

## **PART THREE: MEANING-TO-FORM NEGATIVES**



# 7. Counterfactuality as Negative Meaning: A Case Study of *BE Supposed To*

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## 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the reflection on how markers that are not typically negative may generate negative interpretations in context. More specifically, it will focus on the counterfactual, which can be considered a type of negative meaning insofar as it involves the expression of something that is understood not to be the case. In other words, drawing from Culioli's analysis of negation (1990, pp.91–113), the counterfactual can be characterised as a form of implicit negation which relies on the representation of at least two possible values for a given predicative relation: the positive one (namely *p*), and its complementary *p'* (which can either be *non-p*, i.e. void of *p*, or *other-than-p*). In the absence of explicit cues such as the conditional marker *if*, the interpretation of an utterance as counterfactual appears to be the result of complex interactions. Crucially, a counterfactual reading arises when the value selected on the surface for the propositional content conflicts with facts established elsewhere in discourse. It thus often seems to be a matter of pragmatics rather than semantics, and yet some linguistic expressions seem to trigger, or at least to be associated with, counterfactual meaning more often than others.

To explore this issue, the present study will focus on the structure *BE supposed to* which is one such expression and contrasts in this respect with otherwise related structures like *BE expected to* or *BE believed to*. After providing an overview of the uses of the structure and of the ways it has been described in the literature, I will propose an alternative analysis within the framework of the Theory of Predicative and Enunciative Operations (Culioli) to try to explain why *BE supposed*

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to favours a counterfactual reading. I will conclude with an exploration of the contextual factors that play a role in the development or blocking of the negative or counterfactual reading. The corpus used for this study is the British newspaper *The Independent* (2009)<sup>1</sup>. Representative examples were selected for qualitative analysis using the concordancer *CasualConc*<sup>2</sup>.

## 1. Uses of *BE supposed to*

### 1.1. Overview of the literature

In the literature, including reference grammars of English such as Quirk et al. (1985) and Biber et al. (1999), *BE supposed to* is often identified as a quasi-modal<sup>3</sup>, that is to say as a periphrastic expression that shares semantic characteristics with the modal auxiliaries (especially *should*), but lacks the syntactic properties typical of auxiliary verbs. Because of this intermediate, not quite grammatical status and the lack of straightforward relation between the (quasi)modal construction and the passive of the verb SUPPOSE, most studies<sup>4</sup> have focused on the emergence of the different modal meanings of *BE supposed to* from a diachronic perspective. This is indeed a complex question, given that it poses a challenge to the grammaticalisation principle—according to which epistemic meanings normally derive from deontic meanings, and not the reverse. This is outside the scope of this paper so I will not comment on this particular issue, but I will present the different values of *BE supposed to* that linguists usually agree upon.

There is a general lack of consensus on how many values there are, how they should be categorised and how the terms often used to describe them—namely, *evidential*, *deontic* and *epistemic*—should be understood. However, previous studies agree on the fact that at least two main uses should be distinguished, which I will refer to as the evidential use and the deontic use, both illustrated below<sup>5</sup>.

- (1) Military Scenarios: The three options // [...] 2. ‘McChrystal-Lite’: US sends in 30,000 // This **is supposed to** be the preferred option of the US Defence Secretary Robert Gates. Mr Gates is said to have had initial doubts about large-scale Afghan reinforcements but he has been won over by the military commanders. However Mr Gates is also said to feel that not enough has been done on the border to counter al-Qa’ida and that sending a larger number of troops would mean that the counter-terrorism aspects of the mission can be addressed as well. (In2009)

- (2) Dean Whitehead's miscued header found Spurs substitute David Bentley and his prod sent Darren Bent down the Sunderland left. There was space there because, as aggrieved Sunderland manager Ricky Sbragia noted dryly, left-back George McCartney was in the Tottenham box trying to score. // 'I don't know why he's there, George is supposed to defend,' Sbragia said. (*In2009*)

In (1), the interpretation given to *BE supposed to* can be traced to the meaning of the verb SUPPOSE and is rather close to that of *BE believed to*, which is a common paraphrase for the construction in this type of use, or even *BE said to*, which occurs twice in the right co-text: it is used as a quotative evidential marker to indicate that the source of the propositional content of the utterance is not the speaker (the journalist), but someone else whose identity remains indeterminate. The utterance can thus be contrasted with (1') *this is the preferred option of the US Defence Secretary Robert Gates*, which provides similar information, but does not attribute it to a source other than the journalist. In (1'), the absence of evidential marking also makes the utterance more assertive, which is why *BE supposed to* is sometimes characterised as having epistemic meaning in utterances similar to (1). Nevertheless, primarily identifying such occurrences as *evidential*, i.e. as encoding information source as opposed to speaker attitude (Aikhenvald, 2006), seems more satisfactory since the possible epistemic interpretation is context-sensitive and, most importantly, stems from the evidential value of the construction<sup>6</sup>.

In (2) on the other hand, *BE supposed to* has a deontic value. A possible paraphrase of the utterance is *George should defend*, meaning that George's role is to defend; it is what is expected of him, that is, he is under some form of obligation to do so. This type of interpretation is far less typical of what Noël (2008) refers to as 'NCI constructions' (from Latin *nominativus cum infinitivo*), i.e. constructions like *BE said to*, *BE believed to*, *BE thought to*, *BE reported to*, and is actually only shared by *BE expected to*, which could also serve as a paraphrase in (2) and has a lot in common with *BE supposed to* both from a present-day and diachronic point of view (see Noël and van der Auwera, 2009, pp.618–620).

