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What is modal about *I thought that . . .* ?[1]

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Some nonmodal tense forms (e.g. *thought*) can trigger one or two kinds of modal interpretation, viz. suspended factuality (implicating present counterfactuality) of the complement clause (*I thought you weren't married*) or discourse tentativeness (*I thought you might lend me your camera*). The authors explain how this nonmodal use of the past tense – the thinking is represented as a past fact – can lead to one of these modal interpretations of the complement clause. In doing so they discuss various observations in connection with these and other *I thought that . . .* constructions and similar uses of other past-tense and past-perfect forms.

1 Introduction

A sentence like *Ian thinks Bill's not married* receives an interpretation in which the head-clause situation is factual (i.e. Ian really thinks what I say he thinks)[2] and in which the complement clause situation is 'subjectively factual', i.e. in the subjective 'possible world' (intensional world) of Ian's thinking, it is a fact that Bill is not married. When couched in a past-time context, a sentence like *Ian thought Bill wasn't married* can be interpreted quite similarly. In that case the only difference between *Ian thinks* and *Ian thought* is that by using the past tense the speaker locates Ian's thinking at some past time rather than in the present. The past time in question may be indicated by the context, as in (1a–b). It may also remain implicit but focused by a special accent on *thought*, as in (1c):

(1) (a) 'How did Ian find out we weren't married?' – 'During the holidays he never saw the two of you together, so naturally he *thought* you weren't married. He didn't even think you were a couple.' *(This is to be read as a question–answer pair, i.e. as a scrap of conversation.)*
(b) Mr Bielby said: 'We were standing outside the classroom when I *thought* I heard a scream. We looked through the glass door and all we could see were blood stains on white blouses.' (COB-S)[3]
(c) 'Have you heard? Manfred doesn't benefit from Muriel's death. Her son inherits everything.' – 'I'm not surprised. I THOUGHT they weren't married – that they were just living together.' *(The nuclear accent on 'thought' conveys the idea 'I already thought that before it was confirmed by what you told me just now.')*

[1] We wish to thank the anonymous referees of *ELL* for their useful comments on the first draft of this article.
[2] The hearer will assume this because, in accordance with Grice's (1975) Maxim of Quality, a cooperative speaker should be assumed to be telling the truth.
[3] Some of the examples in this article are attested. Those followed by 'COB-S' and 'COB-W' come from the Cobuild corpus, i.e. from the spoken and written parts, respectively.

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These examples have in common that the thinking is located in the past and that the complement clause receives a subjectively factual interpretation.

However, sentences with *thought* can also be used in a context in which the speaker is really concerned with the present. In that case the locating of the thinking in the past triggers one of two possible readings: 'suspended present factuality' of the complement clause, as in (2a), or 'discourse tentativeness', as in (2b). As we will see, both readings belong to the realm of modality.

(2) (a) 'Let me introduce you to my wife.' – 'Oh, I *thought* you weren't married.' *(thought = 'was under the impression that')*
(b) 'What brings you here?' – 'I *thought* you might help me.' *(less direct, more tentative than I think you may help me)*

It is the main aim of this article to investigate how the different modal readings of the complement clause of *thought* come about in sentences like (2a–b). In section 2 we concentrate on the epistemic modal notion of suspended present factuality. Here we deal with questions such as the nature of the phenomenon, the reason why *thought* can only yield this interpretation if it follows a first-person subject, the step from 'suspended factuality' to 'implicated counterfactuality', the possibility of using *That's true* or *That's not true* in reply to *I thought* sentences implying suspended present factuality, the use of infinitival complement clauses after *thought* and *had thought*, and the question of which verbs other than *think* can be used in the past tense with the implication of suspended present factuality.

In section 3 we deal with the 'attitudinal' (tentative, polite) use of *thought* exemplified by (2b). We discuss the nature of discourse tentativeness, the pragmatic reasons for using an attitudinal modal past form, and the observation that complement clauses of *thought* sometimes yield several modal readings. Section 4 is the concluding section in which the main findings are summarized.

2 Suspended present factuality

2.1 Definition

'Suspended present factuality' is the epistemic modal meaning of the complement clause of *thought* in examples like (2a), repeated here:

(2) (a) 'Let me introduce you to my wife.' – 'Oh, I *thought* you weren't married.' *(thought = 'was under the impression that')*

In the reply sentence, the use of the past-tense form *thought* creates this modal interpretation of the complement clause (but not of the form *thought* itself) because the choice of the past tense suspends the 'subjectively factual' (see section 1) reading which is naturally assigned to the complement clause of *I think*. This becomes clear if we compare the following:

(3) (a) 'Perhaps Shirley would like a cigarette?' – 'I *think* she *has given up* smoking.'
(b) 'Perhaps Shirley would like a cigarette?' – 'I *thought* she *had given up* smoking.'

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The use of *think* in (3a) implies that the speaker presents the contents of the complement clause as subjectively factual, i.e. factual in his opinion. This means that he thinks that Shirley would not like a cigarette, or at least is not going to smoke one. The use of *thought* in (3b) implies that this assumption of factuality (of the complement clause situation) is suspended: speaker A's question *Perhaps Shirley would like a cigarette?* is understood by B as indicating that Shirley still smokes, and the use of *thought* implies that speaker B is not certain whether he can reject this belief, i.e. that he is no longer sure whether Shirley has actually given up smoking or not. In other words, *thought* is selected to suggest that speaker B is no longer committed to the truth of his past thought and therefore feels that he cannot locate the thought in question in the present.

For a better understanding of 'suspended present factuality' it is useful to have a look at some further examples. Consider:

(4) 'This is my wife.' – 'Oh I *thought* you weren't married.'

In this context, speaker B's message seems to be:

> My past thoughts do not fit present evidence. Since I believe that, unless stated otherwise, being married can be taken to be a permanent state, which, if it was holding in the past, is also holding in the present, this conclusion [that my past thoughts do not fit present evidence] means either that my past thoughts were wrong, or that my interpretation of present evidence is wrong, or that I am missing some information that can make two apparently contradictory sets of cognitive information (past thoughts and present evidence) congruent with one another. I would like to have some further information allowing me to deal with the contradiction either by dispensing with my past thoughts or by dispensing with my interpretation of present evidence (and reinterpreting it in a way congruent with my past thoughts) or by showing how the present evidence does match up with my past thoughts after all.

The sort of information which, in (4), allows speaker B to dispense with his past thought is a response to *Oh I thought you weren't married* of *Well, I am* or *Yes, have been for years*. The sort of information that allows speaker B to dispense with his interpretation of current evidence is a response like: *Well, I'm not actually married, but as far as I'm concerned, Millie is my wife*. The sort of information that allows speaker B to make his past cognitive attitude congruent with present evidence is: *I wasn't. We got married this morning*.

