ACTIONALITY, ASPECT, TENSE, AND COUNTERFACTUALITY IN KUBAN KABARDIAN

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

1. INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

2. PAST TENSE AND COUNTERFACTUALITY

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

(1) English (Declerck & Reed 2001: 183)
   a. If I knew the truth, I would tell you. (present counterfactual)
   b. If I had known what I know now, I wouldn’t have appointed him. (past counterfactual)

(2) Lezgian (Nakh-Daghestanian > Lezgic, Russia; Haspelmath 1993: 396)
   Eger am naq’ ata-na-j-t’a,
   if she.abs yesterday come-aor-pst-cond
   za am vokzal.d-a gürüşmiş iji-da-j
   1sg.erg she.abs station-iness meeting do-fut-pst
   ‘If she had arrived yesterday, I would have met her at the station.’

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

(3) English (Declerck & Reed 2001: 178, 180)
   a. If I hadn’t been in the country now, I wouldn’t have been able to attend your wedding.
   b. If you had come tomorrow, you wouldn’t have found me at home.
Likewise, in Lezgian the Past Aorist is used in counterfactual protases with reference not only to the past, as in example (2) above, but to the future as well, as in example (4).

(4) Lezgian (Haspelmath 1993: 395)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Eger} & \quad \text{am} \quad \text{paka} & \text{ata-na-j-t'a} \\
\text{if} & \quad \text{she.abs} \quad \text{tomorrow} & \text{come-aor-pst-cond} \\
\text{za} & \quad \text{am} \quad \text{vokzal.d-a} & \text{gürüşmiş iji-da-j} \\
1sg.erg & \quad \text{she.abs} \quad \text{station-iness} & \text{do-fut-pst}
\end{align*}
\]

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

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

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

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

\[
\text{Se arrivavi (ipf) prima, vedevi (ipf) il film dall’inizio.}
\]

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

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

\[
\text{Si les chasseurs dansaient (ipf) n’importe quand, les jours se ressembleraient (fut+ipf) tous, et je n’aurais (fut+ipf) point de vacances.}
\]

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

\(^2\) Both the French original and its English translation are taken from <malyksiaze.net/us/ksiazka>, accessed 3 April 2020.
In French, the Imperfect person-number paradigm occurs in both parts of the counterfactual conditional: in the apodosis, it attaches to the future stem of the verb, while in the protasis it marks the main verb in non-past contexts, as in (6), or the perfect auxiliary in past contexts, as in (7). Importantly, neither in Italian nor in French is the counterfactual use of the imperfective tenses restricted to semantically imperfective (durative or habitual) contexts, being perfectly compatible with single completed events, hence the notion of “fake imperfective” (see Anand & Hacquard 2010; Ferreira 2014; 2016 for more recent analyses of counterfactual imperfectives in Romance and other languages).

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

3. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO KUBAN KABARDIAN

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

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

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3 French original: <fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Lokis>, accessed 3 April 2020, English translation: <en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Writings_of_Proper_Mérimée/Volume_5/Lokis>, accessed 3 April 2020.
or Russian are nouns or adjectives. The schematic structure of the Kuban Kabardian verbal complex is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The Kuban Kabardian verbal complex

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

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

(8) \[sə- qa- ŝ- ja- \text{Ian} \text{ə}-m \]
1SG.ABS-DIR- TEMP-3SG.ERG- see-OBL key-PL-ABS 1SG.IO-LOC-3SG.ERG-take-RE-PST

‘When he saw me, he took the keys away from me.’ (textual example) 4

(9) \[zərovje-r \ ma-terez- me \]
health-ABS NEG-in.order-COND 2SG.IO-BEN-carry-FUT-NEG

‘If your health is weak, you won’t bear (the hajj).’ (textual example)

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

(10) \[\text{ǯ} \text{əstune} \ a \ ŝape-r \ de \ jan-u \ d-e\text{-ne}-zape. \]
now DEM place-ABS 1PL big-ADV 1PL.ERG-DYN-CAUS-valuable

‘Nowadays we value this place very much.’ (textual example)

(11) \[dade-r \ mašine-xe-r \ š-a-še-m \]
grandfather-ABS car-PL-ABS LOC-3PL.ERG-sell-OBL DIR-go-PST

‘Granddad came to the place where they sold cars.’ (textual example)

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

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

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

5 The “stage setting” use at the beginning of narratives is a characteristic trait of pluperfect grams cross-linguistically; see, e.g. Plungian & van der Auwera (2006: 337); Sičinava (2008).
The same reasoning appears to follow from the description of conditional clauses in Besleney Kabardian by Klimenčenko (2014: 86–92). In realis conditional protases, tenses have their normal interpretation; see examples (18)–(20). Note that example (20) shows that the Future tense marker is not excluded from conditional clauses in Kabardian.

