

English Conditional Inversion: A Construction-Based Approach

Jong-Bok Kim*

Kyung Hee University

Jong-Bok Kim. 2011. English Conditional Inversion: A Construction-Based Approach. *Language and Information 15.1*, 13–29. Conditional sentences also can be formed by inversion of subject and auxiliary, but it happens only in a limited environment. This paper addresses grammatical constraints in conditional inversion and how they behave differently from the regular conditional clauses based on corpus investigations. Our corpus search reveals many different types of conditional inversion constructions, indicating the difficulties of deriving inverted conditionals from movement operations. In this paper, we provide a construction-based approach to the inverted conditional construction. The paper shows that the most optimal way of describing the general as well as idiosyncratic properties of the inverted conditional constructions is an account in the spirit of construction grammar in which a grammar is a repertory of constructions forming a network connected by links of inheritance. (**Kyung Hee University**)

Key words: conditional inversion, construction-based, inheritance, counterfactual, corpus-based

1. Introduction

English allows many different types of subject-auxiliary inversion (SAI) constructions, as exemplified by the following attested examples (Green 1980, Quirk et al. 1985, Biber et al. 1999):

- (1) a. Can you believe what he said? (Yes-no question)
- b. Never had he more enjoyed spending money. (Negative inversion)
- c. He has read more articles than have his classmates. (Comparative inversion)

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- d. May he live to be one hundred and twenty with the eyesight of a falcon! (Wishing)
- e. Don't you even touch that! (Emphatic negative inversion)
- f. Had I had enough money I would have bought a new car. (Conditional Inversion)

All these inversion constructions involve the repositioning of the auxiliary in front of the subject, which is traditionally termed as *I-to-C movement* or *SAI constructions* (cf. Geis 1985, Haegeman 2009, 2010). Of these varieties of inversion examples, this paper concerns the conditional inversion construction exemplified in fl. This conditional inversion construction has at least three different sub-types with respect to the auxiliary type in the inverted clause:¹

- (2) a. Had she told him she was a princess, Peter could not have been more impressed. (COCA: 2005 FIC)
- b. Were I eighty years younger, I might be honestly tempted by you. (COCA 2009 FIC)
- c. Should gas rise above \$4.85, the producers would have to repay the Treasury. (COCA: 2002 NEWS)

In terms of semantics, a2 and b2 are counterfactual in the sense that the inverted clause denotes a proposition that the speaker believes to be false whereas c2 is just contingent in the sense that the occurrence of the main clause situation depends on the inverted clause (cf. Iatridou 2000, Iatridou and Embick 1994, Huddleston and Pullum 2002). In this paper, we try to answer the following research questions related to these three types of conditional inversion:

- What are the grammatical properties of the conditional inversion construction?
- Are there any grammatical constraints in using the conditional inversion?
- What are the relationships between the canonical *if*-conditional and conditional inversion constructions?
- Are there any relations with other inversion constructions?

In doing so, we will first look into basic properties of the conditional inversion construction, and see if our corpus data reflect the properties that the literature has discussed so far. We then sketch a construction-based, lexicalist view to provide an answer to the question regarding the relationship of the conditional inversion construction with other SAI constructions.

¹ The corpora we have used in this study include 410 million words COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English), 400 million words COHA (Corpus of Historical American English), and 100 million words BNC (British National Corpus). All these are available online.