There seems to be a clear distinction between these two uses, which lend themselves to different paraphrases—*is believed to* in (1), *is expected to* in (2)—but there is actually a degree of overlap between them. If we consider example (3):

- (3) Thursday's elections may have become a *de facto* referendum on our imploding government but what people are actually doing is electing some local councillors and, much more substantially, a new European parliament. // Europe is **supposed to** be important to us. A lot of our exports go there. It imposes a lot of regulations on us. And we pay a lot of money to remain members of the club — we are the second largest net contributor after Germany. But we seem hardly to care at all. If you don't believe that, try these two questions. Who is the Europe minister and who replaced Peter Mandelson as the British EU commissioner in charge of trade? (*In2009*)

we can see that *BE supposed to* does not fall neatly into either one of these two types of uses. On the one hand, it carries the implication that *it is generally considered to be the case (that Europe is important to us)*, which gives it an evidential dimension. On the other hand, it implies that *it can't be any other way (given that a lot of our exports go there, etc.)*, so that there is a necessity for <Europe-be important to us> to be the case, which means that this use of the structure also has a lot in common with the deontic interpretation (although the intersubjective dimension is clearly missing).

Interestingly, in this type of context, *BE supposed to* cannot be replaced with *BE believed to*, or *BE expected to*. Because previous studies were more interested in the degree and paths of grammaticalisation of *BE supposed to*, they do not account for this lack of interchangeability with other NCI constructions. My hypothesis is that substitution is impossible because *BE supposed to* is in fact notionally<sup>7</sup> very different from *BE expected to* and *BE believed to* in that it has a very strong counterfactual potential, which is needed here in light of the argumentative structure of the passage; that is, *BE supposed to* allows the speaker to signal the existence of conflicting representations and in doing so, it prefigures the adversative *but*, while *BE expected to* or *BE believed to* could do no such thing.

This hypothesis will be further investigated in Section 2. The rest of this Section will analyse the general pattern of use of *BE supposed to* in the *Independent 2009* corpus to see how common the counterfactual interpretation actually is.

### 1.2. Distribution of *BE supposed to* and counterfactuality

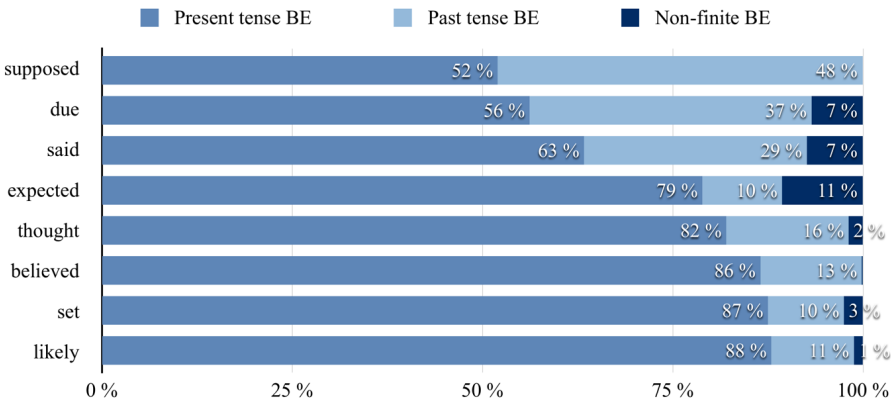
In line with example (3), Visconti (2004, p.184) notes the “overwhelming presence of counterfactual signals in the context of use of *be supposed to* from Modern to Present Day English, such as *but, in fact, in reality*”.

According to Visconti (2004, p.185), “[t]hese contexts, in which *be supposed to* evokes a possible world, a state of affairs which would be expected to occur but does not, represent the most frequent ones in which the construction is used in Present Day English”. Visconti continues by associating this counterfactual interpretation with “the overwhelming use of the past form of the construction in Present Day English”.

Indeed, the following examples show that the association of the past tense with *BE supposed to* is likely to trigger a counterfactual interpretation.

- (4) Gordon Brown’s speech on Friday **was supposed to** provide clarity to our mission in Afghanistan, but has done the opposite. (*In2009*)
- (5) I was due to leave the military in 2006, but in July that year was asked to go to Afghanistan. It **was supposed to** be a desk job in Kandahar but when I arrived there weren’t enough soldiers in Helmand so I headed there to work as a liaison officer between the Afghan army, the police and national directors of security. (*In2009*)
- (6) I **was supposed to** be going to Libya this week for a flying visit. It’s a country that I’ve always wanted to go to. It ticks all my boxes — hardly any tourists, hot, elicits a little sucking of the teeth when you tell people that you’re going there and, most importantly, has some of the most fabulous Roman ruins in the world. For years I’ve dreamt of going to Leptis Magna and everything was arranged until . . . the Libyan embassy refused me a visa. I was persona non grata in Libya. (*In2009*)
- (7) No-one expected the man from Richmond, Ontario, to get through a 72-strong field as far as the match-play competition for the gold medal. And no-one gave the fortysomething an earthly of beating his opponent, Chandler Egan, a 23-year-old US amateur champion. The youth and vigour of the American **were supposed to** win the day. // In the end, Egan could only marvel as his opponent sang and cracked jokes in the rain and sent drives booming into the distance. (*In2009*)
- (8) The new memoir of the American showbiz lawyer Steven Machat, which is published next month, has a memorable exchange with Leonard Cohen. The singer tells Machat he is going later that day to the temple. Machat teases him about observing a Jewish festival, saying: ‘I thought you **were supposed to** be a Buddhist.’ Cohen replies: ‘I want to keep all my options open. Maybe Buddha, maybe God.’ (*In2009*)

