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CHAOS VS. ORDER: THE DEGREE OF INDECISION IN CONDITIONAL COMPLEX CLAUSES

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ABSTRACT. ***Chaos vs. Order: the Degree of Indecision in Conditional Complex Clauses*.** This study examines the temporal and aspectual behaviour of the Romanian conditional mood in complex clauses, using the Davidsonian event variable as a structural foundation. Building on Reichenbach's temporal architecture and Vendler's aspectual typology, the analysis investigates how conditional predicates shift between indecision and partial determination once additional events or adverbials intervene. I argue that the culmination point – typically a property of a single event – undergoes systematic reinterpretation in conditional complex clauses, where event dependency and modal subordination reshape aspectual values. To account for these patterns, the paper introduces the representation E(hX), a hidden event variable that preserves the conditional's inherent uncertainty while allowing dependent events to impose aspectual or temporal constraints. The model captures how the conditional mood becomes less indecisive when interacting with achievement-type predicates, adverbial scope, or narrator-induced perspective. Three guiding questions structure the investigation: how delimitation points are established, how the conditional can be represented without eliminating its uncertainty, and how Reference Time and Event Time influence syntactic labelling. The findings suggest that conditional indecision is not a fixed semantic property but an emergent effect shaped by event structure and aspectual hierarchy.

Keywords*: conditional, aspect, label, E(hX), culmination point*

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REZUMAT. ***Haos vs. ordine: gradul de indecizie în frazele condiționale***. Acest studiu analizează comportamentul temporal și aspectual al modului condițional în propozițiile complexe din română, având ca fundament variabila de eveniment davidsoniană. Pe baza arhitecturii temporale a lui Reichenbach și a tipologiei aspectuale elaborată de Vendler, lucrarea investighează modul în care predicatele condiționale oscilează între indecizie și delimitare parțială atunci când intervin evenimente sau adverbiale suplimentare. Susțin că punctul culminant – de regulă o proprietate a unui singur eveniment – este reinterpretat sistematic în frazele condiționale, unde dependența evenimențială și subordonarea modală modifică valorile aspectuale. Pentru a explica aceste fenomene, articolul introduce reprezentarea E(hX), o variabilă de eveniment ascunsă care păstrează incertitudinea inerentă a condiționalului, permițând totodată evenimentelor dependente să impună constrângeri aspectuale sau temporale. Modelul arată că indecizia condiționalului se reduce în prezența predicatelor de tip realizare, a suprasolicitării adverbiale sau a perspectivei naratoriale. Investigația este ghidată de trei întrebări: cum se stabilesc punctele de delimitare, cum poate fi reprezentat condiționalul fără a-i elimina incertitudinea și cum influențează Timpul de Referință și Timpul Evenimentului procesul de etichetare sintactică. Rezultatele sugerează că indecizia condiționalului nu este o proprietate fixă, ci un efect emergent al structurii evenimențiale și al ierarhiei aspectuale.

Cuvinte-cheie: *condițional, aspect, etichetare lingvistică, E(hX), punctul culminant*

1. Introduction

When we examine a simple clause such as *aș citi o carte* ('I would like to read a book'), the construction straightforwardly conveys an indecisive or non-committal event. The same holds for clause-level irony. However, once additional events are introduced – each carrying its own variable in the Davidsonian (1967) sense – the initial indecision may, might, or even should disappear, depending on the behaviour of both syntactically dependent and non-dependent events. Simple clauses therefore fail to capture the way we typically structure thoughts, since natural discourse overwhelmingly relies on complex clauses. The degree of indecision associated with the conditional cannot be properly explained in simple clauses, but only within complex sentences, where the relations between predicates impose aspectual and temporal constraints. This creates the possibility for an event X to depend on an event Y, even when Y operates along a temporal or aspectual axis that differs from that of X.

2. Literature review

My analysis begins with the Davidsonian (1967) event variable. Davidson proposed a logical-form representation of sentences that incorporates an event variable, motivated by contrasts such as those in (1):

(1) a *Landon stabbed Ana*
b *Landon stabbed Ana in the back with a knife.*
c *Landon stabbed Ana in the back.*

In the basic predicate system, the representation of (1) is Stab(l,a)[2], where stab is the predicate and (l, a) are its arguments – the subject and the object, respectively. Davidson identifies two major limitations of this system: it cannot represent how adverbials modify the predicate, and it fails to capture entailment relations. For instance, (1b) entails (1c), but not vice versa, yet this asymmetry is invisible in the traditional predicate-argument structure. Davidson resolves these issues by introducing an event variable – now standardly represented as e – associated with the entire clause:

(2) ∃*e [Stab(l, a, e) & in-the-back(e)]*

I also draw on Reichenbach's (1947) temporal framework, which distinguishes Speech Time (ST), Reference Time (RT), and Event Time (ET). Without providing a full exposition of his system, I illustrate the core relations through example (3):

(3) a *Ion a vizitat muzeul ieri.*
'John visited the museum yesterday.'
b ST = now, RT = ET, ET < ST
(where ST, RT, and ET are related by markers of anteriority, posteriority, or simultaneity)

Hornstein's (1993) notions of Basic Tense Structure (BTS) and Derived Tense Structure (DTS) also play a role in the analysis. These are integrated with Dowty's (1979) more abstract realis–irrealis temporal representations, involving intervals [I, I'] and worlds [w, w']. For example, a clause such as *Landon is walking* can be represented as [I, w] to mark the actual, ongoing temporal profile of the event, while [I', w'] captures its possible, non-final continuation. Dowty formalizes this as follows: [Prog ø] is true at <I, w> iff there exists an

[2] In predicate logic, we mark the arguments with lowercase letters, so "l" marks Landon, while "a" stands for Ana.

interval I' such that I ⊂ I' and I is not the final subinterval of I', and there exists a world w' in which ø is true at <I', w'>, with w identical to w' at all times up to and including I (Dowty 1979: 146). The analysis further relies on Vendler's (1967) situational-aspectual classification, according to which predicates subcategorize into four major categories; Smith (1991) adds a fifth category:

(a) activity: *to walk*
(b) accomplishment: *to build a house*
(c) achievement: *to reach the summit*
(d) state: *to be*
(e) semelfactive: *to knock*, etc.

In addition to these general theoretical frameworks, the analysis also relies on Dobrovie-Sorin's (1994) foundational work on Romanian clause architecture, which provides an essential comparative background for understanding the behaviour of conditional constructions in this language.

Finally, I make limited use of Ramchand's (2008) First Phase Syntax, which classifies events according to their syntactic–semantic decomposition. Her system distinguishes initiation–process verbs and initiation–process–result verbs, further subdivided into transitive vs. intransitive structures and roles such as DP initiator, DP undergoer, and DP path. In examples such as *John bakes a cake* vs. *John bakes the potato* (Ramchand 2008: 69), the result phrase is not projected, yet an internal result can still be identified (DP path vs. DP undergoer).

3. Methodology

This section introduces the conceptual and methodological tools that will be used throughout the analysis, focusing on hidden event variables, aspectual classifications, and the mechanisms of aspectual donation. The first is the notion of a hidden event variable, an abstract construct parallel to the Davidsonian (1967) event variable. This concept allows me to account for the aspectual and temporal relations that arise within complex clauses. Building on this variable, I adapt Newton's First Law[3] of Inertia to the linguistic domain in order to illustrate how an event x may alter the aspectual or temporal value of another event y. Newton's formulation – "an object at rest remains at rest, and an object in motion remains in motion at constant speed and in a straight line unless acted on by an unbalanced force"- is reinterpreted here such that inertia (or unbalanced force) corresponds to the temporal or aspectual state of event x being affected by another event.

[3] https://www1.grc.nasa.gov/beginners-guide-to-aeronautics/newtons-laws-of-motion/

I also employ a set of aspectual classifications that I have developed: internal, external, local, and distant aspectual expressions. Typically, internal aspect marks the necessary aspectual grammaticality within a complex clause (CC), while external aspect identifies the dominant aspect of the CC – whether it is coindexed with other events sharing the same value or dependent on another event. Local and distant aspect relate to truth conditions and to the aspectual–temporal axis, distinguishing between "what is" and "what could be" (Hegedus 2024). Another key term is aspect donation, which describes the linguistic circumstances under which the aspect of one event may, can, or should be verified in another event through dependency. Such dependency may be syntactic or logical. I also briefly refer to the notion of an aspectual bridge, which captures aspectual dependency between events, though this concept is not central to the present paper and will be developed in a forthcoming study.

To illustrate aspectual and temporal transformations, I use a schematic representation that captures how a sequence of events may shift when the hidden event variable acquires a figure[4] value. A representative example is the following: E1(Gr) → E2(Gr) → E3(Gr) […] E(hX)(Fig). This notation captures the shift from a purely ground-valued sequence to a configuration in which the hidden event variable E(hX) acquires a figure value (pfv), thereby influencing the aspectual interpretation of the surrounding events. For instance, in (4a), the conditional clause […] *ca și când o muscă ar fi supărat-o* ('as if a fly had upset her') remains morphologically non-perfective and surface-labelled as ground, yet the hidden event variable E(hX) acquires a figure value because the narrator presents it as the causal source of E2.