(18) Besleney Kabardian (Klimenčenko 2014: 88–89)

\[
\begin{align*}
\chi^\prime \omega & \quad \omega \cdot s \cdot s \cdot x \cdot x \cdot n \cdot e \cdot q \cdot d m \\
\omega & \cdot \text{iskusterjene} \cdot m \\
\text{OK} & \quad \omega \cdot \text{s} \cdot \text{iskusterjene} \cdot me \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[\text{‘OK, I won’t eat you if you are artificial.’} \quad \text{(textual example)}\]

(19)

\[
\begin{align*}
pape & \quad \text{č} \cdot \text{ew} \cdot r \\
\text{ja} & \cdot \text{sel} \cdot q \cdot me \\
\text{ali} & \quad \text{de} \cdot \text{rapji} \cdot a. \\
dad & \quad \text{fence-abs} \\
3 \text{sg} \cdot \text{erg} & \quad \text{paint-pst-cond} \\
\text{Ali} & \quad \text{com} \cdot \text{help-pst} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[\text{‘If Dad painted the fence (yesterday), Ali helped him.’}\]

(20)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ali} & \quad \text{ja} \cdot \text{urok-xe} \cdot r \\
\text{ja} \cdot \text{š} \cdot \text{ž} \cdot \text{a} \cdot \text{ne} \cdot me \\
\text{a} \cdot \text{ene} \cdot \text{pl-abs} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[\text{‘If Ali does (lit. will do) his homework, his mother will give him sweets.’}\]

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

(21) Besleney Kabardian (Klimenčenko 2014: 88–89)

\[
\begin{align*}
d \cdot \text{ja} \cdot \text{senehatu} \cdot r & \quad \text{f} \cdot \text{ja} \cdot \text{ma} \cdot \text{le} \cdot \text{me} \\
1 \text{pl-pr-poss-profession-abs} & \quad \text{good} \\
3 \text{pl} \cdot \text{erg} \cdot \text{neg-see-pst-ipf-cond} \\
\text{a} \cdot \text{xe} \cdot \text{r} \cdot \text{j} \cdot \text{a} & \quad \text{a} \cdot \text{b} \cdot \text{a} \\
\text{dem-pl-abs-add} & \quad \text{dem-obl} \\
\text{go-fut-pl-ipf-ne} & \quad \text{cond} \\
\text{a} \cdot \text{xe} \cdot \text{r} & \quad \text{a} \cdot \text{b} \cdot \text{a} \\
\text{dem} & \quad \text{pl-abs-add} \\
\text{go-fut-pl-ipf-ne} & \quad \text{cond} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[\text{‘If they (our children) had not loved our profession, they would not have gone there (to the university), too.’} \quad \text{(textual example)}\]

(22)

\[
\begin{align*}
s \cdot \text{j} \cdot \text{ane} & \quad \text{pš} \cdot \text{edej} \\
\text{qe} \cdot \text{k} \cdot \text{ne} \cdot \text{te} \cdot \text{me} & \quad \text{se} \cdot \text{s} \cdot \text{je} \cdot \text{n} \cdot \text{e} \cdot \text{c} \cdot \text{a} \cdot \text{ne} \cdot \text{t} \\
1 \text{sg-poss-mother} & \quad \text{tomorrow} \\
\text{dir-go-fut-ipf-cond} & \quad \text{1sg} \\
\text{1sg-abs-loc-dat-meet-fut-ipf} & \quad \text{cond} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[\text{‘If mother were to arrive tomorrow, I would have met her.’}\]