2. Conditionals vs. Conditional Inversion

2.1 Formal Properties of the *if*-Conditionals

In English, there are at least four different *if*-conditional constructions, depending on the tense or modality and interpretation (Karttunen and Peters 1979):

- (3) a. If you heat water to 100 degrees Celsius, it boils. (Type 0)
 b. If it rains this afternoon, your garden party is/will be doomed. (Type 1)
 c. If I won the lottery, I would buy a car. (Type 2)
 d. If you had done your job properly, you would have been promoted. (Type 3)

All these conditionals are similar in that they present two events in the format *If situation A, (then) situation B* and indicate that situation A has to be assumed in order for situation B to be asserted.² However, these four subtypes are different with respect to interpretation and presupposition. One main difference lies in whether the antecedent *if*-clause is true (indicative) or false (counterfactual) in a situation where it is evident or agreed upon (cf. Karttunen and Peters 1979). That is, as in a3, Type 0 conditionals express a relationship between two general events that are normally true in the situation described. Type 1 conditionals as in b3 describe a possible event in the future depending on the *if*-clause. Type 2 conditionals like c3 are called ‘hypothetical’ in the sense that the main clause event is unlikely but possible given the situation described by the *if*-clause. Finally Type 3 conditionals as in d3 are counterfactual in the sense that the main clause situation is impossible within the context of the *if*-clause.

One well-known property of the conditionals is, as noted here and well-known in traditional grammar, that there is a restriction on the tense and modality in each of these conditionals. For example, the counterfactual one requires the *if*-clause to be in the past perfect while its main clause needs to have the combination of the past auxiliary with present perfect:

- (4) a. If he had spoken in Vietnamese or Spanish, I never would have unlocked the door at that moment. (COCA: 2009 FIC Bk:WarYears)
 b. *If he spoke in Vietnamese or Spanish, I never would have unlocked the door at that moment.
 c. *If he had spoken in Vietnamese or Spanish, I never would unlock the door at that moment.

However, this strict constraint can be violated on the main clause with appropriate situations:

² The conjunctive marker *if* can be replaced by *assuming*, *given that*, *provided that*, and so forth.

- (5) a. If that had happened, what would the economic look like today? (COCA: 2011 NEWS)
- b. If I had not started this program, I would probably be depressed like my friends. (COCA: 2010 ACAD)

In such examples, the *if*-clause describes an unreal event, but the main clause tells us a potential outcome at a not past but present point.

Note that unlike this type of counterfactual inversion, there is also another conditional where a subjunctive appears in the *if*-clause:

- (6) a. If you were my girl, I would give you the best one in my life. (COCA: 2006 SPOK)
- b. If no one were around, he would even pass the red ones. (COCA: 1993 FIC)

Just like examples in 5, these examples also mark a situation as not actually being the case at the time of speaking.³

The *if*-clause can also include an auxiliary verb like *should*:

- (7) a. If he should leave her, she would no doubt be telling someone in her whining voice. (COCA: 1995 FIC)
- b. If anyone should be ready, it should be them. (COCA: 2003 NEWS)

These conditionals in 7 are not counterfactual: the auxiliary *should* places a strong contingent relation between the *if*-clause and the main clause.

2.2 Formal Properties of the Conditional Inversion

As noted, conditional sentences also can be formed by the inversion of subject and auxiliary, but it happens only in a limited environment. That is, conditional inversion is possible only with *had*, *were*, and *should*, not licensing inversion examples like the following (Newmeyer 1998, Fillmore 1999):

- (8) a. If he has seen the film, I wouldn't be shocked.
- b. *Has he seen the film, I wouldn't be shocked.
- (9) a. If she was standing here with me, he would tell you the truth.
- b. *Was she standing here with me, he would tell you the truth.
- (10) a. If she would plead guilty and agree to testify against her husband, the state would recommend it.

³ The subjunctive verb *were* is nowadays often replaced by *was*:

- (i) If I was a girl, I wouldn't want to be a football player because everyone would be yelling at me or would look at me in a strange way. (COCA: 1992 NEWS)

- b. *Would she plead guilty and agree to testify against her husband, the state would recommend it.

The inverted conditional clause functions as a modifier as observed from its distributional possibilities: it can appear in sentence initial, medial, or final as attested from the following corpus examples:

- (11) a. [Had they done something], this animal would not have taken my family. (COCA 2009 SPOK)
- b. We, the judges, [had we been the legislators], would have found such an intention sensible or morally or politically desirable. (BNC: GWN 177)
- c. I should probably never have known either of the team any better [had not misfortune fallen upon them]. (COHA 1932 MAG)

These distributional possibilities support the modifier status of the inverted conditional clause (Bhatt and Pancheva 2005).

