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## CONDITIONALS AS A CATEGORY

This article is an attempt to provide an explanation of how various aspects of the form of conditionals give rise to a variety of meanings that conditional sentences express. This analysis of conditionals is mainly based on different theoretical approaches to conditionals and also to theories of semantic and pragmatic meaning. Conditionals have been used as a testing ground for some of the most influential theories in the philosophy of language, such as, for instance the theory of implicature. This article touches upon the Gricean theory of implicature: the Maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner and also types of utterance meaning according to Grice. Grice's division between "what is said" and "what is implicated" helps us understand how widely the meaning of a conditional sentence may vary depending on the context in which it is used, i.e. as different utterances. Grice's "Conversational Maxims" are guidelines for a better understanding of inferential aspect of various conditional interpretations through the relation of conventional meaning to contextually conveyed meaning.

In the article we integrate several typological observations about conditionals focusing mainly on the traditional classification of conditional sentences and those proposed by Taylor and Sweetser. Taylor's classification of conditionals is based on the epistemic relationship between the propositional content of the protasis and the speaker's assessment of what constitutes reality. Sweetser distinguishes three types of conditionals: content, epistemic and speech-act in accordance with the cognitive domain in which they are used. These two typological approaches enable us to see the diverse meanings that speakers can express in conditional protases introduced by the conditional marker "if".

The importance of the article lies in trying to reveal the flexible nature of conditional constructions by perusing and investigating different approaches to the phenomenon. In this respect Akatsuka's "epistemic scale for conditionals" is of paramount importance and of great interest.

The logical structure of conditionals has been a puzzle to philosophers since Aristotle. Their linguistic form has been an object of interest to research in many fields, including syntax, semantics, pragmatics, discourse, language acquisition, history of language, language universals and language teaching. This is because conditionals have a variety of forms and interpretations. They are an area of language use where the interaction of form, meaning and context is exceptionally complex and fascinating. The misleadingly and seemingly simple if p, q structure has a great number of various interpretations and serves a wide variety of communicative functions. In her 1985 article Akatsuka proposes a gradual "epistemic scale" that ranges between the two poles"irrealis" and "realis". She claims that it is the irrealis span of this scale that is relevant for conditionals. Her epistemic scale is reproduced in (1):

REALIS	IRREALIS		
know (exist x)	get to know (exist X)	not know (exist X)	know not (exist X)
positive	newly-learned	uncertainty	negative
conviction	information		conviction

(1) Epistemic scale for conditionals (from Akatsuka 1985:636)

As the scale shows, there exists a correspondence between the level of irrealis and the assumed cognitive status of some piece of information in the speaker's mind. The different paraphrases with "know" situated along the scale can be seen to correspond to possible epistemic attitudes toward the content of conditional protasis. A past counterfactual conditional like (2a) can therefore be located at negative conviction, a future predictive conditional like (2b) at uncertainty, and "semi-factual" conditional (Schwenter) like (2c) at newly-learned information. Below each of the examples (2a, b, c) we shall try to represent in the parentheses what the speaker can be presumed to "know" or consider reality at the time of uttering these conditionals.

(2a) If John hadn't come, we wouldn't have dined.

( = John did come, thus we did dine.)

- (2b) If it rains, the game will be cancelled.
  - (= I don't know whether it will rain or not.)
- (2c) A: Jane is ill.
  - B: If Jane is ill, we can't go skiing.

(= B has just found out that Jane is ill.)

As regards to two scale domains "realis" and "irrealis", these "do not stand in clear-cut opposition, but rather are on a continuum, in terms of the speaker's subjective evaluation of the ontological reality of a given situation" (Akatsuka 1985:635). What is supposedly excluded from expression in a conditional protasis is the domain of "realis", that is the speaker's positive conviction (I know that X exists). The newly-learned information is on the borderline between "irrealis" and "realis". Let us observe the transition of this newly-learned information into the information that is known. According to Akatsuka, an if-clause is acceptable in conversation even when the conditional sentence in which

it appears is not prototypically irrealis (i.e. not in the realm of uncertainty or negative conviction), as long as the content of that if-clause can be assumed to be information that the speaker has just acquired, as in (2c) above. Since this information is newly-learned (and/or surprising), the speaker treats it as being "unreal", just as information that the speaker does not know is treated as unreal. Thus, illustrating with a different example, we can assume that A's assertion in (3) consists of information that B is acquiring for the first time (Akatsuka 1985:635),

(3) A: I'm going to the LSA.

