Conditional Sentences Revisited

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Las oraciones condicionales se clasifican por lo general en función de relaciones de compatibilidad en la forma de las expresiones verbales que ocurren en la cláusula condicional (o antecedente/ prótasis) y la cláusula matriz (o consecuente/ apódosis). En su uso básico las oraciones condicionales denotan que la situación en la cláusula matriz es directamente contingente de la de la condicional. Sin embargo, esta explicación semántica requiere elaboración para dar cuenta de las llamadas "pseudo-condicionales". Mi propósito en este artículo es revisar las oraciones condicionales desde un punto de vista semántico. En mi opinión, el análisis de las oraciones condicionales se enriquecería si su clasificación se realizara usando un modelo de la estructura subyacente de la cláusula como el propuesto por Hengeveld (1987, 1988, 1989).

1. INTRODUCTION

Conditional sentences are usually classified in terms of compatibility relations in the form of the verbal expressions occurring in the conditional clause (or antecedent/ protasis) and the matrix clause (or consequent/ apodosis). Some examples of compatible combinations are these:

PRESENT-FUTURE
If he *studies*, he *will pass* the exam
PAST-CONDITIONAL
If he *studied*, he *would pass* the exam
PAST SUBJUNCTIVE-CONDITIONAL PERFECT
If he *had studied*, he *would have passed* the exam

My concern here is not formal aspects like the verbal forms used in each part or the conjunction introducing the conditional sentence. In this paper I will review conditional sentences on semantic grounds. Semantically,

conditional sentences are said to convey that the situation in the matrix clause is directly contingent on that of the conditional clause. However, this semantic account requires elaboration so as to cover the so-called "pseudo-conditionals".

In my opinion, the semantic analysis of conditional sentences could benefit if a layered model of the underlying clause structure as proposed by Hengeveld (1987, 1988, 1989) was used for their classification.

2. THE UNDERLYING STRUCTURE OF THE CLAUSE

Inherent in the functional approach to language is the recognition of several layers of structural organization of the clause corresponding to the multiple functions that the clause fulfils in the act of communication. In the Halliday tradition the clause is seen as

Fig. 1

(i) a *representation* of processes
(ii) an *exchange* between speaker and addressee, and
(iii) an *organized message*,

which means that the clause is viewed in relation to the three macro-functions of language:

(i) the *ideational* (dealing with matters of propositional content),
(ii) the *interpersonal* (concerned with the interaction between speaker and addressee), and
(iii) the *textual* (involving the structuring of information in discourse).

The functionalist grammatical model of Functional Grammar (henceforth FG) also adopts this overall conception of the clause structure, though expressed in different terms and enriched by subdivisions of the representational and interpersonal layers[1].

Fig. 2

IDEATIONAL function
Level 1 Predicate
Level 2 Predication
INTERPERSONAL function
Level 3 Proposition
Level 4 Illocution

Each of the layers or levels of semantic organization refers to a particular entity and is represented by a structural unit:

Fig. 3

	Structural unit	**Designation**
Level 1	Terms	Individual
Level 2	Predication	State of Affairs (henceforth SoA)
Level 3	Proposition	Possible Fact
Level 4	Clause	Speech Act

The first three types of entity correspond to the classification made by Lyons (1977) into first, second and third order entities:

Fig. 4

Structural unit	**Designation**	**Lyons' typology**	**Evaluation**
Term	Individual	1st order entity	Existence
Predication	SoA	2nd order entity	Reality
Proposition	Possible Fact	3rd order entity	Truth
Clause	Speech Act	4th order entity[2]	Felicity

First-order entities are physical objects that can be located in space and time:

(1) John, Mary, book

Second-order entities refer to processes, events and states of affairs, which are said to take place rather than to exist:

(2) John gave a book to Mary

Third order entities are abstract entities outside space and time, which can be asserted in terms of their truth.

(3) I think that John will give a book to Mary

The difference between a SoA and a Possible Fact is illustrated in the different behaviour of each of the two entities in certain grammatical processes. For example, a SoA could be referred back by means of the pronoun *it*, whereas in the case of Possible Facts, this has to be done by means of *so:*

I saw that John gave the book to Mary
I saw it

I thought that John would give the book to Mary
I thought so

FG even extends Lyons' classification to include a fourth-order entity, which refers to a speech act and can be evaluated in terms of its felicity (Austin 1962)[3].