A similar example is *I thought you didn't like ice cream*, uttered on seeing a photo of a friend eating ice cream as a child. Here too the speaker suspends the subjective factuality of *I think you don't like ice cream* by using the past tense. The message is:

> What I thought in the past runs counter to present evidence, which must mean either (a) that I thought wrong, or (b) that I thought right and I am misinterpreting present evidence – the current world is not really the way I think it is, or (c) that I am missing some information which would show that my past thought and the present evidence are not incompatible after all, i.e. that I was correct about the past general situation but that this has now changed.

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Each of these possibilities can lead to a particular kind of reply, as is clear from the following examples, in which *I thought you didn't like ice cream* should be read as speaker A's comment on being shown a photo picturing a friend eating ice cream as a child. (Note that in each case *I thought you didn't like ice cream* implies (or, more correctly, implicates – see section 2.5 below) that speaker A believes the proposition 'You don't like ice cream' to be counterfactual at the time of speech.)

(5) (a) 'I *thought* you didn't like ice cream.' – '{You were wrong. / Actually} I do like ice cream. I don't know what made you think I didn't.' *(= possibility (a): the reply denies the contents of speaker A's thought and therefore indirectly confirms speaker A's belief that 'You don't like ice cream' may not be true at the time of speech.)*

(b) 'I *thought* you didn't like ice cream.' – '{That's right / Actually}, I don't. But my father made me pretend to be eating ice-cream for the sake of the photo.' *(= possibility (b): the reply {That's right / Actually}, I don't confirms that the content of A's belief is still applicable in the present by saying: 'You're correct in thinking that I don't like ice cream.')*

(c) 'I *thought* you didn't like ice cream.' – 'That's right. I don't like ice cream. But I used to love it.' *(= possibility (c): the reply confirms that speaker A's past thought was true and therefore indirectly rejects the suggestion that speaker A thought wrong and now no longer thinks that speaker B does not like ice cream. Speaker B accounts for this rejection by pointing out that the seeming incongruity between speaker A's thought of speaker B as not liking ice cream and the present evidence of the photo can be explained by a change in speaker B's feelings towards ice cream.)*

A final example:

(6) 'Can I speak to Mrs Robinson please?' – 'Er you've missed her I'm afraid.' – 'Have I? Oh dear, I *thought* she would be in all evening.' – 'No.' – 'Erm' – 'She should be back by ten o'clock at the latest.' – 'Right. What's the latest I can ring? Cos I might not be back till just after then.' *(adapted from COB-S)*

This is an instance of speaker A using '*I thought* + complement clause' (where he has reason to believe that the complement is, or at least may well be, now not true) partly to allow the addressee to supply further information. (There appears to be a combination of explaining why speaker A has called at what turns out to be an inappropriate time, and simply laying his past thought 'on the table' in order to get more accurate information about the movements of the person he wants to contact. In fact, the strategy does not work instantly – speaker A has to make it clear (by uttering *Erm . . .*) that he needs a bit more than confirmation of the counterfactuality of his past thought, but it does work in the end.)

2.2 The nature of the past-tense form

In example (4) (*'This is my wife.' – 'Oh I thought you weren't married'*) the *I thought* clause is not a 'modal preterite clause' (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002: 148) or 'hypothetical past' clause (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 1985: 188). That is, in (4), *thought* is not a modal past-tense form which represents a present situation of

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thinking as not being factual, as is the case in *If only you thought differently!* or *It's time you thought differently*. In (4), *thought* receives a factual (i.e. epistemically nonmodal) interpretation. The reason why the speaker focuses on the past is not that he wants to trigger a counterfactual reading but that he wants to create a contrast between a past intensional world (world of thinking) and his own speech-time world. The complement clause *you weren't married* also uses a normal tense form, viz. a relative past-tense form expressing the temporal relation of simultaneity in the past temporal domain established by *thought*.[4] However, the complement clause receives an extra element of interpretation, viz. the modal idea of suspended factuality. This follows from the fact that the speaker uses *thought* instead of *think*, although he is basically concerned with the present. Using the past tense here suggests that the speaker cannot use the present tense because he is no longer convinced of the correctness of his thinking. This probably follows from the Gricean Maxim of Relation (relevance). Other things being equal, it is harder to link an utterance about the past to a discourse about the present than it is to link an utterance about the present to a discourse about the present. It follows that if, in a discourse which is about the present, a speaker contributes an utterance which appears to be about the past, then (on the assumption that the speaker is being cooperative, and thus making his contribution as relevant as possible) the hearer will assume that the speaker has a particular reason for referring to the past rather than to the present; for example, because the past conflicts with the present in some way.

2.3 The past counterpart of 'suspended present factuality': suspended past factuality

In the examples that we have considered up to now the past tense in the head clause expresses a contrast between the present and the past. This means that the past-tense form *thought* is used in order to express a contrast between a past intensional world and the speaker's speech-time world; in other words, to suggest that the contents of the complement clause are no longer regarded as factual at the time of speech. *Thought* thus evokes a double time reference: on the one hand it refers to a past world of thinking, on the other it indirectly refers to the present in that the sentence as a whole makes a modalized statement about the present, more specifically about the present suspended factuality of the anterior thought.

In a novel which is conventionally written in the past tense (i.e. the past tense refers to the 'present' of the novel), the contrast between the present of the novel and the past of the novel can be expressed by 'backshifting' (Jespersen, 1932: 158–9) *thought* to *had thought*. The same is true of sentences that form part of another kind of discourse about the past:

(7) I was shaken by the news that Bill was going to get divorced. I *had thought* that Bill was still a bachelor.

[4] In Declerck's (1991) model of tense, a distinction is made between absolute past-tense forms, which create a 'past temporal domain', and relative past-tense forms, which express simultaneity in such a past domain. In *I thought you weren't married*, the form *thought* establishes the past domain and *were* locates the time of its situation simultaneous with the time of the thinking.

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However, we can also find examples in which *thought* is not backshifted:

(8) I was shaken by the news that Bill was going to get divorced. I *thought* that Bill was still a bachelor.

Those who accept (8) as an alternative to (7) interpret *thought* as referring to a time which is anterior to the time of the situation referred to in the head clause of the preceding sentence. This use of the past tense, which establishes a past temporal domain of its own (see footnote 4), is a possibility which is generally available in the English tense system: the time of a situation which is meant to be *interpreted* as anterior to the time of another situation often does not have to be *represented* as anterior to the latter by means of a tense expressing anteriority. Thus, in the following example, we can choose between the past perfect and the past tense to refer to the anterior situation. The only proviso is that when we use the past tense, the anteriority relation (not expressed by the past tense) must be clear from the linguistic or extralinguistic context:

(9) I know that John was punished because he {*smashed* / had smashed} a window. (*Our pragmatic knowledge of the world tells us that what causes a punishment is anterior to the punishment itself.*)

2.4 I thought *versus* X thought

Consider the following example:

(10) What is Cheryl doing here in Croydon? Her father *thought* she was in London.