B: If you're going to the LSA, I'm going too.

Here it is quite acceptable for B to respond with an if-clause. Akatsuka notes, however, that if B picks up the phone right away and calls her friend C to tell him the news, the use of "if" in an example like the following would be unacceptable:

(4) B: I'm going to the LSA because (not "if") A is going.

The contrast in acceptability between the two forms is assumed to be due to the fact that "the newly-learned information, which the speaker regards as true, has just moved from the domain of irrealis into the realis. This cognitive movement along the epistemic scale is thus mirrored by a shift in the linguistic-form-marking possibilities of the adverbial subordinate clause, from irrealis *if* to realis *because*" (Akatsuka 1985:635).

Now let us imagine that after calling her friend C, speaker B then goes on to call her friend D to let her know the same information, and utters the content of (5):

(5) B: A is going to the LSA. And if she's going, I'm going too. When we compare examples (4) and (5), we see that in example (4) the new

information moves from the irrealis to the realis domain reflected by the change in conjunction from *if* to *because* and then back to irrealis in example (5) reflected by the change *because* back to *if*.

A difference between the examples in (4) and (5) is how the new information about A's plans is being conveyed to the addressees C and D.

Conditional sentences take two importantly different forms, the indicative conditional and the subjunctive conditional. In Gauker's words (2005),

Indicative conditionals say if such and such is the case, or was the case, or will be the case, then something is the case, or was the case, or will be the case. For example, "If he is 'n Paris, then he is happy" is an indicative conditional. So is. "If he was in Paris, then he was happy". Subjunctive conditionals say that if such and such were the case, or had been the case, or were going to be the case, then something would be the case, or would have been the case, or would be going to be the case. For example, "If he were in Paris, then he would be happy" is a subjunctive conditional. So is, "If he had been in Paris, then he would have been happy". Another common criterion for classification is based on the epistemic relationships holding between the propositional content P of the protasis and the speaker's assessment of what constitutes reality. Under this criterion, a three-way division can be made between "factual", "hypothetical", and "counterfactual" conditionals, which differ as follows (Taylor 1997:301),

In a "factual" conditional, the content of the if-clause is presumed to be the case, whilst in a "counterfactual" the content of the if-clause is taken to be contrary to fact. Between these categories stand the "hypothetical" conditionals, in which the content of the if-clause is entertained as a possibility, neither in accordance with reality, nor necessarily inconsistent with it.

When uttered in a particular discourse context, these conditionals may fall between e.g. "factual" and "hypothetical", as well as between "hypothetical" and "counterfactual".

- (6a) A: "How will I know that my daughter is better (i.e. over her illness)?B: "If she's eating, she's better."
- (6b) A: "How will I know that my daughter is better (i.e. over her illness)?B: "Well, she's eating again. (And) if she's eating, she's better."

Conditionals in (6a) and (6b) above are good examples of "hypothetical" and "factual" conditionals, despite their near equivalence of their protases. It becomes clear from these examples that in (6a) the speaker is unsure whether the proposition "she is eating" is true or not.

Other individual protases may be regarded as counterfactuals, depending on the content of their apodoses and other contextual factors (Taylor 1997:302). In the following examples (7), the parenthesized portion helps to sway the reading towards one epistemic possibility or another:

- (7a) If he said that (and I heard him), then he's a liar. (factual)
- (7b) If he said that (I don't know if he did), then he's a liar.(hypothetical)
- (7c) If he said that (I know he never would), then he would be a liar. (counterfactual)

The typological classification introduced above is very useful for determining degree of speaker's epistemic commitment to P. However, it clearly does not tell us very much about the relationship obtaining between the propositions P and Q in conditional constructions. A different way of classifying ("if-then") conditionals that focuses on this particular relationship in cognitive and discourse-functional terms has been put forth by Sweetser (1990). Sweetser distinguishes three types of conditionals - content, epistemic, and speech-act in accordance with the cognitive domain in which they are used or interpreted. Sweetser treats the general "if p, q "construction as having a general semantics, which is pragmatically ambiguous between content, epistemic and speech-act level interpretations of the conditional relationship. The nature of the relations depends on the

cognitive domain in which the assumptions expressed by "p" and"q" are considered. The use of conditionals in the three domains is exemplified in (8a), (8b), and (8c):

1. Content (speaker makes a prediction about the external socio-physical world;

protasis postulates a situation; causal relations hold between the described events and situations)

(8a) If it snows, they'll go skiing.