This is especially noteworthy considering that past tense occurrences of *BE supposed to* represent about 48 % of all its uses in the *In2009* corpus, which is a remarkable proportion compared to other NCI or semantically-related *BE Adj TO* constructions (see Figure 7.1):



**Figure 7.1.** Distribution of BE -EN/Adj TO structures in *The Independent* (2009).

Among the constructions listed above, *BE supposed to* is not the only construction prone to be interpreted as counterfactual in the past tense, as shown by examples (9) and (10):

- (9) He **was due to** appear in court next month to challenge the order but his solicitor withdrew the appeal in a letter to the court, a spokesman for Harrow Crown Court said. (*In2009*)
- (10) The board **was expected to** face tough questions from shareholders on bonuses, but instead they faced a handful on the size of banks, share prices and dividend payments. (*In2009*)

However, the fact that it occurs so frequently in past tense contexts suggests a stronger counterfactual potential than for *BE expected to* or *BE due to*—which is in line with my earlier hypothesis. Moreover, with *BE supposed to*, the counterfactual interpretation is also very frequent in the present tense, which differentiates this construction from other structures.

What explains the tendency for the counterfactual reading to arise with *BE supposed to* as opposed to other quasi-modals? This is addressed in Section 2, which provides an enunciative analysis of the construction.

## 2. Schematic form of *BE supposed to*

### 2.1. Pragmatics and semantics within Culioli's TPEO

Within Culioli's Theory of Predicative and Enunciative Operations, all linguistic expressions are considered to be markers of invariant cognitive

operations with some in-built potential for variation that is activated by the interactions with the co(n)text within a particular discourse situation.

One very important difference between the theory and many other approaches is the idea that pragmatic potentials are in a large measure built into the semantics of linguistic items—provided one recognises that fully-fledged meaning emerges only at the end of a complex process of configuration relative to context and situation. (Ranger 2018, pp.v–vi)

From this perspective, *BE supposed to* (just like *BE expected to* or *BE believed to*) can be viewed as a complex marker whose counterfactual pragmatic potential is the result of interactions between the markers *BE*, *SUPPOSE*, *-EN* (past participle) and *TO*. The next part of this paper focuses more specifically on *-EN* and *SUPPOSE*, which are most central to the argument.

## 2.2. *BE supposed to* as a dissociative marker

### 2.2.1. *Dissociation of the assertive source from the original speaker*

When combined with the identification operator *BE*<sup>8</sup>, the past participle marker *-EN* entails a passive reading of the construction. As *SUPPOSE* is a cognition predicate, the passive allows the original speaker *S*<sub>o</sub> (the one producing the *BE supposed to* utterance) to dissociate him/herself from the assertive or modal source *S*<sub>i</sub>, i.e. the source of the ‘supposing’. This forms the basis of the quotative evidential reading, which can clearly be traced to the passive origin of the construction.

In line with grammaticalisation studies, however, one might object to the characterisation of some uses of *BE supposed to* as passive, such as the one given in (2) *George is supposed to defend*, since deontic occurrences cannot be rephrased in the active (*\*X supposes George to defend*) or be specified by an agent *by*-phrase (*\*George is supposed by X to defend*). Although they probably *were* passive originally (see Noël and van der Auwera, 2009), they can no longer be described as such in present-day English because the verb *SUPPOSE* is no longer found with the ‘intend’ meaning thought to have given rise to the deontic use of *BE supposed to*. Yet, just like evidential occurrences, they also imply an underlying evaluation process whose agent, or rather, experimenter, is not identified, thus creating distance between the speaker and the assertive source. This is why *BE supposed to* is typically characterised as ‘objective’, that is, as involving a discourse-external source—as opposed to *should* for instance (see Verhulst et al., 2013).

This can be shown to be the case in many occurrences, such as the following, where some assertive source other than the speaker can be retrieved from the context:

- (11) His recall was accompanied by words of high praise from his manager for CSKA Moscow stopper Igor Akinfeev, someone United **are supposed to** be considering as Edwin van der Sar's replacement when the veteran Dutchman eventually calls time on his stellar career. // Ferguson's assertion that rumours he wants to sign the Russia international are 'not true' will be greeted with a pinch of salt by the sceptics and certainly Foster had no reason to feel comfortable. (*In2009*)
- (12) Internet search leader Google is teaming up with leading US newspapers The New York Times and The Washington Post in an attempt to help out the ailing newspaper industry. // The new project, called 'Living Stories,' debuted today in the experimental 'labs' section on Google's Web site. // The service **is supposed to** make it easier for readers to follow evolving news stories. It will package stories from both the Times and the Post so the coverage can be more easily updated to include new developments. (*In2009*)
- (13) Don't 'save' archives, donate them // The personal archive of the First World War poet, Siegfried Sassoon, has been 'saved for the nation', and we **are supposed to** applaud. The National Heritage Memorial Fund, the state's benefactor of last resort, put up £550,000. But should the state, or Cambridge University — which has raised most of the rest — have had to fork out any money at all? (*In2009*)

In (11), which can be characterised as an evidential use of *BE supposed to*, the 'rumours' mentioned in the right co-text suggest the speaker is not the source of the supposing. In (12), where the structure could be paraphrased as *BE intended to* with an interpretation verging on the deontic, the modal source is likely to be Google, the initiator of the project alluded to in the context. In (13), where we have a more clearly deontic meaning, the distancing effect is strengthened by the quotation marks in the left co-text, and the rhetorical question in the right co-text which suggests that the speaker disagrees with <we-applaud> being desirable.