There does not seem to be an implicature of suspended factuality here, i.e. no suggestion that Cheryl's father no longer thinks that Cheryl is in London. After all, it is possible that Cheryl's father does not know about her being in Croydon. This shows an important characteristic of the implicature of suspended present factuality: it only arises with a first-person subject, in other words when the speaker uttering the sentence is the same person as the one perceiving the 'mismatch' between his past cognitive attitude and a present fact. In the above example, *thought* locates Cheryl's father's belief in the past without evoking the modal interpretation of suspended present factuality of the complement clause. However, such a modal reading does arise when *Cheryl's father thought she was in London* is interpreted as meaning 'On the basis of what Cheryl's father said *I* thought she was in London.'

2.5 From 'suspended factuality' to 'implicated counterfactuality'

It has been made clear in the previous section that stating a past thought in a context that is concerned with the present can invite a modal interpretation of 'suspended factuality' of the complement clause.[5] *I thought you weren't married* can convey the

[5] The formulation '*can* invite' is relevant, because the reading which implicates present counterfactuality of the complement clause is only intended if the speaker believes in the truth of the 'evidence to the contrary' that is

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message 'I am no longer certain that you aren't married', i.e. 'Faced with evidence to the contrary, I have to reconsider my past assumption that you weren't married.' As already noted, this reconsideration leads to one of the following conclusions:

(a) 'I think the counterevidence is clear, so I no longer think that you are not married.' (*This is a 'present counterfactuality' reading: I now think that the assumption 'You are not married' is wrong.*)
(b) 'I am not convinced that my past assumption was wrong, so what appears to be counterevidence may not really be counterevidence. If it is not, then either I am mistaken in interpreting what I perceive or I am not mistaken but do not have the information that would reconcile what I perceive with my past assumption.'

Unless there is a context suggesting otherwise, conclusion (a) is pragmatically much more likely than (b). Conclusion (b) implies either that I cannot trust my ability to interpret observational data or that I consider it impossible for me to draw conclusions from observational data (because there might always be relevant information that I am not aware of). In practice, however, language users draw conclusions all the time. Only seldom do they doubt their ability to draw conclusions from observational data or do they reckon with possible unknown factors. People even have a tendency to disregard these two considerations altogether and jump to conclusions. It is in keeping with this that (a) and (b) represent the unmarked and marked possibilities respectively. Failing an indication inviting (b), people naturally go for (a). In the case of *I thought you weren't married* this means that the idea 'I no longer think that you are unmarried' is the unmarked interpretation, i.e. the one that is automatically selected as long as there is no indication to the contrary. In pragmatic terms: 'present counterfactuality' (e.g. the idea 'You're not unmarried') is an *implicature* of 'suspended factuality'. Unless there is a context or pragmatic knowledge running counter to it, the counterfactual interpretation can safely be assumed to be the one intended by the use of the past tense expressing suspended factuality.

The above readings (a) and (b) illustrate the two extremes of suspended factuality: (a) means that the speaker now believes that his past thought was mistaken – a reading which implicates present counterfactuality of the contents of the complement clause of *thought* – while (b) just implies that the speaker is no longer committed to the truth of these contents – a reading which does not give rise to the counterfactuality implicature. Since (b) is the marked interpretation, it can only be enforced by the context. That is, the context can make it clear that the speaker is (at least ostensibly) not sure about the correctness of his interpretation that there is counterevidence to the present validity of his past belief. In that case he is simply putting the thought 'on the table' so to

to be found in the context. In the following example, the reply is presumably meant to express that the speaker rejects (part of) the claim made in the preceding sentence:

(i) "Tomorrow I will be in Canberra, the capital of Australia." – "I *thought* the capital of Australia was Sydney."

As we will see in section 3, the past tense is used here for reasons of discourse tentativeness, although it may also be meant to be sarcastic. At any rate the reply is less direct than *I think the capital of Australia is Sydney.*

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speak, making the point 'I'm not committed to a present tense/time-reference version of this thought.' This can function to invite help in resolving the discrepancy between a past thought and the present world of discourse that has given rise to the speaker's inability to commit himself to the same belief about the present. The same pattern – of an expression of noncommitment to truth inviting an explanation for a mismatch between a view-of-the-world-up-till-now and present evidence – occurs with questions that seek an explanation for a discrepancy between a speaker's until-now view of reality and what appears actually to be the case. For example:

(11) *(Barbara speaking)* 'Mum, can you come and pick us up from the concert?' – '{Isn't Kate with you? / Wasn't Kate going to drive you home? / I *thought* Kate was driving you home.}' – 'Yes, but she's drunk too much to drive.'

Just a 'Yes' would be pragmatically completely unacceptable here, and would represent a failure to maintain discourse coherence: whichever of the three alternatives the mother utters, Barbara's answer has to explain the gap between what her mother thought, which was that Kate would be driving Barbara home, and the present evidence (namely the request for a lift) that Kate is not going to drive Barbara home.

Another type of example in which *I thought* . . . evokes meaning (b), i.e. the idea of noncommitment on the part of the speaker, is when the speaker is not really treating his thought as a past fact. This is the case when the meaning of *I thought* is extended so as to express something like 'I was supposed to think that . . . ' or 'You tried to make me think that . . . ':

(12) 'I'm going to the dance tonight with my friend Angie.' – 'I *thought* you were only going out with Betty.' – 'Well, yes – no. Just in a manner of speaking.'

The most likely interpretation is that speaker A has told speaker B that he was only going out with Betty, but that B did not believe this. B's *I thought* . . . sentence then expresses something like 'Didn't you try to make me believe that you were only going out with Betty?' and may be used sarcastically (because B has never believed it).

On the other hand, there are many cases in which *thought* is couched in a context which does not allow any interpretation other than the 'presently counterfactual' one, i.e. the interpretation referred to above as the (a) reading:

(13) (a) *(on meeting Tom in London)* Hello Tom! I *thought* you were in Australia at the moment.

(b) 'He supposed you were far too boring to do anything as enterprising as that.' – 'Well, he's right there, isn't he?' – 'What do you mean?' – 'Isn't that what you think?' – 'Of course not, don't be so rude.' – 'I'm sorry. I *thought* that's what you just said.' (Hampton, 1970: 57) *(The counterfactual reading is the only one that makes sense if I'm sorry is interpreted as 'I apologize for misunderstanding you.')*

Note that (13b) is a rare instance of *thought* being followed by a present-tense complement. This is because the sentence implies the idea 'Is my impression not correct?' It should be noted, indeed, that the attempt to make relevant an assertion of a

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'past thought which seems to be at odds with current evidence' will frequently lead to a secondary, and important, implication, namely that the speaker thinks the addressee can reconcile (in one of the three ways mentioned) a past thought with conflicting present evidence, and that the speaker wants the addressee to provide such an explanation or clarification.