In some examples, I also employ Dowty's (1979) notation [I, w] vs. [I', w'], where I and I' refer to intervals in the realis and irrealis worlds, respectively. The corpus used for the analysis consists of conditional complex clauses extracted from Călinescu's *Enigma Otiliei* (EO). The (b)-type examples are typically modified versions of the (a)-type originals. The corpus is processed in Sketch Engine, using guided searches to identify conditional CCs.

4. Analysis

4.1. The E(hX) and the changed culmination point

Since the behaviour of the culmination point is central to the interpretation of conditional complex clauses, the analysis begins with the interaction between perfective marking and hidden event variables. This subsection initiates the analysis by introducing a specialized labelling framework wherein a figure-

[4] Figure vs. ground are notions from cognitive semantics Talmy (1978) or Croft & Cruse (2004), I adapted their functional relevance into my analysis.

labelled event (related to a perfective past tense) may have a ground reading. This phenomenon is intrinsically linked to the culmination point: while this point affects a single event in a simple clause, its function shifts significantly within a Complex Clause (CC). To refine this analysis, the research introduces E(hX) - a hidden event variable which is frequently required in conditional CCs to bypass the limitations of the "simple transformation method." Furthermore, the subsection examines a predicate that involves both the inchoative and the lexical indecision with adverbial scope overtaking[5], analysing how shifts in scope influence event interpretation and aspectual / temporal hierarchy.

Example (4) illustrates how a past-tense event, typically labelled as a figure, may receive a ground interpretation when narrator-induced perspective and event-type variables intervene. The example also shows how tense-driven shifts in culmination point interact with modal subordination and adverbial compatibility, revealing the aspectual instability of conditional predicates.

(4) a *Aurelia* *rămase* *indiferentă,* *de-o* *indiferență*
Aurelia.nom remain.ind.ps.pfv.3sg indifferent of-an indifference.acc
făcută, 1/ *însă* *Aglae* *dădu*
made.ptcp but Aglae.nom show.ind.ps.pfv.3sg
dovezi *de* *impacientă, 2/* *ca*
proof.acc of impatience.acc as
și *când* *o* *muscă* *ar*
and when a fly.nom aux.cond.3sg
fi *supărat-o. 3/*
be.inf upset.ptcp-cl.acc
'Aurelia remained indifferent, an induced indifference, but Aglae showed signs of impatience, as if a fly had upset her.' (EO, 43)

b *Aurelia* *rămase* *indiferentă,* *făcută, 1/* *însă* *Aglae* *dădu*
dovezi *de* *impacientă, 2/* *ca* *și* *când*
o *muscă* *ar* *supăra-o* *[#mâine]*
aux.cond.3sg upset.inf-cl.acc.f.3sg [tomorrow]
[#astăzi] *[#în* *acea* *vreme]. 3/*
[today] [#in that time]
'Aurelia remained indifferent, an induced indifference, but Aglae showed signs of impatience, as if a fly would upset her [#tomorrow] [#today] [#in that time].'

[5] When an adverbial can modify how the CC's temporality is perceived.

Consider (4a), in which all events belong to the narrator's voice; none of them must be uttered by the characters. E1 and E2 are in the past simple, and the adversative conjunction may also function as a temporal connector, since there is no cognitive pressure to prioritize one event over the other. E3 is not a true conditional but has a modal value. The scheme is: E1(Gr)(npfv) → E2(Gr)(npfv) → E3(Fig). Both E1 and E2 appear as ground events, which seems to contradict the claim in chapter 6 that events in a CC must differ in temporal and aspectual duration when they are not truly simultaneous. However, without the narrator we cannot access the characters' [I' and w'], so the apparent ground value is narrator-induced. Even if E1 and E2 occur simultaneously, their event-type variables differentiate them: E1 suggests a stative reading, E2 an activity one.

A major issue must be clarified here. A past event typically becomes a figure event in the presence of a present-tense event, but here E1 and E2 are marked as ground. I do this for two reasons. First, marking them as figure events would create an aspectual conflict with E3. Although E3 is most likely an unhappened event, the narrator presents it as the reason for E2. If we assume a non-ironic reading, E3 may be endowed with a true value; in that case, it is a happened event, and the reason precedes the effect. Second, general events (such as boiling point readings) with general value are treated as ground events.

