelston & Pullum 2002). In fact, since both reduce to 'd in cases such as (2a&d above) , in such reductions it is impossible to tell which modal is being used. Since the *would + have* construction is the more novel (Huddleston & Pullum 2002), it is not unreasonable to assume that the *would + have* construction is a reanalysis of the reduced *had + have* construction.

4. a. If I would have been there, I would have stopped them.
b. If I had have been there, I would have stopped them.

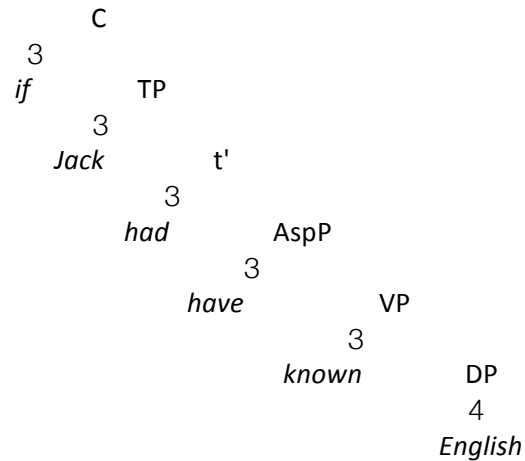
Consistent past-tense marking. The first *have* only appears as the past tense form *had* (***If I have have been there on time, things would have ended better**). Similarly, past tense is marked on all the other irrealis modals of English when receiving counterfactual interpretation (*could, would, should, might*) and, similarly, the counterfactual meaning is prohibited from the present tense form of those irrealis modals (*can, will, shall, may*). These modals, including *had*, are members of a set of English verbs called present-preterit verbs (Milward & Hayes 2011) that are always past tense in morphological form regardless of present tense meaning (such as *got*). Curiously, some of the other non-modal counterfactual constructions in English such as the periphrastic pseudo-modal construction (*ought to*) and the mostly obsolete subjunctive voice (*If I were to*) also carry this unconditioned past tense marking.

Licensing of unmarked auxiliary (rather than participial form). Like all other modals, *had* licenses the unmarked form of the following auxiliary (If I had *have* known; I should **have** known; I should **go**). Only the modals (including *do* and *to*) of the English auxiliaries license bare forms. The other auxiliaries (Asp and Voice) license one of the two participial forms (*I am **running**; I have **run***).

Licensing of four way reduction pattern of *have*. The modal *had* licenses the four way reduction pattern of *have* to *have*, 've, 'a, and *of* (see Kayne 1997): *If I had have known...; If I had've known...; If I had of known...; If had'a known*. This complete reduction pattern is only licensed by modals preceding the *have* aspect marker (***I of known English for years; *I 'a known English for years**)

Based on the above distributional qualities of the *had +have* construction, it is clear that the simplest account for it is that *had* is a modal (projecting a TP or always moved to T from a modal projection) and the phonologically reducing *have* that follows it is the aspect marker (see 5).

5. If Jack had have known English...



References

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