(4) John (speaking to Mary): Can I give you a book?

3. CONDITIONAL CLAUSES ON SEMANTIC GROUNDS

In their basic use, conditional clauses convey that the situation in the matrix clause is contingent on that in the subordinate (ie. the conditional) clause (Quirk 1985: 1088): "Put another way, the truth of the proposition in the matrix clause is a consequence of the fulfilment of the condition in the conditional clause[4]". Since main clause and subordinate *if-* clause are in a relation of causation (an *if-then* relation), one easy conclusion to draw from 'if P then Q´ is that 'if not P then not Q´:

(5) *If you study,* you will pass the exam ® If you don't study, you won't pass the exam

However, there are conditional clauses which, according to Quirk (1985), express "indirect condition" and are said to represent "more peripheral uses". Thus in

(6) *If you want to pass the exam,* I could teach you some extra hours

the implication "If you don't want to pass the exam, I couldn't teach you..." does not hold. The offer to teach you is simply not made, since it would not make any sense to do so.

It seems obvious that in such cases the condition is not related to the *situation* in the matrix clause, but it rather relates to the *performance of the speech act* expressed in the matrix clause: the speech act expressed in the matrix clause (the speaker's offer) is contingent on the fulfilment of the condition expressed in the subordinate clause. This distinction was already noted and accounted for by Haegeman (1984), who speaks of 'ocurrence conditionals' in the first case, and 'speech-act conditionals' (also 'utterance-conditionals' or 'pragmatic conditionals') in the second, in the sense that they motivate the utterance of a speaker in some way .

However, this is not the only case in which the relations between conditional and main clause diverge from the basic pattern. Thus, in

(7) *If he is smiling,* he has passed the exam

it is not the occurrence of a SoA nor the performance of a speech act what depends on the occurrence of the SoA designated by the conditional clause. Rather, the consequence derivable from the fulfilment of the condition is our inference that he has passed the exam.

My suggestion is to reformulate Quirk's explanation of these "peripheral uses" in the sense that what is involved in such cases is not an indirect condition but a condition on a different sort of entity to that of the basic type, corresponding to a different level of the clause[5].

Thus, whereas in the basic type, two different SoAs are connected so that the *occurrence* of one depends on the occurrence of the other, in the peripheral use illustrated by (6) it is not the occurrence of a SoA but the *performance of a speech act* what depends on the occurrence of the SoA designated by the conditional.

In (7), the entity that is dependent on the fulfilment of the condition is a *Possible Fact*. The potential fact described in the matrix clause can be asserted as true if the condition is fulfilled. The fact that "he has passed the exam" must be true if he is smiling.

There are still other cases of "peripheral" conditional clauses. Thus, the conditional clause

(8) *If I may say so,* you look awful in that dress

is a conventional expression of politeness which makes the speaker's utterance seemingly dependent on the permission of the hearer. It does not imply "If I may, you look awful, and if I may not you don't". Your being awful doesn't depend on my permission to say so. You look awful anyway.

Similarly, a sentence like

(9) *If he passes the exam,* I'll eat the book

does not express a condition but it makes a strong assertion: my conviction that he won't pass the exam. Quirk labels cases like this one "rhetorical conditionals". In my view, examples like (9) are not true conditionals, since no condition is imposed on any of the predicational, propositional or clause levels.

Further fuzzy cases are what could be termed "Completive-like-conditionals" (or the other way around), exemplified below:

(10) *If the order is wrong,* now is the time to say so,

which could be paraphrased as "You should say that the order is wrong now if that is the case".

Summing up, if we want to explain these different types of conditional clause in terms of the layered structure of the clause, the following groups could be made:

Fig. 5

Type of Conditonal	**Level of the clause**	**Entity on which condition holds**	**Illustration**
BASIC	Level 2 (predication)	SoA	(11)
INFERENTIAL	Level 3 (proposition)	Possible fact	(12)
TRIGGER-OF-S-A	Level 4 (illocution)	Speech act	(13)(14)(15) (16)(17)(18)

BASIC CONDITIONAL: the occurrence of the SoA designated by the predication in the conditional is a contingency on the occurrence of the SoA in the matrix clause.