More generally, the absence of identification between the speaker and the assertive source increases the distance between the speaker and the propositional content of the utterance, which the speaker does not take responsibility for, and thus, might be seen as a factor contributing

to the counterfactual interpretation of *BE supposed to*. This is suggested by Visconti (2004, p.185):

The inference arises as follows: if the Speaker/Writer chooses to use the *be supposed to* construction (s)he evokes an unspecified source of belief/expectation, which is distinct from her/himself. This choice invites the inference that the Speaker does not identify with the source of evaluation, and also that the Speaker signals a distance between the expected world and the ‘real’ world[.]

However, this is not a specificity of the marker, since we also find this dissociation between speaker and assertive source with other pseudo-passive structures, such as the ones mentioned before. These constructions may lend themselves to an ‘uncertain’ epistemic reading (*BE believed to* in example (14)) or a deontic reading (*BE expected to* in example (15)) but do not carry any implication of counterfactuality:

- (14) The Falklands wolf quickly went extinct after Europeans arrived on the islands from the 17th century. The last wolves **are believed to** have been killed in the 1870s by sheep farmers. (*In2009*)
- (15) Between now and Christmas, I **am expected to** do two essays, two short presentations and a book review. That’s it. No exams, not until June next year, anyway, when I have a grand total of three. There is an intimidating reading list, but when there’s so little else to do, it seems much less of a mountain to climb. (*In2009*)

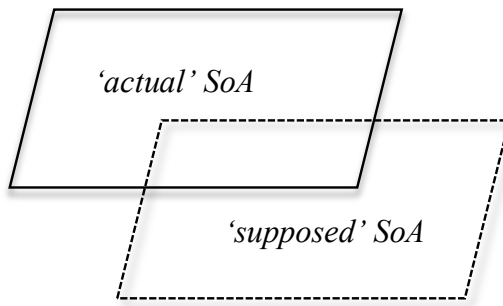
As outlined in Section 3, context plays a role here since *BE supposed to* could have been used in place of *BE believed to* in (14), and *BE expected to* in (15), without triggering a counterfactual reading.

- (14’) *The last wolves are supposed to have been killed in the 1870s by sheep farmers.* [evidential reading with epistemic overtones]
- (15’) *Between now and Christmas, I am supposed to do two essays, two short presentations and a book review.* [deontic reading]

In other words, *BE supposed to* does not automatically imply the selection of *p*’ over *p*—this is explained further in Section 3—but, as noted in Section 1.2, *BE supposed to* tends to appear in counterfactual contexts much more frequently than *BE believed to* or, perhaps more surprisingly, *BE expected to*. This means that the counterfactual interpretation cannot solely be accounted for by the distancing effect resulting from the dissociation between speaker and assertive source.

### 2.2.2. Dissociation of the propositional content from the reference situation

To better understand what is special about *BE supposed to*, we need to go over the notional properties of SUPPOSE, from which it is derived. An examination of the varied uses of the verb recorded by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) in present-day English suggests a core theoretical or hypothetical dimension<sup>10</sup>, also found in now obsolete uses. The etymology of SUPPOSE provides at least a partial explanation: according to the OED, SUPPOSE comes from the Anglo-Norman *su(p)poser*, which is inherited from the Latin *supponere* meaning ‘set/put below’. This spatial origin suggests that the ‘supposed’ state of affairs (SoA) belongs to another reality plane than the ‘actual’ state of affairs (Figure 7.2):



**Figure 7.2.** Spatial representation of SUPPOSE.

In linguistic terms, this means that the propositional content associated with SUPPOSE is not held to be valid in the reference situation where the supposing takes place but is the object of a fictive assertion, insofar as that propositional content is presented as independent from the reference situation and its associated plane of events and merely serves as a premise (i.e., as the basis of a line of argument or reasoning). This analysis is supported by the fact that the verb SUPPOSE has a few ‘special grammatical uses’ (OED)—for instance in the imperative—where it serves to introduce a hypothesis:

- (16) **Suppose** a dozen qualified electricians had warned you that the wiring in your house was dangerously faulty. Would you listen instead to some bloke down the pub who told you that it was all a scam, and that house fires weren’t caused by faulty wiring but by sunspots? // So why do so many people ignore the experts when it comes to climate change? (*In2009*)

In (16), *suppose* constructs an imaginary world in which the predicative relation <a dozen qualified electricians-warn you that the wiring in your house is faulty> is the case. The speaker asks the co-speaker to select the *p* value for that predicative relation in a fictive situation of events and uses this as a starting point for a hypothetical question (*would you...*). The answer to this hypothetical question is meant to sustain the argument that follows: that people should really listen to the experts on climate change. By creating space between the situation of utterance (which serves as the reference situation here) and the state of affairs evoked in the complement clause it introduces, *suppose* allows the speaker to make a point in the abstract.