E3 in (4b) conveys the same informational content as E3 in (4a), but temporally they differ. In (4a), the past participle implies a true reason for E2, so E3 is an event whose culmination point has ended. In (4b), the conditional form suggests the opposite: the culmination point has not been reached. This affects the interpretation of E2 as well, since [(∃e)-VP-*dădu dovezi* ('gave signs') PP-*de impacienţă* ('of impatience')] cannot share the same culmination point as in (4a). Thus, witnessing (4a) and (4b) would yield different temporal/aspectual interpretations. Even if E2 in (4b) were simultaneous with E1, E2 would still be perceived as a ground event relative to E1, due to its dependency on E3. In this case, the adversative conjunction would not function as a true temporal connector. The shared aspectual bridge[6] becomes visible in (4b), where [(∃e)-AdvP-*tomorrow*] is incompatible with E2. Since E2's culmination point depends on E3's state, E3 cannot donate[7] its aspectual value; if it did, it would be verified at E2's time. Conversely, E2 might donate its aspect to E3, making linear order decisive.

[6] My term which refers to a special type of aspectual verification: aspect is verified also in another dependent (logically or syntactically) event.

[7] When the aspectual result is donated to another dependent event (this dependency is not mandatorily a syntactic one, it can be based on temporality etc.)

I consider that both true and modal conditionals may cause interpretational difficulties. It is therefore preferable to keep the original conditional while allowing a hidden event variable E(hX) to check its presumptive nature. When the conditional functions as epistemic modality (as a non-dependent event), the hidden event variable may not bypass [I' and w'] without a checking event. Thus, in cases like (4a-b), E(hX) cannot verify E3's presupposition. Additional adverbials in (4b) further clarify the structure. In a simple present conditional (not a dependent CC), *tomorrow* would be compatible with the tense. Here, however, neither *today* nor *at that time* is contextually compatible with E3, which shows that E3's time cannot bypass E2's. This is due not only to E2's past reference but also to its achievement-type reading, which does not allow adverbial extension or adverbial uncertainty (lexical indecision).[8] One might ask why *at that time* is incompatible with E2's achievement type. The reason is temporal: the adverbial may refer to a time preceding E2's achievement, thereby adding another [PST] operator. I refer to this phenomenon as the synchronised label of the achievement predicate in a shared bridge.

In this section, I have introduced the E(hX), whose role is to illustrate a proper transformation: an indecisive event can be validated by a "yes/no"-type answer while retaining its original uncertainty value. I examined different approaches to the culmination point and how they may affect aspectual bridges. I also showed that achievement-type events do not permit adverbial extension through adverbial uncertainty, and that a past tense may receive a ground interpretation. These findings motivate the need for a more articulated model of conditional indecision, one that the next section develops through the interaction of dependent events and adverbial scope.

4.2. SOT-like behaviour and adverbial scope in Romanian conditional clauses

This subsection examines how Romanian conditional complex clauses may exhibit SOT-like behaviour when tense and aspect are checked through dependent events. The focus is on cases where adverbial scope overtaking forces a hierarchical ordering between Reference Time (RT) and Event Time (ET), and where the hidden event variable E(hX) becomes necessary to avoid temporal or aspectual conflict. The examples illustrate how tense interpretation in conditional clauses depends not only on grammatical tense, but also on the interaction between adverbials, aspectual class, and event dependency.

[8] The shifted culmination point creates a derived telic boundary that blocks aspectual donation: the donated viewpoint cannot override a structurally encoded culmination. Because achievement predicates lack internal temporal development, they cannot host adverbial extension, which explains the incompatibility in (4b).

Example (5) illustrates the consequences of eliminating a mandatory aspectual bridge, showing how hidden event variables, adverbial scope interactions, and tense-checking constraints jointly determine whether aspectual donation is possible. The example also highlights how c-command and SOT-like effects can block otherwise available bridge configurations.

(5) a

Putem 1/	*să*	*rugăm*	*pe*	*domnul*
can.ind.prs.1pl	sjv	ask.sjv.1pl	dom	sir.def.acc
Felix,	*mamă, 2/*	*cred 3/*	*că*	*nu*
Felix.acc	mother.voc	believe.ind.prs.1sg	that	not
are	*(de/*	*ce) 4/*	*să*	*ne*
have.ind.prs.3sg	(of	what)	sjv	cl.acc.1pl
refuze! 5/...–	*chiar*	*că*	*s-ar*	
refuse.sjv.3sg	even	that	cl.refl.acc.3sg-aux.cond.3sg	
putea 6/	*să*	*ne*	*refuze 7/,*	*dacă*
can.inf	sjv	cl.acc.1pl	refuse.sjv.3sg	if
ar	*vrea*	*dumnealui.8/*		
aux.cond.3sg	want.inf	him.def.dat		