(23)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ʒ} \cdot \text{ə} & \quad \text{z} \cdot \text{le} \cdot \text{m} \\
\text{de} \cdot \text{s} \cdot \text{xe} \cdot \text{m} & \quad \text{[…] agš' e} \\
\text{q} \cdot \text{a} \cdot \text{x} \cdot \text{e} \cdot \text{lež} \cdot \text{te} \cdot \text{me} \\
\text{now} & \quad \text{village-obl} \\
\text{loc-sit-pl-obl} & \quad \text{money} \\
\text{dir-3pl} \cdot \text{lo-ben-work-ipf-cond} \\
\text{sabj} \cdot \text{xe} \cdot \text{r} \cdot \text{ja} & \quad \text{nahe-be} \\
\text{zer} \cdot \text{ʒ} \cdot \text{ə} \cdot \text{ne} \cdot \text{te} \cdot \text{m} & \quad \text{d} \cdot \text{ja} \cdot \text{ʒ} \cdot \text{h} \\
\text{child-pl-abs-add} & \quad \text{more-many} \\
\text{sbd-become-fut-ipf-obl} & \quad \text{1pl-abs-loc-trust loc-lie} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[\text{‘We are sure that if the people now living in the village […] earned (enough) money, there would have been more children.’} \quad \text{(textual example)}\]
Kabardian ones, is information on their interaction with the aspect and actionality of verbs. Indeed, most if not all examples of counterfactual clauses reported so far involve telic events in the perfective aspect, as in (16), (17), and (21). However, given that the secondary past tense/irrealis marking is carried out by the Imperfect, whose function as a primary tense is to mark past imperfective (durative and habitual) contexts as in example (12) above, the following questions arise:

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

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

4. THE FINDINGS

The exposition below is based upon a questionnaire containing about fifty sentences with predicates from different actional classes (stative and dynamic, punctual and durative, telic and atelic; on identifying actional classes of predicates in Circassian see Arkadiev 2009), combined with different aspectual viewpoints (perfective and imperfective, the latter both durative and habitual) and different temporal localizations (mainly present and past, but also future). All in all, I collected material from seven consultants, all of them women aged 28–50, most of them teachers at the local school. All questionnaire sentences were initially presented in Russian with an explicit context; in particular, imperfective vs. perfective interpretations were specifically targeted by appropriate temporal adverbials. Kuban Kabardian translations were then modified by substituting the elicited tense form with other possible tense forms, and were checked with consultants for grammaticality and possible interpretations.

This allowed me to discover not only semantic contrasts, some of them subtle enough to be evident only to a subset of the consultants, but also a considerable degree of free variation.

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

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

6 Some forms were checked with only a subset of the consultants.
The table reveals two important facts. First, imperfective contexts, regardless of temporal interpretation, are overwhelmingly covered by the simple Imperfect. Second, the Pluperfect (pst-ipf) is optional in counterfactuals, being almost always substitutable by the simple Preterite. Below I will elaborate on both of these findings.

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

a) by the Pluperfect (-a-te-me pst-ipf-cond), neutralizing the aspectual distinction between perfective and imperfective;

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

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

(24a)  da-qə-šə-k˘-“a-te-m  ʃamboj  pɔla-r  ja-pxenç’-te-me
       1pl.abs-dir-temp-go-pst-ipf-obl  Shkhambi  floor-abs  3pl.erg-sweep-pst-ipf-cond
       wəne-m  da-ʃ-ja-ke-he-ne-te-ʃəm.
       house-obl  1pl.abs-loc-3sg.erg-caus-enter-fut-ipf-neg
‘If Shkhambi had been sweeping the floor at the moment when we had come, he would not have let us into the house.’

(24b)  da-ʃə-ʃə-k-“a-te-m  ʃamboj  pɔla-r  ja-pxenç’-a-te-me
       1pl.abs-dir-temp-go-pst-ipf-obl  Shkhambi  floor-abs  3pl.erg-sweep-pst-ipf-cond
       wəne-m  da-ʃ-ja-ke-he-ne-te-ʃəm.
       house-obl  1pl.abs-loc-3sg.erg-caus-enter-fut-ipf-neg
‘If Shkhambi had (already) swept the floor by the time we had come, he would not have let us into the house.’

At least some of my consultants have similar intuitions with respect to atelic activity verbs as well: see examples (25a) vs. (25b), where, in parallel with the examples in (24), the Imperfect implies a progressive reading, while the Pluperfect yields an interpretation of a temporally bounded activity.
(25a) də-şə-ḳʷe-ž'-a-m  
1pl.abs-temp  
laže-te-me  
1pl-poss-mother work-ipf-cond  
də-dej  
qə-še-ć’ə-fə-ne-te-ğəm.  
1pl-at  
dir-loc-exit-obl-fut-ipf

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

(25b) də-şə-ḳʷe-ž'-a-m  
1pl.abs-temp  
leẑ-a-te-me  
1pl-poss-mother work-pst-ipf-cond  
də-dej  
qə-še-ć’ə-fə-ne-te-ğəm.  
1pl-at  
dir-loc-exit-obl-fut-ipf