This ‘in the abstract’ component appears to be fundamental for *BE supposed to* which can often be rephrased as, or seen to function harmonically with, *in theory*:

- (2') *in theory*, George is supposed to defend / defends / plays defense
- (3') *in theory*, Europe is supposed to be / is important to us
- (12') *in theory*, the service is supposed to / will/shall make it easier for readers to follow evolving news stories

See also the following authentic example:

- (17) *In theory*, the training is reasonably thorough. After an initial 12 week basic course in Kabul, recruits **are supposed to** receive an intense three week session before they deploy to the front. But the realities of combat mean that this has been reduced to three days before the troops are sent out to fight. (In2009)

EXPECT, on the other hand, does not evoke an alternative—hypothetical or theoretical—state of affairs. As shown in Besnard (2017), it is positively-oriented and involves a projection of the validation of the predicative relation awaiting confirmation. In other words, with EXPECT (from *ex(s)pectāre* ‘look forward to, wait for’, OED) and *BE expected to*, *p* is selected on the same plane as the reference situation in anticipation of the actual validation of the predicative relation. This is why the predicate introduced by *BE expected to* often has future-time reference and there is typically no implication that the actualisation of the state of affairs is doubtful—see again (15) *Between now and Christmas, I am expected to do two essays, two short presentations and a book review.*

To summarise, the consequence of the hypothetical or theoretical character of SUPPOSE and the lack of speaker-commitment attributable to the passive origin of *BE supposed to* is that there is a double

distance between the (speaker-related) situation of utterance and the state of affairs evoked by the propositional content of the *BE supposed to* utterance. This appears to be a strong basis for the development of the counterfactual reading. To illustrate with example (3) *Europe is supposed to be important to us*, which is quite typical of the use of *BE supposed to* in journalistic texts: the selection of the positive value *p* for <Europe-be important to us> is carried out on a theoretical (i.e., not empirical) plane and is attributed to an assertive source which is not identified to the speaker. Thus, in the end, there is no commitment to the validity of the propositional content by any subjective source whatsoever, even though, because the proposition functions as a premise, the positive value is normally represented as desirable. Furthermore, by explicitly marking the validity of the propositional content as theoretical, *BE supposed to* suggests that the reality (which is usually what a non-conditional utterance is about) is either entirely or somewhat different. As a marker of non-conformity, *BE supposed to* thus sets up two independent levels of representations—an explicit theoretical one, and another one, more directly related to the situation of utterance, which can be inferred from the context. In doing so, *BE supposed to* opens up space for contradiction and is as a consequence particularly prone to appear in argumentative contexts.

As opposed to *BE expected to*, *BE supposed to* thus favours a counterfactual, i.e., negative, reading because there is a potential in-built gap between the theoretical situation of events set up by the structure and the actual situation of events. However, this gap is underspecified, only potential, so that contextual elements are needed to activate the counterfactual reading. This allows for a variety of uses in discourse. These are examined in the next Section, which focuses on present-tense occurrences of the quasi-modal.

### 3. Discourse functions of present-tense *BE supposed to*

#### 3.1. Highlighting contradictions and passing comment on the state of affairs

Very often, *BE supposed to* occurs in contexts where the selection of *p* for the proposition within its scope appears, on some level, contradictory to the actual situation of events referred to in the surrounding co-text. As suggested earlier, this is likely to give rise to a counterfactual interpretation, as in (18) and (19):

- (18) Interviewed on the release of his new book, *The Storm of War* (Eleven Secret Herbs And Spices Press, £19.99; bargain bucket of ten copies, £29.99), Andrew Roberts speaks with pride of being heir to a Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise fortune. ‘The idea that I **am supposed to** be cringingly embarrassed ... is such rubbish,’ he rebukes. ‘There is a photo around the corner of Mummy and Daddy with Colonel Sanders which is not something I would have outside my drawing room if I was embarrassed.’ (In2009)
- (19) Why G20? // G stands for Group, and 20 **is supposed to** be the number of countries taking part. Actually, there are 22 — but don’t ask. (In2009)

In these two examples, the contradiction is quite explicit and complete. In (18), the speaker rejects *the idea that I am supposed to be cringingly embarrassed* as nonsensical by means of the negative evaluative marker (*such*) *rubbish*, so that <I-be cringingly embarrassed> is negated, with the selection of the complementary value *p*’, and more precisely *non-p*, instead of *p*: <I-be (cringingly) embarrassed> is *not* the case *at all* vs. complementary <I-be proud> (logical negation inferred primarily on the basis of the negative attitude to the proposition expressed by the speaker in the co-text). In (19), the number 20 is opposed to 22, with the adverb *actually* functioning as a direct counterpoint to the ‘theoretical’ character of *BE supposed to*. Again, *p*’ is selected instead of *p* for the predicative relation at stake <20-be the number of countries taking part> (which is *not* the case), but this time it is contextually defined as *other-than-p*, with the following sentence providing the right value for the first argument (logical negation inferred on the basis of a contradictory proposition presented as fact in the co-text).

Most of the time, however, the contradiction is only partial. *BE supposed to* often occurs with generic subjects in argumentative sequences where the theory is contrasted with specific facts typically introduced by adversative markers like *but*. Examples (20) to (25) illustrate this type of use:

- (20) Data protection regulation **is supposed to** work in the consumer’s favour, but seldom does so. More often than not, it appears to be used by retailers and utility providers as an excuse for inaction. (In2009)
- (21) The service, which was introduced in the UK last week, shows 360 degree images of streets from 25 British cities. Faces and car number-plates **are supposed to** be blurred out but in some cases can be seen. (In2009)

- (22) War veterans **are supposed to** get priority treatment in the health system for conditions resulting from military service but many complain that the reality is very different. (In2009)
- (23) ‘GPs **are supposed to** quiz their patients about smoking habits and urge potential quitters to use the Stop Smoking Service. But most doctors don’t bother.’ (In2009)
- (24) ‘A manager **is supposed to** encourage you, support you, and provide you with opportunities. In my case it was the opposite, Flavio Briatore was my executioner.’ (In2009)
- (25) Books **are supposed to** inform or entertain — preferably both. Fame fails to do either. Which is surprising, as Tom Payne is clearly an interesting man, and no doubt an original and entertaining teacher. (In2009)