The conditional inversion can also appear in embedded clauses:

- (12) a. I felt that [had I done that], I would have been satisfying something that was there. (BNC K6M 349)
- b. Her tone suggested that [had she been close enough] she would have elbowed him in the ribs. (COCA: 2009 FIC Bk:SheShootsConquer)
- c. There never has been a year since my first nomination in which I could not have made a million [had I taken the side of privilege and favoritism]. (TIME 1925)

As the data illustrate, the conditional inversion can appear within the CP or even within the relative clause, indicating that the conditional inversion is not a main clause phenomenon.

An intriguing constraint also exists in the inverted auxiliary. It cannot be Neg-contracted, unlike the canonical SAI construction (cf. Iatridou and Embick 1994, Bhatt and Pancheva 2005):

- (13) a. Hadn't we all suffered?
- b. Weren't they in my name?
- (14) a. *Weren't weather always perfect, they would be unable to give or express life.
- b. *Hadn't it been for them, the mountains might have barred the way for a hundred years.

As noted in 13, the contracted negation can be in the I(nfl) position or sentence initial position in canonical Sub-Aux inversion constructions. However, this is not possible with the conditional inversion as shown in 14. The proper position for the negation in the conditional inversion is right after the subject:⁴

- (15) a. Were weather not always perfect, they would be unable to give or express life.
 b. Had it not been for them, the mountains might have barred the way for a hundred years. (COCA 2002 MAG)

Our corpus data also provide interesting examples where the marker *if* is still present in conditional inversion:⁵

- (16) a. The old man would never have left her here **if had** he **seen** it. (COCA 2008 FIC)
 b. “Apparently, **if had** I **read**” a little more of Thomas Jefferson, “I should have concluded that Judge Henderson was correct to forestall the implementation of Prop 209.” (COCA: 1997 NEWS)
 c. He could go through with it, if **had** he any hope of getting out of Pakistan soon. (COCA: 2009 FIC)

Literature (Haegeman 2010) has argued that in the conditional inversion, the inverted auxiliary and the marker *if* are in a complimentary distribution, leading to take the *if* in conditionals as a C (complementizer). These examples indicate that we cannot simply assume that *if* here is a complementizer since the inverted auxiliary is already in the C position in traditional transformational grammar.

2.3 Semantic and Pragmatic Properties

In *if*-conditionals, we can also emphasize the condition expressed by the *if*-clause. In particular, when the condition is emphasized as exclusive, the form *only if* can be used:

- (17) a. They would have been eligible for Tony consideration [only if] they had transferred to a Broadway theater. (COCA: 1994 NEWS)
 b. Africans would only be given the right to reside permanently in a town or city [only if] they had been born there. (COCA: 1998 ACAD)

⁴ Even though we cannot find examples where the contracted negation form is in the initial position, our corpus search for COHA gives us the uncontracted *not* in this position:

- (i) a. Had not individuals made the attempt, the Roman Catholic superstition would have continued. (COHA 1826 NFR)
 b. Had not improvement been rapid, their untrained zeal might perhaps have flagged. (COHA 1896 FIC)

We can take such examples as archaic forms though a question remains how this has changed.

⁵ As a reviewer points out, there are clearly variations in the acceptability of the examples in 16: Not all native speakers I consulted with accept such examples.

As such, the *only if* tells us an exceptional case required for the event of the main clause to happen.