2.6 Replying to I thought that... sentences

A reply to *I thought that*... can confirm or contradict either the claim that speaker A thought something – see (15a–b) – or the content of the thought – see (16a–b) – but it cannot directly confirm or reject the implicature of present counterfactuality of the content of the thought (i.e. the implicature that the speaker does not believe that the thought applies in the present) – see (17a–b). To illustrate this triple claim let us again consider the following example:

(14) I *thought* you didn't like ice cream.

This sentence can be used in various contexts and may be followed by a reply which may explicitly confirm or reject the claim that the speaker had the thought in question:

(15) (a) *(uttered on seeing a picture of the addressee eating ice cream)* 'I thought you didn't like ice cream.' – 'Yes, I know you thought that.' *(confirmation of the existence of the thought)*
(b) 'You bought an ice cream for everyone except me. Why?' – 'I *thought* you didn't like ice cream.' – 'No, you didn't think that. You just shut me out because you don't like me.' *(denial of the existence of the thought)*

The second possibility is for speaker B to deny the truth of the content of speaker A's thought (without denying the existence of the thought):

(16) (a) 'I *thought* you didn't like ice cream.' – '{No / *Yes / ??Actually / That's right / You're right / Correct / Indeed}, I don't like ice cream.' *(The acceptability judgements relate to each response as a means of communicating. The replies confirm the tenseless proposition forming the content of speaker A's factual thought applied to the present, i.e. the truth of the tensed proposition 'You don't like ice cream.')*
(b) 'I *thought* you didn't like ice cream.' – '{No / *Yes / Actually / *That's right / *You're right / *Correct / *Indeed}, I do like ice cream.' *(denial of the contents of speaker A's factual thought applied to the present)*

We might expect there to be a third possibility, viz. that speaker B directly responds to the implicated counterfactual message 'You like ice cream.' However, this possibility is not available. The implicature can only be indirectly confirmed by the denial of the content of the thought or indirectly denied by the confirmation of this content. Speakers do not normally confirm or deny this implicature by directly replying to it (by using an expression like *No*, *Yes*, *That's right*, etc.).

(17) (a) 'I thought you didn't like ice cream.' – '{*No / *Yes / *Actually / *That's right / *You're right / *Correct / ??Indeed}, I do like ice cream.' *(intended to be read as a confirmation of the implicature 'You do like ice cream') (Note that Actually,*

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I do like ice cream is only unacceptable on the intended reading. It is quite acceptable if it denies the contents of speaker A's thought, as in (16b).)

(b) 'I thought you didn't like ice cream.' – '{*No / *Yes / *Actually / *That's right / *You're right / *Correct / *Indeed} I don't like ice cream.' *(intended to be read as a denial of the implicature 'You do like ice cream')*

The following is a similar example, in which *No* can only be interpreted as rejecting the content of speaker B's thought, and not as a denial of the implicature of present counterfactuality:

(18) A. '. . . on the European issue his position, Douglas's position, and mine are the same.'
B. 'But I *thought* you wanted a single currency, or were prepared to accept a single currency.'
A. '*No*, I made a very long speech just the other day, setting out my doubts about the timing of a single currency.' (COB-S)

Intuitively, we cannot interpret speaker A's *No* as a response to an implicated '(I now think that) you don't want a single currency, you're not prepared to accept a single currency' (though *No* could be used as a response to an overt utterance of the same words). *No* clearly denies the contents of speaker B's thought, viz. 'You want a single currency, or are prepared to accept a single currency.' This is in keeping with the fact that speaker A can substitute *Yes, but* for *No* with little change of effect. It is not the case that speaker B's utterance is ambiguous between 'I think you don't want a single currency' – to go with the *No* response – and 'I thought you wanted a single currency' – to go with the *Yes, but* response. The truth is that with a *Yes, but* response, speaker A's *yes* would be confirming that B's past thought 'You want a single currency . . . ' was correct, and the *but*-clause would be added to deal with the mismatch between the current situation (A's being at one with someone who does not want a single currency) and the past (A's wanting a single currency). By contrast, with a *No* response, A is rejecting the statement 'You want a single currency', going on to prove his point by referring to the fact that he has just made a speech showing that he does not want a single currency (possibly after changing his mind about it).

In other words, our interpretation of the example above is that B's *But I thought . . .* is saying 'There's a discrepancy here' and B goes on to outline the problem: '(You're saying that your position is the same as Douglas's, and yet) I had reason to believe, up to now, that your position was not the same as Douglas's, and that unlike him, you wanted a single currency, and that would normally lead me to believe that your position *is not* the same as Douglas's and you *do* want a single currency.' Speaker B is clearly not saying 'You don't want a single currency.' (In fact, he is more likely to be interpreted as saying 'You do secretly want a single currency – you're just playing politics.') Speaker A's *No* is saying 'No, I {don't / didn't} want a single currency – well, not without reservation – witness the fact that I made a long speech . . . '.

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The above considerations accord with what we observe in connection with other implicatures, which can be cancelled in various ways, but not by a contradicting reply which directly denies the implicature. Compare:

(19) (a) I used to smoke. *(implicates: 'I no longer smoke' – see Comrie, 1985: 24)*
(b) I used to smoke. In fact, I still do. *(implicature cancelled by the same speaker)*
(c) 'I used to smoke.' – 'In fact, you still do.' *(implicature cancelled by speaker B)*
(d) 'I used to smoke.' – '{*No. / *(That's) wrong. / *Liar!} You still do.' *(implicature directly attacked and contradicted by speaker B)*

2.7 Infinitival complement clauses after thought *and* had thought

So far we have only given examples in which *thought*, suggesting suspended present factuality of the content of the complement clause, or *had thought*, suggesting suspended past factuality (see section 2.3 above), is followed by a finite complement, more specifically a *that*-clause (often with deletion of *that*). However, *(had) thought* can occasionally also be followed by an infinitive clause. In that case it receives one of the following four interpretations.

Firstly, it can be interpreted as an alternative to a *that*-clause whose situation is represented as posterior to (= future with respect to) the time of the thought. In that case *(had) thought to* comes close in meaning to *(had) expected to*:

(20) (a) We *had thought* to see him at the dance, but he wasn't there. *(= 'We had thought that we would see him . . . ')*
(b) I never *thought* to see this! *(= 'I never expected to see this!', 'I expected I would never see this.')*
(c) We *had thought* to be able to promote cultural pluralism by deploying arguments of cultural relativism, but found we had created difficulties far worse than the defects we set out to remedy. (COB-W) *(= We had thought we {were / would be} able to promote . . .)*
(d) I never *thought* to hear you say that. (Lodge, 1989: 239) *(= I thought I would never hear you say that.)*
(e) . . . but it certainly wasn't what I saw. I guess I *thought* to see some rogue mage using Sorcery to create the illusion of healing. (www) *(= I guess I expected to see . . .)*

In each of this first set of examples the proposition expressed by the infinitive clause is interpreted as nonfactual in the present, with the implicature of present counterfactuality. In each case this implicature happens to be explicitly confirmed by the context. An example in which it is not confirmed but cancelled is: *I had thought to see John here – is he here?* (This sequence could be used to imply 'I haven't seen John here', but not to imply 'John isn't here', because then it would amount to: '*John isn't here – is he here?')