Apart from example (20) where *data protection regulation* is uncountable—so that it is the spatio-temporal verification of the predicative relation as a whole that is at stake (*seldom* = *not always* and even *not often*)—the theory is that the predication that falls under the scope of *BE supposed to* is valid for all *faces and car numberplates* (21) / *war veterans* (22) / *GPs* (23) / *managers* (24) / *books* (25), while the right co-text indicates that there is at least one occurrence of the notion corresponding to the subject that does not validate the predicate as it is *supposed to*:

- (21’) Not all faces and numberplates are blurred out. (OR *Faces and numberplates are not always blurred out* with an interpretation similar to (20).)
- (22’) Many war veterans do not get priority treatment...
- (23’) Most GPs do not quiz their patients...
- (24’) My manager did not encourage me... SO Not all managers encourage you...
- (25’) *Fame does not inform or entertain* SO At least one book does not inform or entertain.

This does not, however, necessarily mean that the resulting reading is counterfactual, i.e. that *p*’, be it *non-p* or *other-than-p*, is selected over *p*. More specifically, the point of (24) or (25) is not to deconstruct the *BE supposed to* statement—i.e. the statement that, in theory, the role of a manager is to encourage you (24) or that, in theory, the purpose of books is to inform or entertain (25)—but rather to point out that the particular occurrences of /manager/ (Flavio Briatore) and /book/ (*Fame*) mentioned in the co-text are not *good* occurrences, in that they do not have the expected properties normally associated with the

corresponding notions. Thus, in these utterances, *BE supposed to* allows the speaker to make a negative evaluative comment. This is also the case in another common type of sequence illustrated below:

- (26) As it stands, we, the taxpayers, are subsidising her furnishing of her family home, we are paying for items that she would need to buy for her house regardless of whether she was a MP. This does not seem to me to be the point of expenses; those **are supposed to** cover the added cost of working in Westminster, not the cost of fitting out your house with the latest TV, set-top boxes and washing machines. (*In2009*)
- (27) Labour **is supposed to** challenge such attitudes, not lustily embrace them. (*In2009*)
- (28) Development **is supposed to** help people, not destroy them. (*In2009*)

In (26) to (28), even with minimal context, it is quite clear that the validation of the proposition that is under *BE supposed to*'s scope is seen as desirable by the speaker, while being presented as counterfactual in the specific context of the events alluded to in the co-text—with the *not* complementary predication corresponding to *p*' being the actualised value.

What all the examples above have in common is that the theory is used as a starting point, to be contradicted only later by means of explicitly negative or adversative markers, so that *BE supposed to* can be seen to anticipate a problematic mismatch between theory and reality. The same type of mechanism seems to operate when the structure is used in subordinate relative clauses to attribute a property to the subject, which is then questioned in the main clause:

- (29) For the second time in six months, a foundation trust, one of the flagship institutions of the NHS which **are supposed to** set the gold standard for medical treatment, has been found to be delivering sub-standard care which may have cost hundreds of lives. (*In2009*)
- (30) So we live at an odd time. On the one hand there is Gordon Brown, neither feted by his old friends nor yet wholly eviscerated by his enemies. On the other, there is David Cameron, the subject of an occasional sympathetic piece in the left-wing press, but rarely receiving more than a polite pat on the back from those who **are supposed to** be his friends. (*In2009*)

In (29), the notional contradiction between the idea of a *gold standard* and *sub-standard care* is obvious. In (30), the use of an embedded *BE supposed to* predication instead of a simple noun phrase such as *his friends* shows that the attitude of the people referred to conflicts with the notional properties normally associated with the word *friend*, which makes the

qualification of those people as friends doubtful. This does not exactly yield a counterfactual reading, but still orients towards the non-validation of the predicative relations <flagship institutions of NHS-set gold standard for medical treatment> in (29), and <they-be his friends> in (30). However, it is worth noting that the occurrence of *BE supposed to* in subordinate nominal or adjectival clauses does not always favour a negatively-oriented interpretation, partly because what is predicated within these types of subordinate clauses is often not at issue but pre-constructed—which still shows the *a priori* status of the *BE supposed to* predication.

The following Sections explore unambiguously non-counterfactual uses of *BE supposed to*, starting with occurrences of the structure in subordinate clauses which are shown to match the reality in the immediate co-text.

### 3.2. Matching facts with theory

Example (31) below illustrates the compatibility between *BE supposed to* and an actualised proposition:

- (31) 'I am ahead of schedule. The physios are really happy with me and how I feel at the moment is how I **am supposed to** be feeling. There is obviously a bit of muscle wastage in the legs so I am working on that but I am pleased.' (In2009)

Yet, it is precisely the role of *BE supposed to* to set up a theoretical level of representation so that facts can be shown to concord with the theory; it does not follow that *BE supposed to* can itself be factual—plus, its occurring within a *wh*- clause means that there is no assertion of the theory, which is not then considered for itself as the basis of a line of reasoning but is simply used to characterise a state of affairs as consistent with what might be expected.

