The Life Cycles of Counterfactuals in the History of Greek

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The Life Cycles of Counterfactuals in the History of Greek

Aspect, Modality and Typology

By

Ezra la Roi

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To Lydia,
for making counterfactuals come true

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Editorial Foreword

In thinking about the present volume by author Ezra la Roi, I am reminded of a part of the Jewish Passover *Haggadah*—the text of the "telling" of the Jews' exodus from Egypt. In the *Haggadah* there is a song that recounts the escape from Egypt in a step-by-step fashion, wherein each step in the progression had God's help. Each step ends with the refrain "Dayenu", a Hebrew word meaning 'it would have been enough', indicating that that step alone would have sufficed to help the Jews immensely. Ultimately, the many steps are summed up by alluding to God's having done all of those steps on behalf of the Jews.

I mention this because in this fascinating work, la Roi, without any divine intervention but with considerable inspiration, gives us a detailed overview of a pragmatically complex and nuanced set of constructions—counterfactuals—providing both a synchronic analysis and a discussion of the diachrony involved, not just for Ancient Greek but for Post-Classical Greek, and Medieval Greek as well as Modern Greek. I am thus led to think that had he just focused on a synchronic account, or just a diachronic account, for just Epic Greek (Homer, especially) or just Classical Greek, or just Medieval Greek and so on, it would have been sufficient. But he did all of that, and more, producing work that covers the whole span of the relevant[1] recorded history of Greek from Homeric Greek up to Modern Greek of the present-day. And at the same time, he offers an insightful review of the relevant literature on counterfactuals and provides his own analytic framework for understanding them and understanding their diachrony.

La Roi starts with a careful periodization of Greek, going well beyond the usual division into Ancient, Post-Classical, Medieval, and Modern, and this finer granularity provides a basis for a detailed and comprehensive coverage of the whole of the attestation of counterfactuality in Greek. He develops a "life cycle" for counterfactuals and illustrates its applicability in each phase of the language that he examines. In this way, he gives the reader much to chew on and ponder in terms of both synchrony and diachrony.

As a work that is both theoretical, in that it provides an explicit analysis for counterfactuals, and highly empirical, in that it is richly illustrated with example sentences from each of the chronological periods identified, this study

1 I say "relevant" here to excuse the fact that la Roi does not discuss Mycenaean Greek, a move which is understandable inasmuch as there is simply no pertinent data from that earliest documentation of the language.

is tailor-made for the *Empirical Approaches to Linguistic Theory* series. It is a great pleasure for me to be able to add such fine and thought-provoking research to the roster of EALT volumes.

Brian D. Joseph
EALT Series Managing Editor
Columbus, Ohio USA
20 June 2025

Acknowledgments

The research collected in this monograph was kickstarted by the PhD-by-publication which I have written at Ghent University between October 2019 and December 2022, *Counterfactuals in Ancient Greek: Pragmatics, Life Cycles and Connected Pathways*. The project was first funded by the Ghent Special Research Fund and subsequently by a fundamental research grant from the Flemish government (FWO 1122620N, 2019–2023). The majority of this monograph was written during the fourth year of my PhD and part of the first year of my post-doctoral fellowship at Ghent, funded by the Flemish government (FWO 12B4B24N, 2023–2026). I also benefited greatly from the opportunity to write in the tranquil environment of the Fondation Hardt in Geneva in the spring of 2024 and finalise the manuscript in the collegial environment of the Classics department of the University of Groningen.