'Mother, we may ask Mr. Felix, I think that he has no reason to refuse us! But I have to admit that he might refuse us, if he wants to.' (EO, 44)

b

Chiar	*că*	*[*s-ar*		*putut] /*
		[cl.refl.acc.3sg-aux.cond.3sg		can.ptcp]
		[ar	*fi*	*putut] 6/*
		[aux.cond.3sg	be.inf	can.ptcp]
să	*ne*	*refuze*		
[în	*acea*	*vreme]*	[?ieri] 7/,	
[in	that	time]	[yesterday]	
dacă		*[ar*	*fi*	*vrut]*
if		[aux.cond.3sg	be.inf	can.ptcp]
		[#vrusese]	*dumnealui.8/*	
		[want.ind.pst.pffv.3sg]	him.def.dat	

'Even though he [#someone[9] could have] [could have] refuse us [in that time] [?yesterday], if [he wanted to] [#had wanted to].'

[9] Romanian past impersonal, which has no direct English equivalent because English requires an overt subject (EPP), so I render it with 'someone'.

c	*[În*	*acea*	*vreme]*	*[săptămâna*	*trecută]*	*chiar*	*că*
	[in	that	time.acc]	[week.def.acc	last.ptcp]		
	[#s-ar		*fi*	*putut]*	*[ar*	*fi*	*putut] 6/*
	să	*ne*	*refuze*	*[#în*	*acea*	*vreme]*	
				[până	*acea*	*perioadă]*	*(indicată*
				until	that	period	(indicated
	de	*noi*	*(înainte*	*de*	*RT)*		
	by	us	(before	of	RT)		
				[#până	*săptămâna*	*trecută]*	*[?ieri]*
				[until	week.def.acc	last.ptcp	[yesterday]
				[până	*ieri /*	*vineri] 7/,*	*dacă*
				[until	yesterday/	Friday]	
	[#ieri]		*[ar*	*fi*	*vrut]*	*[vrusese]*	*dumnealui.8/*

'[In that time [last week] even though he [#someone could have] [could have] refuse us [#in that time] [until that time (indicated by us, before RT)] [#until the last week] [?yesterday] [until yesterday / Friday], if [#yesterday] he [would have wanted to] [had wanted to].' (*constructed example*)

d	*[Ieri]*	*chiar*	*că*	*[#s-ar*	*fi*	*putut]*	*[ar*	*fi*	*putut] 6/*	*să*	*ne*	*refuze*
	[#astăzi]			*[până*	*la*	*ora*	*10]*	*[#până*		*vineri]*		
				[until	to	hour	10*]*					
	[#ieri] 7/,			*dacă*	*[ar*		*fi*	*vrut]*		*[vrusese]*		
	dumnealui.8/											

'[Yesterday] he even though [#someone could have] [could have] refuse us [#today] [until 10 AM] [#until Friday] [#yesterday], if he [would have wanted to] [had wanted to].'

Consider (5b) with the changed tenses. The past tense in E6 suspends the impersonal value, making the phrase ungrammatical: E6 in the past conditional suggests a positive value, implying that the act of refusing did not happen. What is crucial here is how tense is checked. E7 remains in the present subjunctive, but its temporal axis is located in the past due to its dependency, so individual tense checking would yield a false result. The same applies to E8. The past conditional in E8 requires the event equalizer to avoid temporal/aspectual conflict with E6, suggesting that checking the CC's tense only once is insufficient unless aspect becomes decisive.

I marked E8's past perfect as semantically anomalous because its aspectual structure conflicts with E6 and E7. In the past perfect, the volitional act of E8 precedes E6 and E7, which would imply either that the referent was forced to

believe his volitional property or that he has no access to E6 and E7 (being outside his [I and w]).[10] However, if a temporal event variable is added to E7, [(∃e)-AdvP-*în acea vreme* ('at that time')], the construction becomes acceptable: the past perfect's T^0 can be linked to another past event whose reference licenses the past perfect label. This shows that labelling is crucial in a CC and that T^0 can be linked to an adverbial phrase, confirming the relevance of the Davidsonian event variable. Since this adverbial implies an undetermined past reference, we must also test a determined one such as [(∃e)-AdvP-*ieri* ('yesterday')]. 'Yesterday' normally implies a past simple reading, but in rare cases it may be compatible with a past perfect label[11].