Secondly, in a narrative context, an infinitive clause following *had thought* may sometimes be interpreted as an alternative to a *that*-clause whose situation is simultaneous with the thinking. This possibility, which requires the infinitive to be

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stative or progressive, characteristically occurs in written language and is fairly literary. Many speakers do not find it quite acceptable.

(21) (a) They *had thought* to be leaving it but instead seemed to be approaching its oldest quarter. (COB-W) *(= They had thought they were leaving it . . .)*
(b) ?He *had thought* to be making a good impression.
(c) ??I *had thought* to be a good mother, but I was apparently mistaken. *(= I had thought I was a good mother . . .)*

In these examples the content of the complement clause is simultaneous with the time of thinking, which is anterior to the narrative 'now', and its factuality is suspended at a time simultaneous with the narrative 'now'. As is clear from (21b), there is an implicature of counterfactuality (of the complement clause) at the time of the narrative 'now'. In (21a) and (21c) this implicature is explicitly confirmed by the *but*-clause.

Thirdly, X *had thought to do* Y can express the idea 'X had intended to do Y.' In this use the infinitive is not stative or progressive.

(22) They counter-attacked from any position, regardless of how deep. It was a tactic that Ireland *had thought* to use, but they needed Castaignede to kick often and badly. (COB-W)

The only possible interpretation appears to be that Ireland did not use the tactic, so the suspended factuality amounts to counterfactuality.

Fourthly, X *(had) thought to do* Y can express the idea 'It (had) occurred to X to do Y.' This use, in which the infinitive is not stative or progressive, is restricted to nonassertive clauses. The reference is to a past context. *Thought to* is used to refer to thinking at the past 'now', while *had thought to* refers to thinking at a time which precedes the past 'now':

(23) (a) Fish and fruit and everything was rotting on the shelves and nobody *thought* to mark down prices in order to clear stocks. (COB-S) *(The clause is nonassertive because it is negative.)*
(b) I don't suppose you *thought* to turn over the tape did you? (COB-S) *(The clause is nonassertive because it is interpreted as negative: I don't suppose you thought to . . . is interpreted as 'I suppose you didn't think to . . . '.)*
(c) On reflection, I could see that my high profile, as it had become, might indeed embarrass some members of the Council, although to my knowledge only the two hint-droppers *had thought* to complain about it. (COB-W) *(= It had occurred only to the two hint-droppers to complain about it.) (The clause is made nonassertive by the restricter only (= 'no more than').)*
(d) He knew I liked that wine, but {*did* he *think* / *had* he *thought*} to save me a bottle? No, of course not. *(The clause is nonassertive because it is a question.)*
(e) The gaffer knew there was going to be a power-cut, {but he *hadn't thought* to tell me / *and he (*had*) *thought* to tell me}. *(The 'and'-clause is assertive and therefore ungrammatical in this construction.)*
(f) It was a bit queer, she thought, if he had gone away like that and maybe she ought to go over and see if everything was all right. There was the milk, for instance. *Had* he *thought* to stop it? If not, you wouldn't want it standing in the hot sun all day. (COB-W)

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In this fourth use there is no implication that the content of a past thought is suspended at speech time or was suspended at the past time focused on. It follows that there is no implicature of present or past counterfactuality of the tenseless proposition expressed by the complement clause. This is illustrated by the fact that the reply to the question in (23d) could be positive instead of negative:

(23) (d′) He knew I liked that wine, but {did he think / had he thought} to save me a bottle? *Of course he* {*did / had*}. He was such a thoughtful person.

2.8 Verbs other than thought implicating suspended factuality

We can distinguish between three classes of verbs that can be used in the past or past perfect tense to implicate present or past suspended factuality: 'pure cognitive verbs' such as *think*, *assume* or *suppose*, 'emotive cognitive verbs' such as *want*, *intend* or *mean*, etc. and verbs that can be used in either of these two senses, such as *expect* and *hope*.

The following are examples in which the past tense of a pure cognitive verb is used to express that the content of the complement clause is suspended in the present.

(24) (a) 'Isn't that Tom over there?' – 'I {*thought / assumed / supposed / was convinced*} he was abroad. But you might be right.' *(The past tenses in the reply suggest that speaker B is willing to suspend his past cognitive attitude and to consider 'Tom be abroad' as currently counterfactual.)*

(b) I *was convinced* she was at least seventy! *(In writing, the implicature that she is not yet seventy may be either confirmed or cancelled by the context: '... but I was wrong' vs. '... and I was right'. In speech, different intonation patterns distinguish between the two readings.)*

(c) Well, you make a good point because I *assumed* 'being stuck in your car' referred to not being able to get home but of course it can – it can refer to not being able to get away from home. (COB-S)

(d) 'I *assumed* you were happy with the arrangement.' – 'No, I'm not happy. I'm a man, Brian, with pride. I want to live my life like any man, not a kept woman.' (COB-W)

Needless to say, 'factive verbs' (Kiparsky & Kiparsky, 1970) cannot be used in this way. Factive verbs by definition represent their complement clauses as factual and therefore do not lend themselves to a mechanism leading to the suspension of factuality (of the complement clause) or the implicature of counterfactuality (of the complement clause). Thus, *I knew he wasn't to be trusted* cannot be interpreted as implying 'Now I no longer know he is not to be trusted', though *I thought he wasn't to be trusted* can be interpreted as implying 'Now I no longer think he is not to be trusted.'

A number of 'emotive cognitive verbs' may appear at first sight to be used in the past tense in a way similar to *thought*:

(25) I {*intended* / *wanted* / *meant*} to be in Tokyo today but I missed my plane yesterday.

In this example too there is an idea of present counterfactuality ('I am not in Tokyo today'), but this is in fact the only similarity between these sentences and examples with

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I thought that . . . The differences between them can be made clear by a comparison of the following examples:

(26) (a) I {*thought* / *assumed* / *supposed* / *was convinced*} John was a teacher.
(b) John {*intended* / *wanted* / *meant*} to be a teacher.

There are several differences between (26a) and (26b). Firstly, out of context, i.e. as an isolated sentence,[6] (26a) can easily be interpreted as suggesting that John is not a teacher, whereas this is not true of (26b), unless it is pronounced with a contrastive stress on the emotive cognitive verb. (According to the Gricean maxim of Quantity, it is less informative to say that someone intended to do something than to say that they did do it, so stressing the former implicates that the latter is not the case.) To rule out any interpretation other than the reading of present counterfactuality of the complement clause in (26b), we have to replace the past tense by the past perfect: *John had* {*intended* / *wanted* / *meant*} *to be a teacher*. Secondly, in (26a) the verbs express a *'pure* cognitive attitude', i.e. just a belief (though with varying degrees of subjective certainty), while in (26b) the verbs express an *'emotive* cognitive attitude', in this case a desire or intention. Thirdly, unlike the *think*-class verbs in (26a), the *intend*-class verbs in (26b) have the idea of 'posterior actualization' as part of their propositional content. It follows that the actualization of the complement clause situation is interpreted as simultaneous with the cognitive attitude in (26a) and as posterior to it in (26b).[7] Fourthly, the complement clause is a *that*-clause in (26a) but has to be an infinitive clause in (26b). Fifthly, while the propositional attitude is normally interpreted as currently suspended in (26a), it is not in (26b): (26b) does not suggest that John no longer intends or wants to be a teacher.