Slightly differently, when the exceptional condition expresses a possibility that has no effect on the main clause, we can use *even if*:

- (18) a. [Even if] he had shown up there, it would not have mattered. (COCA: 1996 NEWS)
 b. [Even if] I had asked, that wouldn't have meant anything. (COCA: 2002 FIC)

Inverted conditional clauses also behave differently from the regular conditional clauses. For example, the non-inverted conditional antecedents may be modified by focus adverbs such as *only* and *even*, but this is not possible with inverted conditional antecedents according to Iatridou and Embick (1994):

- (19) a. [Only if] Peter had come would Susan have left.
 b. *[Only] had I thought that would I have called him.
- (20) a. [Even if] she had been allergic to dill, he would have served the stuffed grape leaves.
 b. ?(?) [Even] had Joe served truffles Kathy would not have been happy.

However, our corpus search gives us many examples where the degree focus expression *even* appears in conditional inversion:

- (21) a. But the new rule, even had it been in effect, wouldn't have helped Rosser. (COCA 2002 NEWS)
 b. Even had I mustered the nerve to speak of it, nothing would have happened. (COCA 2005 FIC)
 c. Even had she known his birthday, she wouldn't have scoured Albuquerque thrifts. (COCA 2006 FIC)

The reason for the unacceptable conditional inversion with the focusing marker *only* can be attributed to the fact that the inverted clause conveys old information. As noted by Iatridou and Embick (1994), there are many environments where *only* cannot be in the focus position:

- (22) a. He (*only) admits (*only) that he stole the tapes.
 b. He heard the rumor (*only) that Bill had stolen the tapes.

A variety of the conditional inversion examples we have identified from the corpus show us that the subject is either a pronoun or a definite NP:

- (23) a. Had [we] not packed snowshoes, we could not have followed its trail. (COCA: 2008 MAG)

- b. Had [my father] succeeded in becoming a Catholic priest, I would still have been born. (COCA 2010 FIC)
- (24) a. Were [I] more rational, I would be more certain about it.
- b. Were [Karl] alive today, he'd be frantically updating it.

Unlike these counterfactuals, the contingent inversion allows its subject to be an indefinite:

- (25) a. Should [people] be concerned, what should they do? (COCA 1999 SPOK)
- b. Should [gas] not be available to supply these plants, it could trigger a serious economic crisis. (COCA 2000 ACAD).

Even though most of the contingent inversion examples found in our corpus data have a pronoun as the subject, we also find examples like 25 where the subject is not definite.

The fact that the counterfactual inversion represents old information can also be supported from *it*-cleft examples. The regular *if*-conditional clause can be clefted, but the inverted clause cannot (cf. Iatridou and Embick 1994):

- (26) a. It is [if John had come] that Mary would have left.
- b. *It is [had John come] that Mary would have left.

The regular *if*-conditional clause can also be an answer to a *wh*-question, but not the inverted one:

- (27) A: When/under what circumstances would Mary have come?
- a. B: If she had been offered many artichokes.
 - b. B: # Had she been offered many artichokes.

These facts further support the constraint on the information structure for the inverted conditionals.

2.4 Similarities with Questions

As noted, the *if*-clause establishes an uncertain situation in order for the main clause situation to be considered. In this sense, the *if*-clause provides us with a world of reference while the main clause offers one relevant outcome of the world being that way. The *if*-clause thus indicates 'uncertainty':

- (28) a. If you are going to the party, I'll go too.
- b. If I had known the fact, I would have come sooner.

In these examples, the *if*-clause can be interpreted as a question as given in 29:

- (29) a. Are you going to the party? Then, I will go.

- b. Had I known the fact? Then, I would have come sooner.

The *if*-clause is equivalent to a question, inviting an answer linked to the main clause. This kind of question meaning is also represented in the conditional inversion. For example, the conditional inversion clause in 30 can be interpreted as a question:

- (30) a. Had I known the fact, I would have come sooner.
 b. Were he to do that, he'd be making a big mistake.

There are more similarities between *if*-conditionals and questions. For example, English has a construction in which speakers pose a question and immediately make a statement:

- (31) a. Are you ready? Ok, you can leave.
 b. You are not going? You'll regret it.