Consider (5c) with added adverbials. First, read the CC with [(∃e)-AdvP-*în acea vreme* ('in that time')], followed by the past conditional, combined with [(∃e)-AdvP-*ieri* ('yesterday')]. Here the first adverbial marks RT, while the second marks ET. RT-'in that time' is incompatible with ET-'yesterday'. One might attribute this to the undetermined nature of RT, but eliminating ET-'yesterday' shows that RT-'in that time' does not imply a past perfect. E(hX) may be present if the agent refers to a past perfect, but decoding this requires extralinguistic knowledge. The RT [(∃e)-AdvP-*săptămâna trecută* ('last week')] removes this requirement, yet the construction remains semantically anomalous with ET-'yesterday'. I assume this is an aspectual conflict, not a temporal one, since both past conditionals and the present subjunctive are compatible with past adverbials.

This hypothesis is supported if we read (5c) with RT-'in that time' and ET-'until that time', followed by E6 and E7. The undetermined RT gains a past perfect reference through ET, forcing a past perfect value for the present subjunctive. With two similar adverbials, the construction is slightly odd, since ET is marginally saved by a prepositional variable.[12] If RT follows ET, the CC becomes semantically anomalous because ET's bridge or label is excluded from checking, leaving only a ground label with an unchecked figure label.

Consider RT-'last week' with ET-'until that time'. RT implies a past simple context, valid for the past conditional, so the derivation is valid only if ET does

[10] In Dowty's framework, such 'forced volition' corresponds to the irrealis interval [I', w'], since the agent's volitional state cannot be evaluated within the temporal history of the actual world. The volitional property is therefore interpreted in a world whose past does not coincide with the realis world up to RT, which is why the agent is described as being "outside" his [I, w].

[11] If 'yesterday' is internally segmented, a past perfect label may exceptionally pair with it. For instance, if the relevant subinterval (8-10 AM) becomes pure past when a later segment is checked, its label shifts from past simple to past perfect. In such rare cases, the past perfect is not semantically anomalous, since its label can still unify with 'yesterday'. This shows that even a past simple adverbial may accommodate a past perfect reading when event labelling forces it.

[12] The preposition contributes a minimal interval boundary that allows ET to be weakly included under RT, preventing a crash but not fully licensing the temporal axis. This is why the rescue is only marginal.

not precede RT. ET-'until that time' cannot precede RT-'last week'. The logical implication is that ET cannot be later than the following week's Sunday 23:59; the minimal RT-ET difference can be one minute, the maximal seven days.

Consider also RT-'last week' with ET-'until yesterday'. The minimal requirement for RT remains, and ET-'until yesterday' implies that both RT and ET occur within week 1. E7 lacks truth value, but its hypothetical value is indexed in this period.

The next question is how figure vs. ground interacts with these adverbials. In a simple CC, 'yesterday' can appear clause-initially as RT, and most events are compatible with this. However, if RT-'yesterday' is followed by ET-'last week', both logical and aspectual conflicts arise. 'Yesterday' is closer to ST than 'last week', so its temporality excludes ET's temporality. ET-'last week' becomes the figure event, RT-'yesterday' the ground. In the acceptable version of (5c), the ground precedes the figure, showing that in non-simultaneous CCs aspectual/temporal checking must differ to avoid derivational crash.

In constructions with multiple adverbials, order may matter, but the key issue is inclusion vs. exclusion. A ground event closer to the present cannot label a variable whose temporal/aspectual axis does not include it. This is not Hornstein's (1993) BTS: if the CC is read as an individual event, 'last week' can follow E7. From a labelling perspective, 'yesterday' cannot access the RT's [I' and w'], and this appears mandatory in constructions like (5c).

I previously noted that Romanian future simple shows restrictions with multiple adverbials marking RT and ET; here I illustrate that RT itself may impose combinatory restrictions (5d). In (5d), RT-'yesterday' can be followed by an ET whose [I' and w'] are included in RT's. RT-'yesterday' cannot include ET-'today', so 'today' creates its own label, rejected by the CP temporal/aspectual operator. In E7, the present subjunctive's grammatical tense is subordinate to the CC's dominant tense, since its variable 'until 10 AM' must refer to the previous day. ET-'until Friday' is semantically anomalous not because of the preposition but because the noun introduces a misleading 24-hour shift.[13] Event position also affects variable labelling: in (5c), 'yesterday' is the ground event (relative to the hidden RT of E6), while in (5d) it becomes the figure if accompanied by ET-'until 10 AM'. RT-'yesterday' cannot be accompanied by ET-'yesterday'; a temporal/aspectual difference is required.