In sum, when an *intend*-class verb is used in the past tense in a sentence that is uttered 'out of the blue', this is not normally done in order to evoke a present counterfactuality reading of the complement clause. (To achieve the latter effect we use the past perfect rather than the past tense.) However, this does not alter the fact that the past-tense form of an *intend*-class verb can also be used in a context inviting or enforcing a present counterfactuality reading of the complement clause. In such a context the past tense can be substituted for the past perfect. (In the case of *want*, the past tense actually sounds much better than the past perfect.)

(27) (a) I {*(had) intended* / *(*??*had) wanted* / *(had) meant*} to have a word with the headmaster today, but I can't find him!
(b) I'm sorry I have to warn you off. I *didn't* {*intend* / *want* / *mean*} to, but you are leaving me no other choice. *(The past perfect forms hadn't* {*intended / meant*} *to can also be used.)*

[6] Self-evidently, an implicature may be either allowed or disallowed (i.e. blocked or cancelled) by the context in which it is used. Thus, if the (26b) version *John wanted to be a teacher* is thrown into a conversation about the present, there is a clear implicature that John is not a teacher. On the other hand, if the sentence is used as part of a story about John as a child, there is no suggestion that John is not a teacher now. For this reason, we discuss (26a–b) as sentences used in isolation.

[7] In fact, with *thought* (and similar verbs), the tense used in the *that*-clause can express any temporal relation:

(i) I thought someone else {had done it / was doing it / did it / would do it}.

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Without such a context, the natural interpretation in which *wanted* refers to the present is a 'discourse tentativeness' reading (as in *Hello Tom! I wanted to have a word with you*) – see section 3 below.

As already noted, the verbs *hope* and *expect* can express either a pure cognitive attitude, as in (28a), or an emotive one, as in (28b–c):

(28) (a) I {*thought / hoped / expected*} that John would make a good teacher. *(When used out of context, this sentence implicates that I have now given up my {belief / hope / expectation}, and that John has not turned out to be a good teacher.)*
(b) John {*had intended / had hoped / had expected*} to be the next chairman. *(Used in isolation, this sentence implicates suspension of the present factuality of John's emotive cognitive attitude and in doing so suggests present counterfactuality of the complement clause.)*
(c) John {*intended / hoped / expected*} to be the next chairman, but someone else is being elected. *(We do not need to use the past perfect because the context enforces an interpretation in terms of suspension and present counterfactuality.)*

The following examples further illustrate the use of the past tense of *hope* and *expect* as *think*-class verbs:

(29) (a) What a pity the Managing Director isn't here. I *hoped* I would have a chance of presenting my project to him. *(The form hoped implies that the hope is presently suspended.)*
(b) I *didn't expect* to find you here!

The latter example means 'Until a moment ago I expected not to find you here, but apparently I was wrong, for I have found you here.' Pragmatically, this invites the hearer to give an explanation resolving the mismatch between my past thought (expectation) and what I find to be the case. It would be a significant departure from conversational norms for the addressee not to deal with my 'mismatch'. He can do so either by showing that he cannot help, e.g. by saying *Didn't you? I thought I'd told you I was coming* or by resolving the discrepancy, e.g. with *No, you were right not to expect me to be here, my plans changed at the last minute*. It is also important to see that the use of the infinitive clause *to find you here* does not mean that *expect* is used as an *intend*-class verb: the infinitive clause is equivalent to the *that*-clause 'that I would find you here'. (It was pointed out in section 2.8 that the past tense of *think to* can be used in the same way: *I didn't think to find you here!*)

3 Discourse tentativeness: the 'attitudinal' use of the past tense

3.1 Definition

The 'preterite of modesty' (Kruisinga, 1931: 25) has been known for a long time. It has been studied crosslinguistically by (among others) Fleischman (1989) and Bybee (1995). In recent times it is sometimes referred to as the 'attitudinal past' (Quirk et al., 1985: 188). What it means is that, with certain verbs of cognition, the past tense can be substituted for the present tense in order to render the utterance more tentative,

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modest, polite. (Compare *Do you want me?* with *Did you want me?* and *I wonder if you are married* with *I wondered if you were married*.)

In our opinion, the mechanism generating this 'discourse tentativeness' is a 'shift of temporal focus' (Declerck, 1990, 1991: 80–9): the speaker uses the past tense to focus on some past part of a cognitive situation which could easily include the time of speech and could therefore be referred to in the present tense. The effect of the shift is that the speaker suggests that he might no longer be committed to the cognitive situation in question, and in doing so represents his assertion (or other speech act) as rather uncertain, tentative. In most cases this is an attempt on the speaker's part to make his utterance sound indirect and hence tentative, polite, tactful, unassuming.[8]

(30) (a) I *wanted* to ask you a favour. *(less direct than 'I want to ask you a favour')*
(b) I *wondered* if I could leave off one of my brochures. (COB-S) *(= request for permission, tentative equivalent of 'Can I leave off one of my brochures?')*
(c) 'Are you looking for someone?' – 'Yes, I *was hoping* to find the Dean here. I need to speak to him.' – 'You'll find him in room A203.' – 'Thanks. I'll go and see him at once.'
(d) I *thought* you might lend me your camera. *(tentative suggestion or request)*
(e) I said, 'I *wanted* to tell you – yeah, I *wanted* to tell you that we – Alice *wanted* – *requested* a video.' And she's watching, she grabbed her chest and she said, 'A video? Oh dear, I don't know.' (COB-S) *(The context makes it clear that the speaker was wary about the addressee's reaction to the news of the video, and indeed confirms that the news was not taken too well. Thus it is not surprising that a tentative form is used to break the news.)*

This 'attitudinal' use of the past tense is only possible with verbs expressing (either pure or emotive) 'inert' cognition. ('Inert cognition verbs' are verbs that refer to an involuntary feeling, impression or state of mind.)

The relevant sentences in (30a–e) are statements. The same mechanism (viz. a shift of temporal focus from the present to a past part of the situation) is also at work in interrogative sentences like the following, but here the speaker's tentativeness is transferred to the hearer:

(31) (a) 'If you have any views on that give us a call er on three four five, seven eight, seven eight. Yes Fiona. *Did* you *want* to say something?' – 'Yes. Well I think brunette androids have more fun actually.' (COB-S)
(b) *Was* there any particular place you *wanted* to visit while you're staying with us in Belgium?