2. Epistemic (speaker draws an inference in the apodosis; internal; protasis

provides basis for inference)

(8b) If they're not answering the call, they are not at home.

3. Speech-Act (speaker performs a speech act conditionally in the apodosis;

p's are used as comments on the speech acts performed in q's)

(8c) If you have got a headache, take some medicine.

As the examples of conditional sentences from each domain show, there are syntactic and semantic particularities common to each type. In the content conditional (8a), the reference time as reflected by the tense of the protasis' finite verb is earlier than that of the apodosis' finite verb. By contrast, in epistemic conditionals like (8b), the temporal reference of the protasis ("at present") is later than that of the apodosis (before "at present"). In speech-act conditionals like (8c), an imperative form ("take"), as well as other non-assertions such as questions may occur in the apodosis.

For a better understanding let's paraphrase the sentences in (9a) and (9b):

(9a) If they got into an accident then the roads were slippery.

(9b) If the roads are slippery then they'll get into an accident.

In (9a) the prior knowledge of the accident enables the speaker to draw the inference about the condition of the roads. A paraphrase of this sentence would be "If I know that they got into an accident, then I conclude on the basis of that evidence that the roads were slippery."

In (9b) "the realization of the event or state of affairs described in the protasis is a sufficient condition for the realization of the event or state of affairs described in the apodosis" (Sweetser 1990:114). Content conditionals are almost always predictions. A paraphrase of (9b) would be "In the case that the roads are slippery, then I predict that they'll get into an accident." As Sweetser notes (1990:130), epistemic and speech-act domain conditionals are regularly compatible with factual Ps, but content domain conditionals typically are not. Content conditionals tend to retain some hypotheticality no matter what the circumstances of the utterance, because their principal function is to speculate about situations in the socio-physical world that are in turn based on other contingent situations in the same world. The benefit of Sweetser's breakdown of conditionals by domain is that it closely shows the form-function similarities of conditionals across the three domains. An attempt at extracting some of these similarities has recently been carried out by Harder(1996:450). To begin his analysis, Harder notes that in the content (or socio-physical) domain, which Sweetser takes to be the basic one, the link between conditional protasis and apodosis is typically causal, temporal and also inferential in nature, as the following example shows:

(10) If it snows, the roads will be dangerous.

In (10), the snow will cause the roads to be dangerous. Furthermore, this danger presumably only comes into existence after the snow has begun to fall. The inferential process proceeds in a manner that parallels the causal and temporal chains, from the premise (cause) to the conclusion (effect).

In the epistemic domain, however, only the inferential link between the two clauses remains: the causal and temporal chains evident in the content domain are no longer present. But in addition now the inferential reasoning proceeds in the "opposite" direction, from postulated effect to inferred (probable) cause:

(11) If the roads are dangerous, (it's that) it has snowed. The dangerous nature of the roads does not cause the snow. The conditional is based on an inferential process about how the roads got to be dangerous.

(12) If it snows, take the bus to work.

In the speech-act domain example (12), none of the three referential links that held between protasis and apodosis in the content domain example in (10) are left. Instead, what remains is a purely discursive-pragmatic link between the speech act in the apodosis (here, an imperative) and the condition in the protasis that licenses the imperative speech act (Schwenter 1996:64).

The referential meaning of the protasis is quite obvious in the case of content domain conditionals, whose clausal contents often form part of a causal relationship (protasis= cause), a temporal relationship (protasis="before" situation) and an inferential relationship (ptotasis=premise) for the state of affairs in the apodosis (Schwenter 1996:64). It also appears to a lesser extent in epistemic conditionals, in which the knowledge of the protasis enables the speaker to draw the conclusion in the apodosis, and the protasis as a premise but not as a cause or prior temporal situation. But the protases of speech-act conditionals have no referential meaning at all with respect to the apodosis. The speech-act protases however play what Harder calls a "stepping-stone" role: they permit speakers to create a sufficient amount of relevant context in order to move on to the performance of the speech act in the apodosis (Harder 1996;460).

Another question that arises is whether and how the conditional markers contribute to this connection. Sweetser proposes that the conditional marker "if" is an explicit indication that P is a sufficient condition for Q. In order to understand the marker's role in the conditional connection better, let's consider

the content (13a), epistemic (13b), and speech-act conditionals (13c) in the constructed exchanges between speakers A and B below:

- (13a) A: If it rains, they're going to cancel the game.B: That's not true.
- (13b) A: If his car is there, then he is at home.
  - B: That's not true.
- (13c) A: If you're hungry, there are cookies in the kitchen.
  - B: That's not true.