[13] The '24-hour shift' refers to the fact that Friday introduces a temporal axis that cannot be included in RT-'yesterday'. The noun denotes a full-day interval whose endpoint lies outside the temporal domain established by the RT. As a result, ET-'until Friday' forces the derivation to evaluate an interval that begins within the RT-domain but ends in a later temporal segment, creating a discontinuity that the CP-level temporal/aspectual operator cannot license.

(6)	*Noi,*	*familia,*	*dacă*	*am*
	we.nom	family.def.nom	if	aux.cond.1pl
	fi	*mai*	*energici, 1/*	*am*
	be.inf	more	energic	aux.cond.1pl
	putea	*lua*	*măsuri, 2/*	*ști, 3/*
	can.inf	take.inf	measures.acc	know.ind.prs.2sg
	sunt	*destule,*	*debilitate*	*mintală*
	be.ind.prs.3pl	enough	retard.nom	mentally
	etcetera, 4/	*dar*	*moșul*	*e*
	etc	but	old.man def.nom	be.ind.prs.3sg
	pezevenghi, 5/	*îl*	*învață*	*Otilia 6/*
	slick	cl.acc.m.3sg	learn.ind.prs.3sg	Otilia.nom
	și-l	*ajută*	*Pascalopol. 7/*	
	and-cl.acc.m.3sg	help.ind.prs.3sg	Pascalopol.nom	

'We, as a family, if we were more energetic, we would be able to change things; you know there are many people with mental disabilities, etc., but the old man is slick, Otilia teaches him and Pascalopol helps him.' (EO, 111-112)

Example (6) illustrates one of the most intricate forms of indecision in conditional complex clauses, where lexical and structural factors jointly destabilize the aspectual configuration. It shows how a real conditional pair interacts with a sequence of present-tense clauses, generating multiple competing bridges whose interpretation depends on hidden event variables, event labelling, and the availability of aspectual donation.

(6) consists of seven events: E1 and E2 are real conditional events, while the remaining events appear in the present simple. Several of these are not introduced by subordinating conjunctions but occur as independent clauses separated by commas. This is particularly relevant for the relation between E3 and E4: despite the absence of an overt conjunction, E3 is syntactically dependent on E4 due to its transitivity. The comma also isolates E5 from the subsequent events, shaping the internal architecture of the CC's aspectual bridge. In this configuration, punctuation becomes a structural cue, signalling how temporal and aspectual segmentation is distributed across the clause.

E1 and E2: real conditionals and the role of E(hX). E1 and E2 form a genuine conditional pair: the failure of X leads to the failure of Y. Their linear order

corresponds to their temporal order, so a bridge between them is obligatory. I assume a hidden event variable E(hX) for both conditionals. A first hypothesis is that E1's local aspect is checked by E(hX1), and that this result could be donated to E2. However, this would lead to excessively late checking at S-structure, which risks a derivational crash. Although the conditional conjunction in E1 carries the "yes/no" result of E(hX1), which could in principle rescue the derivation, the X-bar representation of the CC must begin with E2 (as the main clause). If E1 were structurally higher, the conditional conjunction would be positioned below E(hX1), blocking raising and allowing only lowering. Since temporal and aspectual checking occurs at the CP-type operator (as I hypothesized above), raising would no longer be motivated after lowering (cf. Harwood 2014).

Aspectual sharing is another theoretical option, but the temporal gap between the two conditionals prevents the sharing of relevant components. E1 cannot donate its distant aspect to E2: even if E(hX1)'s result is interpreted as distant, E2's Aktionsart E(hX2) only allows local aspect to be checked. This yields two ground-labelled events with different [I′, w′] values. Sharing or donation becomes possible only if the temporal distance between these two reference points is reduced. This reduction can be achieved in two ways:

(i) ST-based equalization: removing a hidden past operator from E1 so that E1 and E2 temporarily share the same temporal axis.

(ii) Temporal inertia: allowing E(hX1)'s local aspect to influence E(hX2) once the temporal gap is minimized. However, this method depends on the truth value of E(hX1), which introduces instability. The most precise solution is therefore individual aspect checking for E1 with an inserted breakpoint, ensuring that E2's evaluation does not depend exclusively on E1.