In such questions, the speaker's lack of commitment is transferred to the addressee, which makes it a less confrontational question. For example, (31b) is more delicate than *Is there any place you want to visit while you're staying with us in Belgium?*,

[8] 'Discourse tentativeness' is to be distinguished from 'epistemic tentativeness'. The latter is a form of nonfactuality which we find e.g. in conditionals with an *if*-clause expressing a 'tentative condition' (Declerck & Reed, 2001: 167), such as *The garden party would be cancelled if it rained*. Here both situations are represented as unlikely to actualize in the post-present.

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because, by assuming a lack of commitment on the addressee's behalf, it avoids, on the addressee's behalf, the idea that the addressee is imposing on the speaker (whose question, both participants realize, can be read as an offer to arrange a visit). That is, the speaker seems to be assuring the addressee that any expression of a wish has, in advance, been placed in the past, the addressee is treated as not committed to it, and so the addressee will not be imposing on the speaker if she expresses a wish to visit somewhere. The politeness (both in this example and in (31a), where the past tense could be felt to be patronizing) is on the speaker's side, because the speaker, in using the past tense, makes it possible for the addressee to make an assertion or express a preference with as little constraint as possible. But the tentativeness is also transferred from the speaker to the addressee, thus allowing the addressee to perform a speech act without being constrained by the risk of damaging someone's 'face'.[9]

The difference between the attitudinal use of the past tense and its use to suggest suspended present factuality or counterfactuality is illustrated by the different uses of *thought* in the following examples:

(32) (a) I *thought* you were a bachelor.
(b) 'Are you looking for someone?' – 'Yes, I *thought* I might find the Dean in here.'

In (32a) there is a 'shift of temporal domain' (Declerck, 1991: 21–4) from the present to the past: faced with evidence to the contrary, the speaker is not sure he can continue to entertain the thought 'You are a bachelor', and therefore locates it in the past. This triggers the implicature that the thought cannot be located in the present because its contents can no longer be treated as valid. In (32b), there is no such contrast between past and present triggering a counterfactual interpretation of the complement clause. The thought in question is clearly seen as still valid at the time of speech. However, by focusing on a past portion of the cognitive situation, the thought is presented in a way that is less direct, more tentative: by focusing on the past the speaker suggests the *theoretical possibility* that he might no longer be committed to the thought in question. However, it is clear from the sentence and its context that this possibility is imaginary. The use of the past tense is just a conventionalized device to make the utterance less direct. There is not really a contrast between past and present which is sufficiently strong to trigger a counterfactual interpretation of the complement clause.

What the two uses of the past tense have in common is that they locate the time of the cognitive situation in the past. However, there is a difference in temporal interpretation. In (32a) the time of the situation (of *thought*) that is located in the past is interpreted as the time of the full (complete) situation of thinking, which is therefore interpreted as

[9] 'Face' is used in the sense of Brown & Levinson (1987). As noted in the *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics* (p. 370), 'face' 'is taken to be important to individuals in both a positive and negative aspect. One preserves the negative face of an interactant by impeding or interfering with his/her actions and values as little as possible; one attends to the positive face of an interactant by endorsing and supporting the interactant's presumed positive self-image as much as possible.'

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not continuing into the present. This is not the case in (32b). This difference is due to the different reasons for locating the situation in the past: in (32a) the speaker wants to explicitly contrast the past with the present, whereas in (32b) he merely wants to focus on some past part of a situation which may in principle still be continuing at the time of speech.

3.2 Pragmatic reasons for using an attitudinal modal past form

Using a less direct form has certain advantages. Consider:

(33) You're not leaving, are you? I *was hoping* you could help me clean up this mess. *(The speaker implies that he is not necessarily committed to his hope, i.e. that he is prepared to give it up if the hearer should prefer not to give him a hand.)*

In this example, the use of *was hoping* rather than *am hoping* or *hope* renders the request indirect. This contributes to politeness and has a 'face-saving' effect, for the hearer as well as for the speaker:

(a) The request is politer with *was hoping* than it would be with *hope* because the use of *I hope that you . . .* is very direct and implies that the speaker has the right to make a direct request for help, which is simply face-threatening (for the hearer) in itself. The past tense, by contrast, in making the gesture of placing the speaker's hoping in the past, and thus not necessarily still applicable in the speech situation, acknowledges that such a request needs to be put indirectly and thus acknowledges that the addressee's face is as important as the speaker's.
(b) Making a request, suggestion, statement, etc. less direct helps to protect the speaker's face in the case of a negative reply. In general, a negative reply to *I want to talk to you* may be expected to be more face-threatening than a negative reply to *I wanted to talk to you*. This is because *I want* is more pressing than *I wanted*, and renders it more difficult for the hearer to say no without seeming impolite.

These two factors are not unrelated to each other. There is no doubt that in certain contexts – for example when the speaker and addressee are on a formal rather than a friendly footing – the response *I'm afraid I can't – I have to leave now* would be more surprising (because face-threatening) in response to *I hope you can help me . . .* than in response to *I hoped you could help me . . .* The reason for this is that there is a clash between the expectation of compliance implicit in the use of the present tense (via the implication that the speaker is entitled to make such a direct request) and the addressee's refusal, whereas when the speaker uses the past tense the implied speaker's view of the power-relations between the speaker and the addressee is one that allows for the possibility of a refusal without anyone losing (much) face. If the speaker really believes that he has the power to make direct requests of the addressee, then he is more likely to be insulted by a refusal.

It should also be noted that with *I hope you can help me* there is very little way of making sense of the utterance except as a request, whereas in the case of *I hoped you could help me* the request interpretation only arises in a suitable (nonpresent) context and is a cancellable implicature. Compare:

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(34) (a) I *hoped* you could help me. So I went to your house, but you weren't at home. In the end I did it on my own. *(The speaker just reports what he hoped at some past time. There is no implicature of present request.)*
(b) 'I hear you've been looking for me.' – 'Yes, I *hoped* you could help me. I've got a problem.' *(In this context, 'I hoped you could help me' is by implicature interpreted as expressing a present request.)*
(c) 'I hear you've been looking for me.' – 'Yes, I *hoped* you could help me. But Andy and Robert are helping me now, so I don't need to bother you any more.' *(The implicature that the speaker is making a request is cancelled by the last sentence.)*

3.3 Past-tense forms allowing several modal readings of the complement clause

An attitudinal past tense which is interpreted as indirect and tentative in one context may sometimes provoke the opposite interpretation in a different context. For example:

(35) I *thought* you might lend me your camera.

This can be used in the following contexts:

(a) *(speaking to a group of friends or colleagues)* I've been given a great job reporting on the elections in Brazil, but I still haven't got my luggage back from the airline that lost it on my last trip, so I need some favours: Meg, I would like to borrow your small suitcase; John, I *thought* you might lend me your camera; . . .
(b) 'I suppose you want to borrow all my equipment then?' – '(Well,) I *thought* you might lend me your camera.'