### 3.3. Providing justification for a preceding statement

This matching of theory and facts can also be seen to operate to some extent in another common use of the structure where no counterfactual value can be construed, illustrated in (32) and (33):

- (32) Thousands of people lined up outside a planetarium in Patna on Tuesday to buy solar viewing goggles. The goggles, costing 20 rupees (40 cents), **are supposed to** act as filters and allow people to look at the sun without damaging their eyes. // But millions across India were

shunning the sight and planned to stay indoors, gripped by fearful myths. (*In2009*)

- (33) Dream trip? // I would love to go to the Galpagos Islands. The landscape is **supposed to** be quite incredible, and I'm fascinated by the wealth of nature. I can just imagine chartering a boat with a group of friends and sailing around the islands. (*In2009*)

These two occurrences show that *BE supposed to* utterances may fulfil an explanatory function, without any reference to the actualisation of the proposition under the scope of the structure in the surrounding co-text. In (32), where the *BE supposed to* predication specifies the intended use of the viewing goggles referred to in the previous sentence, it provides context for the preceding statement, thereby explaining the interest of *thousands of people* in said goggles. In (33), the evidential *BE supposed to* serves to justify the speaker's selection of the *Galapagos Islands* as his dream trip.

What differentiates these uses of *BE supposed to* from the counterfactual or negatively-oriented uses is the objective, or informative, rather than argumentative nature of the passage, as well as its thematic structure: in (31) there is an absence of negative or adversative markers from the right co-text, while in (32) the *but* sequence that follows does not contradict the proposition of the *BE supposed to* utterance. Moreover, in both examples there are strong cohesive ties to the left co-text, as the theme (or topic) of the *BE supposed to* sentence corresponds to the focus of the preceding sentence.

### 3.4. Defining roles in the abstract

When the theme of the *BE supposed to* utterance has a generic reference and does not take up the focus but the theme of the preceding sentence, the explanatory function is often lost:

- (34) Once entrusted with a case, an investigating magistrate is independent and impartial. He or she is **supposed to** assemble all the evidence suggesting both innocence and guilt. When the investigation is complete, he or she recommends whether the suspect should be prosecuted or cleared. (*In2009*)

Thus, in example (34), *BE supposed to* helps to characterise the role of the subject by defining the properties theoretically associated with it. Compared to the present tense assertions found in the surrounding sentences, *BE supposed to* presents the validation of the predicative

relation as desirable, but this is done in the abstract, without any reference to a specific situation, so that the verification of the supposed characteristics of *he or she* is not at stake.

### 3.5. Reporting the opinion or the words of others

In a number of cases, *BE supposed to* is used to refer to the opinion or words of others, which is typically characterised as the evidential use of the structure. There might be a degree of overlap between the type of use presented here and the preceding Sections since many of the occurrences presented in Sections 3.1 to 3.4 can be understood to have an evidential dimension. This is to be expected given that reference to an assertive source other than the speaker was shown to be one of the invariant features of *BE supposed to* (see Section 2.2.1). I would argue, however, that this evidential dimension is not enough for just any occurrence of the structure to be interpreted as fulfilling primarily a reporting function; such an interpretation arises when the information source is at issue, or when there is clear reference to a previously held discourse, as in examples (35) and (36):

- (35) Turquoise: the colour of warm Caribbean seas; a place where whales do not meet unedifying and chilly ends but swim for ever. For psychologists and brand experts, it is supposed to evoke calm and compassion. Maybe Mr Clegg and his PR people are sending us a subliminal message: the Tories have the slogan 'vote blue, go green' but we are actually delivering the beautiful marriage of these two colours. (*In2009*)
- (36) Although no one can ever quite track down the source, G K Chesterton **is supposed to** have said that when men cease to believe in God, they don't believe in nothing; they believe in anything. That maxim might serve as a motto for this typically inventive and ironic, but riddling and elusive, novel by one of Poland's most original writers. (*In2009*)

Here, *BE supposed to* serves to index a proposition to another enunciative source, thus diluting the speaker's responsibility for the utterance, while signalling that the content of the proposition is not to be taken for granted. In (35), <turquoise-evoke calm and compassion> is not presented as a fact but as a theory held by *psychologists and brand experts*. In (36), <G K Chesterton-say that...> is a *maxim*, something that is generally held to be true but that cannot be checked in the absence of a definite source.

As seen here, there might be epistemic overtones to this type of use of the structure, which are incompatible with the development of a

counterfactual interpretation, given that contradictory facts necessarily resolve all uncertainty.

### 3.6. Referring to an uncertain future

Finally, *BE supposed to* regularly occurs with future time reference—very often with an ‘expected’ or ‘intended’ type of meaning—which blocks the development of the counterfactual reading, although the context might cast doubt on the realisation of the event:

- (37) How do you find motivation if you haven’t got it? I have just done my AS levels and **am supposed to** be doing my A2 levels next year and going to university, but I can’t get up any interest in what I’m doing. I just don’t care, and I know I will screw up if I carry on like this. (*In2009*)
- (38) Under the proposed alliance, Microsoft will process users’ internet search requests on Yahoo’s website and provide much of the advertising tied to those inquiries. The deal, which still requires regulatory approval, **is supposed to** lower Yahoo’s expenses, freeing the company to focus on luring more traffic to its website. (*In2009*)
- (39) Joshua sings in his local church choir, and today he and his older sisters **are supposed to** be heading off by coach and plane to Berlin to perform in churches there. It would be an experience that he would remember for the rest of his life. And by the way, for us it would mean the rare and precious luxury of a childless long weekend, which we had planned to spend away from London. I fear it is not going to happen. (*In2009*)

In (37) to (39), because the event is located in the future—*next year* in (37), when the deal is approved in (38), later *today* in (39)—the predicative relation qualified by *BE supposed to* can neither be validated or non-validated in the situation of utterance. In this context, the role of the structure is to present the validation as theoretical, i.e. as planned but relatively uncertain, the uncertainty stemming from the nonfulfillment of the necessary conditions for the event to take place, at the time of utterance: the subject *I* does not have the proper motivation to realise the predicate in (37); the very existence of the subject *the deal* is uncertain in (38); the reason for the speaker’s uncertainty regarding the validation of the predicative relation is unspecified in the immediate context in (39), but the uncertainty itself is explicitly stated.