This is what conditionals do too: the *if*-clause asks a question, and the main clause makes a statement.

There is also an environment where *if* introduces a question. Consider the indirect questions introduced by the complementizer *if*:

- (32) a. He asked [if] you were coming to the party.
 b. She was wondering [if] you were still angry with her.

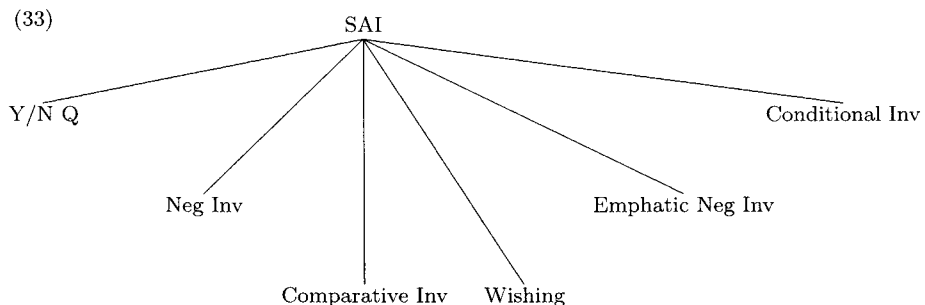
Verbs like *ask* and *wonder* introduce an indirect question with the marker *if*. Even if the marker *if* does not introduce a conditional, the clause marks 'uncertainty'.

3. A Construction-Based Perspective

3.1 Form and Functional Constraints

The *if*-conditionals and conditional inversion data we have seen so far indicate the difficulties of deriving inverted conditionals from movement operations. In this paper, we provide a construction-based approach to the inverted conditional construction.

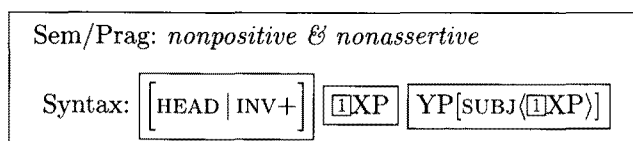
As we have seen earlier in (1), English employs many different SAI (Subject-Aux Inversion) constructions as given in 33 (cf. Kim and Sells 2008):



These constructions have one shared formal property such that the auxiliary is inverted in the sentence initial position as have been accepted by traditional grammar and others. However, the remaining question is, as Fillmore (1999) and Goldberg (2006) have suggested, if there are other shared functional properties. The set of SAI constructions, linked or derived from the prototypical sentences, are different from prototypical sentences in many respects. For example, the SAI constructions cannot stand alone, are dependent upon the main clause, and denote non-positive assertions. Considering the typical conditional inversion in 34, we can easily identify these non-prototypical properties:

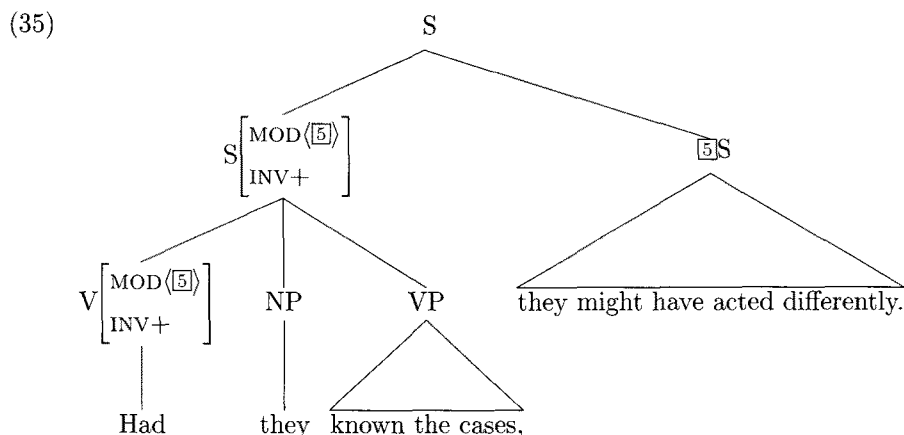
- (34) a. Had they known the cases, they might have acted differently.
 b. Were you in our shoes, you would show the same prudence.
 c. Should you leave the company, these funds are yours.