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

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

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

a-r  
japeč’e  pşedgoż-ć’e  fade  je-fe-t  je-f-a-t.  
dem-abs  before  morning-ins  booze  dat-drink-ipf/*dat-drink-pst-ipf

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

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

(27)  japeč’e  türçije-m  wa-ḳʷe-te-me.  
before  Turkey-obl  2sg.abs-go-ipf-cond  
türk-ə-bze  şa-z-we-mə-re-çe-x-a-r  ħew?  
Turk-language  rel.rsn-refl.io-2sg.erg-neg-caus-know-pst-abs  what

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

(28)  ş’apstu  weš’x  qje-mə-x’x-te-me  ħe-t-ḳʷeh-ne-t.  
now  rain  dir-dat-neg-rain-ipf-cond  dir-1pl.erg-around-fut-ipf

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

(29)  pşedej  themexe-max’x-te-me  de  da-lež’e-ne-te-ğəm.  
tomorrow  Sunday–day-ipf-cond  we  1pl.abs-work-fut-ipf

‘If tomorrow had been Sunday we wouldn’t work.’

In fact, it is only the marking of the apodosis that distinguishes between realis and irrealis conditionals, the latter consistently employing the combination Future+Imperfect: -ne-t(e).
If we now focus on non-telic predicates, we observe that with statives the aspectual distinction appears to be neutralized: my consultants allow both Imperfect and Pluperfect in past counterfactual contexts with statives without any tangible difference in meaning; see example (30).

(30) $\text{dəʁʷase \ s-jə-q}$ $\text{ʷeš'ə-r}$ $\text{wəne-m}$ $\text{še-s-te-me}$ / $\text{še-s-a-te-me}$
    yesterday 1sg-poss-brother-abs house-obl loc-sit-ippf-cond / loc-sit-pst-ippf-cond
    $\text{qə-p-xʷ-ιje-we-ne-t}$.
    dir-2sg.io-ben-loc-hit-fut-ippf

‘If my brother had been at home yesterday he would have called you.’

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

(31) (Kljagina 2016: 16, ex. 14d)
    $\text{s-jə-wənč \ əbze-r}$ $\text{stolə-m}$ $\text{tje-ι-γ-t}$.
    1sg.pr-poss-key-abs table-obl loc-lie-pst-ippf

‘My keys were lying on the table (and now they are not there).’

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

(32) $\text{neχə-be \ wə-ž'ej-a-te-me}$ / $\text{wə-ž'ej-te-me}$
    last.year more-often 2sg.abs-sleep-pst-ippf-cond / 2sg.abs-sleep-ippf-cond
    $\text{neχ-maš}$ $\text{e.re}$ $\text{w-je-zeš’ə-ne-t}$.
    more-rarely 2sg.abs-dat-get.tired-fut-ippf

‘If you had slept more last year you would have been less tired.’

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

(33a) $\text{neχəbe}$ $\text{wa-ʔə-ɛra-μə-xʷ-te-me}$
    last.year 2sg.abs-dir-loc-NEG-fall-ippf-cond
    $\text{škola-m}$ $\text{wə-ʔə-š-a-xʷ-ne-ʔəm}$
    school-obl 2sg.abs-dir-loc-3pl.erg-drive-fut-ippf-NEG

‘If you had not (regularly / *once) arrived late last year, they would not have excluded you from school.’

(33b) $\text{neχəbe}$ $\text{wa-ʔə-ɛra-μə-xʷ-a-te-me}$
    last.year 2sg.abs-dir-loc-NEG-fall-pst-ippf-cond
    $\text{škola-m}$ $\text{wə-ʔə-š-a-xʷ-ne-ʔəm}$
    school-obl 2sg.abs-dir-loc-3pl.erg-drive-fut-ippf-NEG

‘If you had not (once / *regularly) arrived late last year, they would not have excluded you from school.’
The picture presented so far is complicated by the previously mentioned fact that the use of the Pluperfect is not obligatory even in past counterfactuals; the Preterite can be used in such contexts instead, as in example (34).

(34) \( jəʁʷe-m \) \( wə-ԛe-kʷ-a-me \) \( \text{dirjekterə}-m \) \( w-ja-ʃte-ne-t. \)
\( \text{on.time-obl} \) \( 2\text{sg.abs-dir-go-pst-cond} \) \( \text{director-obl} \) \( 2\text{sg.abs-3sg.erg-take-fut-ipf} \)

‘If you had come on time the director would have let you in.’