What exactly is it that speaker B is objecting to in each of these examples? In the first two the answer seems rather obvious: the objection is to the connection between the two parts of the conditional, not to one part or the other alone. In the content domain example (13a), the objection is to the validity of the causal link between rain and game cancellation. In the epistemic domain example (13b), the objection is to the validity of the conclusion drawn by the speaker A in view of the premise in the conditional protasis. Thus once again it objects to the connection between the two propositions, not to either one in isolation. But in the speech-act domain example (13c), B's objection is not to the connection between the two propositions in A's uttered conditional, it is only to the truth of proposition in the apodosis (i.e. there are no cookies in the kitchen). Thus, we can conclude that there is no truth-conditional meaning in the connection between the propositions P and Q in (13c). Therefore, what appears consistent to the meaning of "if" in all the examples in (13) seems to be only procedural, frame-creating function (Schwenter 1996:68). What is more, the sufficiency objected to in (13a, b) above is that of the proposition P for Q and not the meaning of the conditional marker "if" itself. Speaker B is not objecting to the use of "if", which does not express a concept, but to the proposition introduced by this marker. The function of "if" is to state that P may be a sufficient cause, premise and relevant context for O which will be determined by the domainspecific pragmatics of the particular conditional construction.

Another recent study of conditionals (Fillmore 1990) analyses the verb forms in conditional sentences as indicative of two aspects of interpretation: temporal reference and epistemic stance. These accounts are centered around revealing formal differences among the three major types of sentences, such as:

(14) If I catch/caught/had caught the 12 o'clock train, I will get/would get/would have got to the meeting on time.

The present tense form "catch" is indicative of neutral epistemic stance towards a future event, while "caught" signals negative epistemic stance to it. The third form "had caught" is used to express negative stance towards a past event. In this way, Fillmore accounts for a great variety of conditional sentences, showing important form-function correlations. Fillmore thus treats conditionals as constructions, in which the choice of a verb form in one clause is related to the choice made in the other in a way which is dictated by the whole interpretation of the construction in terms of time and epistemic background, rather than by any strict rules of well-formedness (Hornstein 1990).

But there are cases where conditionals receive other types of non-canonical (i.e. non-conditional) interpretations. The so-called "indicative counterfactuals" (Akatsuka 1986) are a good example of how crucial the connection between a conditional and the preceding context can be.

(15) A: J is very smart.

B: If J is smart, I'm Einstein.

The connection between protasis and apodosis in B's response highlights the absurdity: neither the protasis nor the apodosis is asserted to be true.

In many types of discourse, speakers make frequent use of protases containing a proposition that has already been asserted in the discourse context for different purposes, without necessarily expressing any doubt towards the propositional content of the protasis. Thus, in the epistemic domain example (16),

(16) A: I just went by her house, and the light was on.

B: Oh, if the light is on, then she must be at home.

The content of A's assertion repeated in B's conditional protasis aims at enabling the speaker to draw an inference and to conclude that the content of the apodosis is true. In a similar way, conditionals functioning in the speech-act domain can contain "given" protasis in order to show how the speech act in the apodosis is relevant to the current discourse situation. In (17),

(17) A: I'm not feeling well.

B: If you're not feeling well, stay in bed.

The imperative in B's response is relevant in the context of A's prior assertion. Examples (15-17) demonstrate how a prior utterance or some parts of it in the context can be used echoically for other purposes, "reporting what someone else has said or thought and expressing an attitude to it" (Carston 1996:320). But these echoic protases are not necessarily restricted to repetitions of what another speaker has actually said previously. In fact, these protases can also consist of inferences drawn from the context, as in (18),

(18) (Friends talking about a movie that they had previously planned to see):

A: I read the review of it; they say it's a bomb (a complete failure).

B: If you don't want to see it anymore, we'll go to another one.

The proposition introduced by "if" represents an inference that B has drawn from A's prior utterance. Although not a repetition of what A has said, it could be an accurate representation of what A is trying to suggest indirectly, in which case A could agree to B's suggestion that they go to see another one. But since B has drawn an inaccurate inference, the conditional marker "if" allows B to present the assumption in the protasis as hypothetical. That is, B is not asserting that A doesn't want to go to see the movie. Thus, A could agree to go or not to go to the

movie. Or A could reject B's inference by pointing out that, despite the bad review, the movie is still of interest.