The inverted conditional clause in these counterfactuals a34 and b34 as well as in the contingent conditional in c34 are all non-declarative speech acts and do not assert or presuppose the truth of the proposition. That is, the conditionals here do not assert or presuppose that they knew the cases, you are in our shoes, or you leave the company. The antecedent clauses here cannot stand alone, depending upon the main clause. SAI constructions display the three common attributes: non-positive, non-asserted, and dependent. These common attributes on the SAI can be represented as constructional constraints in Figure 1:

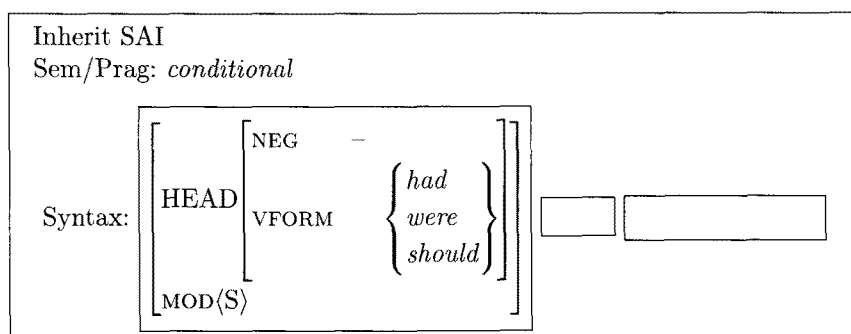


[Figure 1] SAI in English

The constructional constraints in Figure 1 specify that in terms of semantics and pragmatics, SAI constructions have non-positive and non-assertive illocutionary force. In terms of syntax, SAI constructions are inverted and have three sisters consisting of an inverted auxiliary, subject XP, and the predicate, as represented in the following tree structure:



Even if the conditional inversion inherits the common attributes of the SAI constructions constraints in Figure 1, as we have seen earlier, the conditional inversion has its own constructional constraints. That is, as we have seen, the auxiliary form values in conditional inversion are restricted to *were*, *had* and *should* and the inverted clause modifies the main clause. In addition, the auxiliary cannot accompany the contracted negation *n't*. These morphosyntactic as well as conditional semantics are non-prototypical properties of the SAI, but are the properties of conditionals by themselves as stated in Figure 2.⁶



[Figure 2] Conditional Inversion

The conditional inversion constructions, inheriting the properties from the SAI, will thus also observe the constraints in Figure 2. These constraints basically will allow us not to generate examples like the following:

⁶ As illustrated in Kim and Sells (2008), the VFORM value in English is canonically divided into two subtypes *finite* and *nonfinite*. The former type has three subtypes *pres* (*present*), *past*, and *plain* whereas the latter type has as its subtypes *base*, *prp* (*present-participle*), *psp* (*past-participle*), and *inf* (*infinitive*). In addition to these classifications, we we introduce *had*, *should*, *were* as subtype VFORM values of the *past*.

- (36) a. *Has he known what was in it, he wouldn't have opened it.
 b. *Shall there be a need, we can always call for help.
- (37) a. *Weren't it for your help, we'd be in trouble now.
 b. *Hadn't you invited me, I wouldn't have known about this.

Examples in 36 are simply out since the inverted auxiliary verbs cannot be in conditionals, though they can appear in other SAI constructions:

- (38) a. Never has he had to play in this much pain.
 b. Shall there be any more pain?

Examples in 37 are also not licensed because the auxiliary verbs carry the NEG feature though again nothing is wrong to have this value in other SAI constructions:

- (39) a. Weren't they always blue?
 b. Why hadn't you worked with him in the past?