This monograph and the research contained in it could not have been produced, had it not been for the many people that have shaped me academically in the last years. First of all, I would like to express my heart-felt thanks to the supervisors and advisors of my PhD project who have helped me unpack the intricacies of counterfactuals in the past years: my PhD supervisors Rutger Allan and Klaas Bentein, the members of my advisory committee Geoffrey Horrocks, Mark Janse, Antonio Revuelta Puigdollers and Gerry Wakker, as well as the members of my doctoral committee James Clackson, Koen De Temmerman, Toon Van Hal and Gerry Wakker. Especially as a postdoc, it is a real pleasure to be able to rely on their mentorship in navigating academic life. Second, I am greatly indebted to the members of the international research projects that I have been a part of in recent years; I wish to thank the members of the *Pragmatics in Cyclical language Change* project and Maj-Britt Mosegaard Hansen (PI) for rich discussions of cyclicity and all things related, the members of the *Habituals* typology project and Kees Hengeveld (PI) for the friendly typological discussions of tense, aspect and modality, and the members of the *Everyday Writing in Graeco-Roman and Late Antique Egypt* (*EVWRIT*) project and Klaas Bentein (PI) for countless insights into the language of the Post-Classical Greek papyri. Third, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Jean-Christophe Verstraete for inviting me to be a substitute lecturer for his classes on linguistic typology at the KU Leuven. The opportunity to dive deeper into one of my linguistic passions, together with other typologists at Leuven and an enthusiastic group of students, has truly expanded my academic thinking. Fourth and finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Brian Joseph for suggesting that I submit my monograph to the Brill series *Empirical*

Approaches to Linguistic Theory and for his encouraging support as editor. This series acts as a platform for typological studies (e.g. Aikhenvald & Dixon 2011, Santazilia 2023), diachronic studies (e.g. Labeau 2022) and studies of underrepresented (diachronic) varieties of Greek (e.g. Ralli 2019). In this monograph, I weave together these three research areas.

Last but most certainly not least, I want to recognise the unfailing support of my families, friends and, above all, Lydia, my bride-to-be. Your firm foundation is my *sine qua non*.

Tables

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Glosses, abbreviations and transliteration

Glosses

Here I list the glosses that I used in addition to the glosses prescribed by the Leipzig Glossing system:

OPT	optative
CF-PTC	counterfactual particle
PTC	particle
MOD	modal particle (i.e. *an/ke(n)* or *tha*)

Because linguistic context is crucial to the use and understanding of counterfactuality, I was forced to be economical in glossing. To that end, I (i) only explicitly note the aspectual forms of past indicative forms, since past indicatives are the most frequently discussed form, (ii) use only OPT for optatives, to set them apart from indicatives, (iii) pluralise the gloss of a form's meaning instead of adding SG/PL, (iv) put vocatives that consist of two words in one gloss, (v) usually gloss the case for pronouns and adjectives, not articles, and (vi) use a straight line to gloss a mixed morphological structure (e.g. IPFV|PPRF).

Abbreviations

EPCG	Early Post-Classical Greek (III–I BCE)
(P)IE	(Proto-)Indo-European
LPCG	Late Post-Classical Greek (IV–VI CE)
Mod[a]	the modal particle *an/ke(n)*
Mod[b]	the modal particle *tha*
MPCG	Middle Post-Classical Greek (I–III CE)
p	protasis
q	apodosis
TA	temporal-aspectual

The abbreviated references to Greek texts follow the conventions in the Liddell, Scott, Jones lexicon (LSJ). If the text referred to did not feature in the LSJ and there was no conventional abbreviation (e.g. Chron.Mor. for the Chronicle of Morea), I use an abbreviation that follows similar principles, for example using *Hist.* for *historia* 'history' and *Vit.* for *vita* 'life'.

Transliteration

Since the majority of the examples discussed in this book come from Archaic to Post-Classical Greek, I have adopted a *graphemic* transliteration strategy rather than a phonological one. On the one hand, this is because many of the phonological changes characteristic of Medieval and Modern Greek are taking shape in the Post-Classical Greek period. On the other hand, a graphemic transliteration strategy is more transparent for those readers that are unfamiliar with Greek. Therefore, the following choices for transliteration have been made in order to make the Greek accessible to readers: upsilon= 'u', phi = 'ph', zeta= 'z', chi= 'kh', xi= 'ks', theta= 'th', eta= 'e:', omega= 'o:'. I used ':i' to represent the *iota adscriptum*. Instead of the Ancient Greek conventions of using the high dot '·' to signify a semi-colon and of ';' for question marks, I used a semi-colon and a question mark respectively. For the same reasons, I have also chosen not to mark accent in the transliterations.