As suggested above, it is worth noting that *BE expected to*, which often has a future orientation, would be acceptable in the context of (37), (38) and (39) but, lacking the theoretical dimension of *BE*

*supposed to*, would not carry the same implication of uncertainty that is echoed in the context of all three occurrences.

## 4. Conclusion

This study has shown that hypothetical or distancing markers can generate negative meanings in certain contexts. The quasi-modal *BE supposed to* is one such structure as it possesses invariant notional or semantic properties which make it prone to express counterfactual meaning. However, we have also seen that co(n)textual or pragmatic factors play an important part in the activation or blocking of this counterfactual potential.

As a matter of fact, for the counterfactual interpretation to arise, the proposition under *BE supposed to*'s scope needs to be seen to conflict with the actual state of affairs established elsewhere in the discourse. One interesting fact about the counterfactual reading of the structure is that although it is negatively-oriented from an existential point of view, it is typically accompanied by desirability, and is as such positively-oriented from a subjective point of view. This points to the ambivalent nature of *BE supposed to*, which operates simultaneously on various levels of representation.

## Endnotes

1. This 40-million-word digital corpus (referred to as *In2009* in what follows) is part of a larger 620-million-word corpus comprising eighteen full years of publication of the digital edition of the *Independent* newspaper (from 1992 to 2009) collected by Catherine Collin (University of Nantes).
2. © 2008–2023 Yasu Imao (Osaka University).
3. See Collins (2009) for a discussion of the term ‘quasi-modal’.
4. See for instance Westney, 1995; Visconti, 2004; Moore, 2007; Noël and van der Auwera, 2009; Verhulst et al., 2013; Agrafojo Blanco, 2014.
5. Double slashes in the examples stand for paragraph breaks in the original.
6. The relation between evidentiality and epistemic modality is a complex matter which has been much debated in the literature. The approach taken here follows Aikhenvald (2006, p.320): “Evidentiality is a verbal grammatical category in its own right, and it does not bear any straightforward relationship to truth, the validity of a statement, or the speaker’s responsibility. Neither is evidentiality a subcategory of epistemic or any other modality”.

7. Culioli (1990, p.69) defines the *notion* as “a complex bundle of structured physico-cultural properties”. In this approach, “[n]otions are representations [...] they epitomize properties (the term is used here in a very extensive and loose way) derived from interaction between persons and persons, persons and objects, biological constraints, technical activity, etc.” (*Ibid.*)

8. Within the TPEO, BE is considered as an instantiation of the locating operator epsilon ( $\epsilon$ ), meaning ‘is located relative to’—identification being one of the possible values for the operation of location. The idea behind the concept of location is that “[n]o term is isolated; all terms can only acquire a referential value if they are part of a locating system” (Chuquet et al., 2010). See Besnard (2016) for more details about BE as a locating operator.

9. I will use the phrase *original speaker* (or simply the term *speaker*) to refer to the *énonciateur* (French for the ‘uttering subject’ serving as subjective origin within the situation of utterance and, consequently, as the ultimate locator for the construction of referential values), to be differentiated in principle from the *assertive* or *modal source* corresponding to the TPEO’s *asserteur* (or *locuteur*) responsible for the propositional content of the utterance and its modal evaluation. See Chuquet et al. (2010) for more details on these aspects of the theory.

10. Relevant excerpts from the *OED* entry for *suppose*, *v.*:

I. Senses involving mental action.

\* General uses.

1. *trans.* To assume (without reference to truth or falsehood) as a basis of argument, or for the purpose of tracing consequences; to frame as a hypothesis; to put as an imaginary case; to posit.

2003 A. F. Alford *Pyramids of Secrets* iv. 147 Let us now take a different approach to the problem... Let us suppose, as some Egyptologists have suggested, that the Grotto was a sacred site for centuries before the Pyramid was built.

5. To form an idea of, conceive, imagine; to apprehend, guess.

2006 E. D. Stevens *Burnt Rec.* xiv. 135 Then he tried to suppose how she would feel.

7. *trans.*

a. Of a person, system, etc.: to lay down or assume as true, take for granted, accept without question, presuppose.

2003 T. Rockmore *Before & after Hegel* i. 26 Like the majority of philosophers since the ancient Greeks, Maimon simply supposes that it is necessary to avoid all circular reasoning.

b. Of an action, condition, fact: to involve as a ground or basis; to require as a precondition; to imply, presuppose.

2008 D. M. Harland *Exploring Moon* ii. 37 It was argued..that the crater marked the spot where a semi-molten 'volcanic bomb' fell after being ejected from an explosive vent, but this supposed that the Moon had recently been active and that there was a local vent.

9. To entertain as an idea or notion sufficiently probable to be practically assumed as true or to be at least admitted as possibly true, on account of consistency with known facts; to infer hypothetically; to incline to think, sometimes mistakenly.

2003 P. D. Smith *Seas that Mourn* xvii. 139 As Jimmy stood his lookout watch that night atop the flying bridge, he studied the area where he supposed the city to be.

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