As we have seen here, the conditional inversion clause carries a MOD feature originated from the three auxiliary verbs *had*, *were*, and *should*. Compare the sample lexical information between *had* and *has*:⁷

- (40) a.
$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \langle \text{had} \rangle \\ \text{HEAD} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{AUX} \quad + \\ \text{NEG} \quad - \\ \text{VFORM} \quad \textit{had} \end{array} \right] \\ \text{MOD} \langle \text{ (S) } \rangle \end{array} \right]$$
- b.
$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \langle \text{has} \rangle \\ \text{HEAD} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{AUX} \quad + \\ \text{VFORM} \quad \textit{has} \end{array} \right] \\ \text{MOD} \langle \quad \rangle \end{array} \right]$$

The differences between *had* and *has* thus come from the feature value of NEG and MOD. While *has* has neither NEG nor MOD value so that they can appear in the main clause and with the contracted negation, the inverted *had* cannot be negated and need to modify a main clause. In British English, it is often assumed that the main verb *have* has also an AUX feature:

⁷ Both the inverted and noninverted auxiliary *had* also select a subject and a VP[*psp*] as its complement, blocking examples like the following:

- (i) a. *You had [working with him in the past].
 b. *Had you [working with him in the past].
 c. *Had, [they might have acted differently].

Examples like (ic) are simply out since *had* combines with only a finite S. See Kim and Sells (2008) for further details.

- (41) a. He had a lot of money.
 b. Had he a lot of money?

We then expect a similar possibility in conditional inversion. In fact, this expectation is born out from our corpus data:

- (42) a. Had he a choice, he would never have chosen the life struggle of morbid obesity. (COCA 1992 NEWS)
 b. Had he his druthers, he would have liked to forge a new era of human-animal relations in Dr. Harmony's fat butt. (COCA 2002 FIC)

In addition, note that the modified main clause can be not only a declarative, but also an interrogative or imperative:

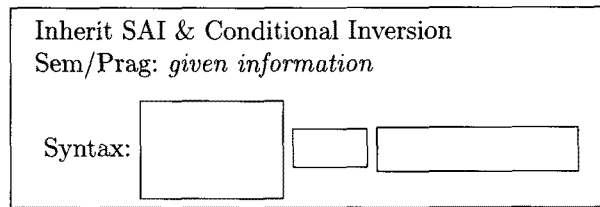
- (43) a. Had they tried that route, how far back would he have gone? (BNC: CGL 1754)
 b. Were he to do it, would it have an impact on the people voting in the House? (COCA: 1993 SPOK)
 c. Should she open it, what will she find? (COCA: 2008 FIC)
- (44) a. Should it not clear in a few days, make an appointment with your gynecologist. (COCA: 1993 MAG)
 b. Should you get an infection, check in with your gyno so she can diagnose and treat it ASAP. (COCA: 2008 MAG)

These constructional constraints specified here are thus *sui generis*. That is, we cannot predict these properties from other general principles. Note that we need to subclassify the inversion conditionals into two subconstructions: counterfactual and contingent. One clear difference we have observed is that the inverted clause in the counterfactual conditionals denotes given information. This explains why the counterfactual conditionals do not occur in the *it*-clefts and other places designated as focus positions, whose data we repeat here again:

- (45) a. *It is [had John come] that Mary would have left.
 b. It is [if John had come] that Mary would have left.

To reflect this information packaging constraint on the conditional inversion, we are led to assign this as a low-level constraint to counterfactual inversion constructions in Figure 3:

As indicated here by the empty values in the three sisters in Syntax, the counterfactual inversion construction inherits its syntactic information from SAI and conditional inversion constructions but has its own semantic and pragmatic constraints.