The temporal gap: The minimal or maximal temporal gap cannot be measured in absolute duration, since CCs differ widely in their temporal structure. The decisive factor is labelling: the correct assignment of [I, w] or [I′, w′] determines when the two conditionals can be evaluated together. Initially, E1 and E2 share the same label, which blocks truth-result-based analysis. This bridge also shows that individual aspect checking (without a breakpoint) is not superior to sharing or donation, because E1 and E2 are mutually dependent. E2 alone would be present/future-oriented, but with E1 added, an implicit past operator appears, expressing present inability as a past-based consequence. E3 and the two possible bridges: E3 is not introduced by a conjunction, so it can be interpreted in two ways: (i) E3 as part of the first bridge (E1-E2-E3)

In this case, E3's local aspect is checked together with E2's local aspect. Since E3 expresses a reproach, local aspect checking is appropriate. E3's temporal axis cannot exceed E2's Aktionsart; its minimal endpoint is tied to E(hX1)'s local

aspect. (ii) E3 as part of the second bridge (E3-E4-E5). Here, E3's temporal axis expands significantly. Together with E4, E3 expresses a general value and receives a ground label with [I, w]. E3's distant aspect can be donated to E4 because no final-state labelling is required; internal aspect (decoding) is sufficient. In a general-value bridge, E3 may even lack a local aspect. E4 and E5: general vs. individual: E5 belongs to the same second bridge but refers to an individual, so it carries a local aspect. The adversative conjunction does not create a temporal relation; therefore, no aspectual donation occurs between E4 and E5, and both events undergo individual checking. Why E6 cannot follow E3 directly: One might propose that E6 follows E3, but several factors rule this out:

(i) E6 is linearly preceded by E5, whose clitic reference must be preserved.

(ii) If E6 followed E3, it would occupy a higher X-bar position than E5, disrupting the clitic-noun relation.

(iii) This would require affix lowering without a corresponding raising step, which is derivationally unmotivated.

If we nevertheless hypothesize an E3→E6 sequence, the second bridge would fall temporally between the first (E1-E2) and the third (E4-E5), giving it a shorter duration than the third bridge. This interpretation would only be accessible to speakers without prior access to the hypothetical E3+E6 configuration; otherwise, the derivation would crash.

The analysis in this subsection shows that temporal and aspectual delimitation in Romanian conditional complex clauses depends not on a fixed SOT system, but on operator-driven interactions between events, adverbials, and hidden variables. The behaviour of RT and ET demonstrates that aspectual donation is highly constrained, and that even minimal changes in adverbial scope or c-command may alter the entire configuration of the clause. The examples also confirm that individual tense checking is insufficient in dependent structures: only operator-based aspectual verification can prevent derivational crash and ensure a coherent interpretation.

5. Conclusions

Example (4) shows how narrator-induced ground values allow two past events (E1–E2) to remain aspectually distinct while avoiding conflict with the modal conditional E3. The contrast between (4a) and (4b) demonstrates how a shifted culmination point and the achievement-type reading of E2 block aspectual donation, making adverbial incompatibility the key diagnostic for identifying

the shared bridge. In (5), eliminating a mandatory bridge forces tense and aspect to be checked through RT–ET interactions, revealing that E(hX) is superior to simple transformation because it preserves uncertainty and allows label synchronisation across clauses. The example also shows that individual aspectual checking is insufficient in the presence of multiple adverbials: polarity, achievement-type readings, and RT–ET ordering jointly determine whether a past simple adverbial can be reinterpreted as past perfect or whether the derivation crashes. In (6), lexical indecision (via E(hX) and the shifted culmination point) interacts with ST and labelling to determine which of the two possible aspectual bridges becomes available. The example also illustrates how improper c-command configurations and scope-based constraints block certain derivations (e.g., E3→E6), ensuring that only the structurally coherent temporal/aspectual bridge survives.

The detailed examples above show that conditional CCs remain interpretable only when aspectual verification is carried out at the operator level; the following conclusion synthesizes the main implications of this system.

The data discussed in this section illustrate that Romanian conditional complex clauses require a multi-layered aspectual architecture, in which hidden event variables, operator interactions, and adverbial scope jointly determine the final interpretation. The conditional mood's inherent indecision is not eliminated but re-distributed across the clause, depending on whether events receive local or distant aspect, and whether their labels align with the temporal axis established by RT and ET, a structure that also lends itself to computational implementation through explicit event-variable synchronisation. The analysis further shows that aspectual bridges are not freely available: their formation is restricted by syntactic configuration, Aktionsart compatibility, and the presence or absence of a critical event capable of licensing a shared label. When these conditions fail, the derivation either becomes ungrammatical or yields an unintended or semantically anomalous reading.

Overall, the paper demonstrates that conditional CCs cannot be evaluated through tense alone. Instead, they require a label-based, operator-sensitive system, in which aspectual verification, event dependency, and structural position jointly regulate the interpretive space of the clause.

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