Even though *I thought that* . . . is anyhow more indirect and tentative than *I think that* . . . , in the context sketched in (a), the sentence *I thought you might lend me your camera* is liable to sound extremely presumptuous, really quite the opposite of tentative. In (b), by contrast, the sentence may be interpreted as a tentative request.[10] This tentativeness comes in part from literally locating the thinking in the past, and making it dismissible. In fact the speaker could add *But I realize now that you'll be needing it yourself*. But that addition could not be made to the same sentence in (a).

It is not easy to find a satisfactory explanation for this difference. It is quite possible that the use of *thought* in (a) is just a case of being ostensibly polite in a context where the politeness implicit in the use of indirect statements is overridden by the other factors, such as intonation. Presumably this means that the past tense in such structures – when the structure is used to make a rather high-handed request – has become completely conventionalized, and is no longer meaningful via its past-time reference, but only as a virtually empty gesture towards politeness. That is, its secondary meaning, of politeness, is used, but not its primary meaning of past-time reference.

[10] Depending on the tone, it could be a reproachful request ('I didn't think it was asking so much to ask if I could borrow your camera') or a tentative request (uttered timidly or wheedlingly, say), or it could be little more than a statement of a past thought, perhaps also functioning as an indirect request, but not a very tentative one ('I thought you might lend me your camera. And your tripod. But I don't want to borrow all your equipment').

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4 Conclusion

In this article we have discussed two uses of the past tense which trigger some kind of modal interpretation, viz. suspended factuality (implicating present counterfactuality) of the complement clause and discourse tentativeness. An important point made is that these uses of the past tense are not instances of the nontemporal ('modal past') use of the preterite (as in *If only my parents were here* or *It's high time we left*) but are instances of the temporal (nonmodal) use of the past-tense form in order to locate a situation in the past or to put the temporal focus on some past part of a situation which also includes the present. It has been explained how these nonmodal uses of the past tense can nevertheless lead to a particular kind of modal interpretation. The article has also discussed various other observations in connection with these and other *I thought that . . .* constructions.

It is important to see that what we have argued is not that the past tense itself is doing different things in different readings of *I thought*. We have argued that the past tense does the same thing in every case, viz. locate the time of a situation in the past. There may be a difference between the discourse-tentative use of the past tense, where the speaker has the option to refer to the present or to the past, and the suspended factuality use of the past tense, where that option is not present (but where there is still something a bit special about the past tense because the context is not past), but in each case the past tense does what it always does, viz. locate the situation (of thinking) in the past. But, of course, at the level of interpretation other factors come into play.

Most of the article has been about different interpretations, in different contexts, of the speaker's motivation (or what hearers take to be a speaker's motivation) for talking about past thoughts. Sometimes the motivation is straightforwardly descriptive, when the context concerns the past and the speaker's past thought is simply one situation in a chain or set of past situations. Sentences like (1a–b) illustrate this. Sometimes the speaker mentions past thoughts for other functional purposes, and not simply as part of a discourse about the past. When the speaker is not simply referring to a past thought as part of a general picture of the past, the common thread to the motivation is noncommitment to the current applicability of the (untensed) proposition in the complement clause. Sometimes the motivation for the noncommitment is that the speaker is not sure if the content would be true if applied to the present world (i.e. suspended present factuality); sometimes the noncommitment is because the speaker wishes to make the content of the complement clause appear unimportant (to the speaker) in the present (i.e. discourse tentativeness).

However we interpret the speaker's intentions in using *I thought*, the issue is that in each instance of use of *I thought*, just as with any other language use, there arises the question 'Why is the speaker talking about past thoughts?' and, according to the context, we get different answers about the speaker's motivation in using '*I thought* + complement'. The interesting thing then is to find out what sort of answers to the question it is possible to get, and then to find out how exactly the context constrains us to opt for one or other interpretation of the speaker's motivation for talking about past

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thoughts. This is what we have tried to do. Our project in this article has been to describe the sorts of (attributed) speaker-motivations for talking about past thoughts that we can identify (and not to give a quite detailed account of the contextual features that lead to one or other interpretation). We have identified, basically, two major categories of answer to the question 'Why is the speaker referring to past thoughts?' The first possibility, which arises in a context in which the discourse is 'about' the past, is that the speaker is principally involved in constructing (via asserting or questioning) a description of past situations, and his reference to a past thought, and the content of the thought, is simply an addition to that description of a past scenario. The second possibility, which arises in a context in which the discourse is 'about' the present, is that the speaker is referring to a past thought as a contribution to the discourse about the present. The way in which a description of a past thought is made relevant as a contribution to a discourse about the present depends in the first instance upon the relation of the content of the thought to the content of the discourse so far.

If the content of the thought is at odds with the discourse so far, then we usually interpret the reference to the past thought as expressing a contrast with what appears to be the case as far as the discourse-up-to-now is concerned, i.e. as expressing some incongruence between the speaker's picture of the world-up-to-now and current evidence. Since, in saying simply *I thought X*, the speaker does not actually place the current evidence or the past thought in the wrong, this leads us to assume that the speaker is undecided about which of the conflicting theories to believe, i.e. that he is no longer committed to the truth of his picture of the world. We regularly attribute to a speaker who chooses to share such incongruence between past thought and present evidence with other discourse participants an intention (whether sincere or disingenuous) of getting the incongruence resolved, with the help of the other participants. This use of *I thought* is at basis an expression of noncommitment to the truth of the content of the complement of *thought*.

If the speaker's past thought does not conflict with the discourse so far but implies or says that the speaker has entertained the idea of a speech act that could be to a greater or lesser extent face-threatening for the addressee or a third party, we assume that the speaker has described a past thought rather than a present one for politeness purposes, to make the speech act less intrusive. This use of *I thought* then amounts to the expression, simultaneously, of an indirect speech act and a lack of commitment to the act in question, in order to reduce intrusion on another's 'face'. This is what we have referred to as discourse tentativeness.[11] In this use the past tense (effecting past-time

[11] Discourse tentativeness concerns speech acts, but the speech act need not be an obvious attempt to affect someone's actions, like a request, warning or suggestion, as in (i), but can be just an assertion, as in (ii):

(i) 'I think we should get Harry that book as a birthday present.' – 'Yes, that's a good idea. I just *wondered*, though, whether he'd like that new Bob Dylan CD.'

(ii) 'Harry's in the library.' – 'I suppose that's possible, only I *thought* he was in the lab.'

Note that (ii) is different from (iii), which is interpreted in terms of suspended factuality rather than discourse tentativeness:

(iii) 'Harry's in the library.' – 'I *thought* he was in the lab.'

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reference) is selected, not because the speaker is adding a past situation to a discourse about the past, but because he is expressing noncommitment to the truth of the content of the (untensed) complement clause (now), and noncommitment to the importance of the content of the (untensed) complement clause (now).

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