[Figure 3] Counterfactual Inversion

3.2 More on Construals

As pointed out by Haegeman (2010), it has been proposed in literature (Larson 1990, Declerck 1997, among others), temporal clauses can have both high and low construals:

- (46) a. I saw Mary at Seoul when [she claimed [that she would leave]].
 b. High construal: at the time that she made that claim
 c. Low construal: at the time of her presumed departure

The example in a46 has both the high construal in b46 and low construal in c46. These two readings have, as claimed in Larson (1990) and Haegeman (2010), motivated a movement analysis for the operator *when*, as represented in the following two sources:

- (47) a. High construal: I saw Mary at Seoul [when_i [she claimed [that she would leave] t_i]].
 b. Low construal: I saw Mary at Seoul [when_i [she claimed t_i [that she would leave]]].

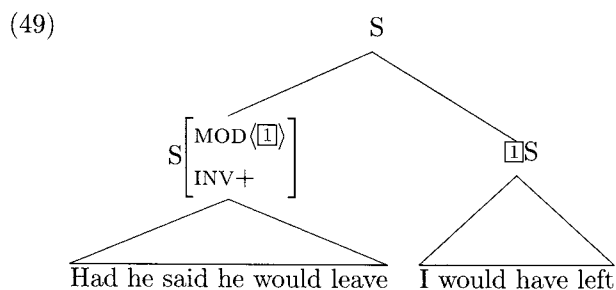
Note that we may not apply this kind of movement for both *if*-conditionals and conditional inversion since the conditional licenses only the high construal (cf. Bhatt and Pancheva 2005, Haegeman 2010):⁸

- (48) a. If he had said he would leave, I would have left.
 b. Had he said he would leave, I would have left.

In both cases here, the main clause is linked to the high construal in the sense that 'I would have left' only at the time he said he would leave.

In the present analysis with no movement operations, this high construal only reading is a natural consequence as seen from the following structure:

⁸ To keep movement operations for conditionals, Bhatt and Pancheva (2005) introduce the so-called 'world' operator.



There is simply no way to link the main clause to the embedded clause of the inverted antecedent *he would leave*.

However, note that our corpus examples allow the inverted clause to be linked with the main clause in the embedded clause:

- (50) a. Had we known it was going to happen, I'm certain we would have found a different way of dealing with our problem.
 b. Had you been present, Buzz, there was nothing you could have done.
 c. Had I met you sooner, I doubt I would have entered into it
 d. Had I not delved into my own emotions, I doubt the book would have resonated so deeply with readers.

These examples are expected given that the conditional inversion basically represents 'given' information that can function as a topic element. As is well known, topic-like adverbials can be linked to the embedded clause (cf. Hukari and Levine 1995):

- (51) a. [On Monday], I think that [Kim went home very late].
 b. [Yesterday], it seems that [Kim arrived home very early].
 c. [How often] do you think that [Fred was late this week]?

Whether we posit a movement operation for such or not, we can provide a parallel analysis for conditional inversion without positing an ad hoc operator like 'world' operator as assumed in Bhatt and Pancheva (2005).

4. Conclusion

As we have seen, the device of constructional inheritance enables us to represent the English grammar as a 'repertory' of constructions while acknowledging significant grammatical generalizations in SAI as well as conditional inversion.

We have first identified the proto-typical properties of the SAI constructions, different from canonical non-inverted sentences. We have also teased out the properties of conditional inversion constructions whose properties are partly inherited from their counterparts *if*-conditionals. The counterfactual and contingent inversion

thus share some properties with its supertype SAI as well as *if*-conditionals, but at the same time have their own constructional constraints which are not predicted from these related, high-level constructions. We have seen that this inheritance mechanism within the construction grammar perspective can provide an optimal way of describing the general as well as idiosyncratic properties of the inverted conditional constructions. That is, the inheritance mechanism allows us to capture the family resemblance among SAI constructions while mid- as well as lower-level generalizations are captured by sub-regularities on their sub-constructions. This way of explaining English grammar is an attempt to show the commitment in principle to account for the entirety of the language in question.

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