Furthermore, there are conditionals (i.e. conditional protases) that do not encode a "given" or "factual" assumption arising out of the prior context at all. In fact, in some cases conditional protases can also present "brand new" propositions that speakers clearly consider to be "factual" (Schwenter 1999:21). An example of this type of conditional is (23):

(19) Ann: Did you see Juan at the disco on Saturday night?

Mary: If I stayed at home, how am I going to know?

The protasis in this example introduces a proposition that the speaker takes as describing a fact that is not open to question (Mary obviously knows where she was on Saturday night), which is then used as a context for the question in the apodosis. The content of this apodosis runs counter to Ann's expectations: she appears to assume that Mary went to the disco on Saturday night. It should be noted that in the context of this particular protasis, the question asked in the apodosis of the conditional takes on a rhetorical character. Thus, it should be emphasized once again, that conditional constructions show considerable semantic-pragmatic flexibility under particular contextual conditions. Therefore, let us turn to some general observations about the concept of meaning: semantic and pragmatic. As Levinson (1995:91) notes, the basic distinction between the sentence meaning and utterance meaning has established two fundamental explanatory levels in a theory of meaning, one responsible for the systematic process whereby the meaning of complex expressions can be built out of the meaning of their parts, and another responsible for explaining how the same expressions might have different meanings or interpretations in different discourse contexts. Grice made a preliminary bipartite division within the utterance meaning between, on the one hand, "what is said" (propositional content) and, on the other, "what is implicated" (implicatures). This schema, which is still widely accepted today, can be displayed in graphic form in (20):

(20) Types of utterance meaning according to Grice:

Meaning

Propositional content (What id "said") (What is "implicated")

Conventionally

Conversationally

Generalized Conversational Implicatures (GCIs) Particularized Conversational Implicatures (PCIs)

In this schema, Grice is using "what is said" to refer to the propositional meaning of an utterance (truth-conditional meaning). By contrast, "what is implicated" is all the meaning transmitted by the utterance, either explicitly or implicitly (nontruth-conditional meaning). This division between truth-conditional and nontruth-conditional meaning is what has traditionally formed the basis for separating semantic phenomena from pragmatic phenomena (Schwenter 1999:23). From Gazdar's well-known formulation PRAGMATICS = MEANING minus TRUTH CONDITIONS (1979:2) one can deduce that SEMANTICS = TRUTH CONDITIONS.

A proper understanding of inference and context is necessary in accounting for important aspects of conditional interpretations. Grice's (1975) original proposal of the interpretive maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner was a major advance in our understanding of the relation of form-specific conventional meaning to contextually conveyed meaning (Dancygier 1998:8). Presiding over this set of maxims was what Grice called the "Cooperative Principle." "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk change" (1975:45). These maxims are regarded as broad rules of conduct governing civilized discourse (Bennett 2003:22). The maxims are as follows:

## (21) Grice's Conversational Maxims

#### Maxims of Quantity

1. Make your contribution as informative as required (for the current purposes of the exchange).

2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

### **Maxims of Quality**

- 1. Do not say what you believe to be false
- 2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

## Maxim of Relation

Be relevant

### **Maxims of Manner**

- 1. Avoid obscurity of expression
- 2. Avoid ambiguity
- 3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
- 4. Be orderly

Though the wording of the maxims is clearly directed towards speakers, addresses (who, in their role as interlocutors, are presumably also speakers) may also put them to use to compute what was meant on the basis of what was said (Schwenter 1999:29). The maxims are therefore not only guidelines for how to "mean more that what is said" but also for understanding the"more" that is meant (Clark 1996).

R. Lakoff (1973) proposes a special set of maxims of politeness (e.g. Don't impose. Give options. Make interlocutor feel good.).

Since the appearance of Grice's formulation of the maxims, there have been several efforts to reduce their number to two or three general principles (Horn 1984, Levinson 1987) and even to reduce them to one single principle of "Relevance" (Sperber and Wilson 1986). The relevance-theoretic approach claims that utterances come with a guarantee of their optimal relevance, which means that they present the message to the hearer in the way which ensures maximal communicative gain (in Sperber and Wilson's terms, maximal contextual effect) and at the same time minimizes the hearer's processing effort. Hearers are thus assumed to conduct their search for the most relevant interpretation by weighing what was said against what they already know. Such a treatment of inference and context helps to explain how more pragmatically complex relations between protases and apodoses are constructed and understood.

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