(11) *If you study,* you will pass the exam

INFERENTIAL CONDITIONAL: the conditional is the source of knowledge or motivation forthe proposition expressed in the matrix clause.

(12) *If he is smiling,* he has passed the exam

The potential fact described in matrix clause is asserted in terms of its truth. The truth of a proposition conditions the truth of another proposition.

CONDITION ON SPEECH ACT'S PERFORMANCE: The conditional sentence expresses the condition for the triggering of the Speech Act.

(13) *If you want to pass the exam,* I could teach you some extra hours

There are different types of speech act which can be designated by the matrix clause:

(14) *If you are going my way,* I need a lift back REQUEST
('If you're going my way, will you please give me a lift back?')

(15) *In case he ever asks you,* I don't know you ORDER
('In case he ever asks you, tell him that I don't know you.´)

(16) *If you want to pass the exam,* why are you watching TV? QUESTIONn
('I do not understand why you are watching TV, which is not the expected behaviour if you want to pass the exam´)

(17) *If you are hungry,* there is some food in the fridge OFFER
('If you are hungry, you can take food from the fridge´)

(18) John has left, *in case you haven't heard* STATEMENT
('I tell you that John has left because maybe you haven't heard´)

Haegeman (1984) draws on Sperber and Wilson's yet unpublished proposal and regards such examples as 'conditions on the relevance´ of the main proposition, which provide explicit guidance as to how the main proposition should be processed, avoiding misinterpretations in some cases. Thus, in (17) the proposition that there is food in the fridge is irrelevant if it were not for the inference which the hearer is expected to draw from the conditional: that he is allowed to eat the food in the fridge. Similarly, in (16) the speaker introduces in the *if*-clause his motivation for asking the question and the conditional clause points out the context against which processsing must take place. Thus, although the question may be relevant in isolation, what the speaker expects is not merely that the hearer provides information concerning why he is watching TV, but he is expected to relate his answer to the information that he wants to pass the exam, which seems to be in conflict with incoming data (ie to be watching TV).

Haegeman (1984) includes further subtypes within this group of "speech act-conditionals", all of them subsumed under Quirk's "indirect conditionals". They are:

(a) Politeness expressions:

(19) *If you don't mind my saying so,* you won't pass the exam.

(b) Metalinguistic comments hedging the wording of the utterance:

(20) His style is florid, *if that's the right word*

(c) Uncertainty about extralinguistic knowledge:

(21) I met your girlfriend Caroline last night, *if Caroline is your girlfriend*

As before, these are conditions on the relevance of the speaker's utterance:

Politeness conditionals suggest that the main sentence may be out of context, possibly because it does not occur at the moment at which we normally (i.e. according to our background assumptions concerning polite conversation) expect such remarks. Their role is to modify the force of the speech act in the matrix clause (generally a strong assertion, a warning, a threat...), avoiding their interpretation as inappropriate from the part of the hearer.

As regards those conditionals providing metalinguistic comments, they draw the hearer's attention to the potential vagueness of words and phrases in the utterances, and by means of them the speaker hints at further inferences to be drawn. In so doing they contribute to the relevance of the utterance since the hearer will be able to attach the appropriate meaning to the word or phrase.

The last type of conditionals, expressing uncertainty about extralinguistic knowledge, serve as a warning to the hearer that the reference is not clearly established, in this way avoiding wrong contextual implications derived from faulty reference.

In my view, though these three peripheral types of conditionals illustrated in (19), (20) and (21) share with the proper speech act conditionals their being conditions on the relevance of the utterance expressed in the main clause, they are conditions of a different kind in that they do not condition the *performance* of the speech act itself but they serve as mitigators of the force that the utterance may have or as warning to the hearer as to the vagueness of a term or a faulty reference. I will label such cases "fake" conditionals.

4. CONDITIONAL CLAUSES & FG TYPOLOGY OF SATELLITES

In FG conditional clauses are regarded as satellites. Each of the recognized levels of the clause is taken to have its own satellites, whose semantic contribution is essential to the building up of a fully specified predication.