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

(35) \( dəʁʷase \) \( s-jə-qʷeʃ’ə-r \) \( wəne-m \) \( ʃe-s-q-a-me \)
\( \text{yesterday 1sg-poss-brother-abs} \) \( \text{house-obl} \) \( \text{loc-sit-pst-cond} \)
\( ԛə-p-xʷə-tje-we-ne-t. \)
\( \text{dir-2sg.io-ben-loc-hit-fut-ipf} \)

‘If my brother had been at home yesterday he would have called you.’ – cf. (30)

(36) \( jəλes-ｋʷ-a-m \) \( neχə-be.re \) \( wə-ʒ’ej-a-me \)
\( \text{year-go-pst-obl} \) \( \text{more-often 2sg.abs-sleep-pst-cond} \)
\( neχ-maʃ \) \( w-je-zeš’ə-ne-t. \)
\( \text{more-rarely 2sg.abs-dat-get.tired-fut-ipf} \)

‘If you had slept more last year you would have been less tired.’ – cf. (32)

(37) \#səhata-r \( t^*\text{ə-m} \) \( \text{swande sup} \) \( jə-ʃe-v-q-a-me \)
\( \text{hour-abs two-obl Swande soup 3sg.erg-caus-boil-pst-cond} \)
\( ja-peš’ə-m \) \( tʃeljɛvιzə-r \) \( xe-ʃe-ne-ne-ne-te-qəm. \)
\( \text{poss-room-obl television-abs loc-caus-be-lit-res-fut-ipf-neg} \)

‘If at two o’clock Swande had already finished cooking (*had been cooking) soup, the TV set in her room wouldn’t have been turned on.’ (pragmatically odd under the assumption that Swande turns the TV set on only when she is in her room)

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

(38) \( s-j-ade \) \( ʒ’əpstune \) \( ʃej-a-me \) \( bž’e-r \) \( x’e-ʃ-a-we \)
\( 1\text{sg.pr-poss-father now sleep-pst-cond door-abs ben-do-res-adv} \)
\( šə-ta-ne-t \)
\( \text{loc-stand-fut-ipf} \)

‘If my father were sleeping now, his door would be closed.’

Such a use of the Preterite instead of the Pluperfect, and especially instead of the Imperfect, as in (38), seems to be a marked option not accepted by all speakers in all contexts, but still robustly attested. This shows that the use of the Pluperfect in counterfactuals is probably perceived by the speakers of Kuban Kabardian as somewhat redundant. Note that just like the Imperfect, the Preterite does not unambiguously mark the protasis as counterfactual; see example (39) with a realis conditional.
On the other hand, there is an observable tendency to use the Pluperfect in non-past counterfactual contexts, including the future ones, testifying to its becoming a default marker of counterfactuality per se, regardless of temporal reference. This is illustrated by examples (40)–(42).

(40) ǯ’əpstu weš’x ği-je-mə-š’x-a-te-me ği-t-kʷe-hə-ne-t
now rain DIR-DAT-NEG-rain-PST-IPF-COND DIR-1PL.ERG-go.around-FUT-IPF

‘If it were not raining now, we would go for a walk.’

(41) asłan ęż’a-łe-m nayə-bere ği-ḳʷ-a-te-me
Aslan village-OBL more-often DIR-go-PST-IPF-COND

zeč’e-m-jə ja-g’epe-ne-t
all-OBL-ADD 3PL.PR+POSJ JOY-FUT-IPF

‘If Aslan came to the village more often, everyone would be happy.’

(42) thə wjəxepsəw newbe agš’e-r ɬə-zə-ra-ʒ-e-p-t-a-m-ց’e
thanks today money-ABS DIR-SBD-1SG.IO-DAT-2SG.ERG-give-PST-OBL-INS

awe pšədej-jə ɬə-z-e-p-t-a-te-me dem’e-ne-t.
but tomorrow-ADD DIR-1SG.IO-DAT-2SG.ERG-give-PST-IPF-COND good-FUT-IPF

‘Thanks for giving me money today, but if you had given it to me tomorrow, it would also have been fine.’

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

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

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

(43) *dəʁʷase məʃine-r mə-qʷate-ʁ-a-me madej da-ʃə-ʃə-ne-te-qəm*

`yesterday car-ABS NEG-break-PST-PST-COND here 1SG.ABS-LOC-SIT-FUT-IPF-NEG`

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

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

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

ABBREVIATIONS

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

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