Fig. 6

Layer	**Satellite**
PREDICATE	Predicate satellite
PREDICATION	Predication satellite
PROPOSITION	Proposition satellite
ILLOCUTION	Illocutionary satellite[6]

Level-1 (predicate) satellites specify additional internal properties of the SoA designated by the nuclear predication:

(22) Mary danced *beautifully*

Level-2 (predication) satellites serve to localize the SoA as defined in the core predication with respect to temporal, local, and cognitive dimensions:

(23) Mary danced beautifully *yesterday*

Level-3 (proposition) satellites reflect the speaker's evaluation of and attitude towards the content of the expressed proposition:

(24) Mary *certainly* danced beautifully yesterday

Level -4 (illocutionary) satellites specify or modify the force of the basic illocution of the utterance (mitigation & reinforcement)[7]:

(25) *Honestly,* Mary certainly danced beautifully yesterday

If we were to classify conditional clauses in terms of the typology of adverbial satellites proposed in the FG framework, the former typology

of conditional clauses will correspond to the following classification of satellites:

Fig. 7

Type of conditional	**Satellite type**
BASIC	Level 2
INFERENTIAL	Level 3
TRIGGER-OF-SPEECH ACT	Level 4
"FAKE"	Level 4

Basic conditionals are Predication (i.e. Level 2) Satellites. A Condition satellite of level 2 specifies a SoA on the occurrence of which the occurrence of another SoA depends. The SoA of "passing the exam" will take place if the SoA of "studying" takes place.

Inferential conditionals are Propositional (i.e. Level 3) Satellites. A Condition satellite of level 3 specifies a SoA the occurrence of which provides the evidence on which the propositional content (of the matrix clause) is based or supports the fact designated by such propositional content. If the SoA of "smiling" occurs, the proposition "that he has passed the exam" can be asserted as true, or, at least, quite probable.

"Trigger-of-Speech-Act" conditionals are Illocutionary (i.e. Level 4) Satellites. A Condition satellite of level 4 specifies a condition on the felicity of the speech act. My offer to teach you some extra hours is appropriate if it is true that you want to pass the exam. Otherwise, it won't make any sense.

"Fake" conditionals can also be seen as Illocutionary Satellites, although they are not a true condition on the performance of the Speech Act since their function is to soften the strength of the utterance expressed by the matrix clause, which is generally a strong assertion, a warning or a threat, and it is not expected to be fulfilled.

5. CONCLUSIONES

In this paper we hope to have demonstrated that the layered structure of the clause, as proposed in Hengeveld (1987, 1988, 1989, 1997) provides a natural framework for the subcategorization of satellites in general, and more specifically for our concern here, a better framework for the classification of conditional sentences.

NOTES

1. FG owns its layered conception of the underlying clause structure to Hengeveld (1987, 1988, 1989), who developed the idea of distinguishing between the predication and the proposition within the structure of the clause, and demonstrated the usefulness of this idea with particular reference to the analysis of different types of modalities. In doing so he incorporated certain ideas from Foley-Van Valin (1984), Bybee (1985), and Lehmann (1987).
2. Fourth-order entities, which refer to speech acts, and which can be evaluated in terms of their felicity are not contemplated by Lyons in his typology.
3. One late advance is the introduction of Level 0, represented by the Predicate, which designates a Property/relation and can be evaluated in terms of its Aplicability.
4. The statement Quirk makes is highly inappropriate since he ignores a semantic distinction between predication, proposition and clause, which turn out to be crucial in a semantic discussion on conditional sentences.
5. These semantic differences can be shown to have several syntactic reflexes, as Haegeman & Wekker (1984) & Haegeman (1984) observe. However, we have ignored them here, our only concern being semantic.
6. More recently, Hengeveld (p.c.) has introduced a new level, with its corresponding satellites: Level- 5 (clause) satellites locate the utterance in the context of discourse: Honestly, Mary certainly danced beautifully yesterday, *if I may say so.* However, this makes the status of "Fake" conditionals rather fuzzy, since sometimes they are considered as belonging to Level 4 (1997: 304) as in *If I may speak frankly, I would say that...,* which provides comment from

the speaker on his manner of saying what he does say in uttering the matrix clause, sometimes to Level 5, as in *Honestly, Mary certainly danced beautifully yesterday, if I may say so.*

7. Illocutionary satellites correspond to Quirk's (1985) "disjuncts". His distinction between the central adjuncts, and the more peripheral subjuncts, conjuncts and disjuncts is a reflex of his own conception regarding the existence of different levels in which adverbials (satellites in FG) operate.

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