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How to do conditional things with words

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The plan

- What do conditionals mean and how do they work?
- What do imperatives mean and how do they work?
- What do conditional imperatives mean and how do they work?

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- Conditional speech acts
- The nature of conditionals
  - Conditionals as context setters
  - Conditionals as restrictors
  - Restriction "from below"

Part 1: Nice theories, big problem

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- ~~Material implication~~? No!
  ~~*if p, q = not (p and not-q) = not p* OR *q*~~

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(1) If Samantha caught the early train, she's in her office by now.

- Stalnaker/Lewis-ish
  if p, *q* = *q* in all relevant *p*-scenarios/worlds

How do conditionals come to mean what they mean?

Lewis/Kratzer/Heim: *if*-clauses restrict modal operators

(4) If Samantha catches the early train, she always has coffee before class.

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(6) If Samantha caught the early train, MUST she is in her office by now.

(4) If Samantha catches the early train, she always has coffee before class.

(5) If Samantha misses class, she should go to office hours.

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Why just these kinds of operators?

Implementation

1. Generate *if* as sister to operator; move to periphery

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2. Base-generate outside; constrain restrictor variable

Now for something completely different

(7) Tell Alex that I'm not here!

Imperatives

- seem to convey commands
- speech act operator?
- performative deontic modal?

A minimal, non-modal semantics for imperatives

von Fintel & Iatridou. 2015. A modest proposal for the meaning of imperatives. `http://kvf.me/modest`

Weak uses of imperatives: acquiescence, indifference

(8) a. Can I open the window? Sure, go ahead, open it! I don't mind.

b. Which way should I turn? Go left, go right, I don't care.

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Imperatives in certain conditional conjunctions

(9) Ignore your homework and you will fail this class.

We propose adopting Portner's minimal, non-modal semantics for imperatives:

ignore-IMP your homework =
λx : x is the addressee. x ignores x's homework

Imperative pragmatics

- imperatives denote properties
- unembedded imperatives are put forward as possible additions to the hearer's To Do List (TDL)
- there are various possible levels of speaker endorsement (default: strong)
- there are no speech act operators in the object language

Nice theories, big problem

Conditional imperatives:

(10) If Alex comes, tell him I'm not here!

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(11) *Ruguo Yani xinglai-le jiu gaosu wo*
if Yani awake-PRF then tell 1SG

'If Yani woke up, tell me!'

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Conditional imperatives:

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'If Yani woke up, tell me!'

What is the conditional doing here? If *if*-clauses restrict modal operators, but imperatives don't involve a modal operator, how are conditional imperatives even possible?

Time to regroup!

Options

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3. Conditional imperatives as instances of conditional speech acts

   But: what are conditional speech acts? How do they work? And do they fit with our view of imperatives?

Part 2: Conditional speech acts

What do we do with conditionals?

We do with conditional propositions whatever we do with "simple" propositions:

- assert
- doubt
- question
- bet
- promise
- command

The Edgingtonian View

- Declarative conditionals are not assertions of conditional propositions but conditional assertions of the consequent under the supposition of the antecedent.
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Actually kind of hard to tell apart.

Conditional bets as a clear case

(12) I bet $5 the next throw is a five.

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(12) I bet $5 the next throw is a five.

(13) If the next throw is odd, I bet $5 it's a five.

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(12) I bet $5 the next throw is a five.

(13) If the next throw is odd, I bet $5 it's a five.

The bet in (13) is not a bet on a conditional proposition; it's a conditional bet.

- If the next throw is even, the bet is off.
- If the throw is odd, the bet is won if it's a five and lost if it's a one or three.

Conditional bets as conditional speech acts

A conditional bet is a bet on the truth of consequent, conditional on the truth of the antecedent.

- When the antecedent is true, the bet is on and turns on the truth of the consequent.
- When the antecedent is false, the bet is off.

Conditional speech acts, compositionally

- How do we model speech acts?
- What does it mean for a speech act to be conditional?
- What is the compositional structure of conditional speech acts?

Speech acts update the conversational scoreboard

The scoreboard contains (at least):

- the common ground of commitments about how the world is
- the stack of questions under discussion (QUD)
- for every relevant individual, their To Do List (TDL)

Portner, Gunlogson, Farkas & Bruce, Krifka, Malamud & Stephenson …

What speech acts do

- Assertions (propose to) update the common ground
- Questions (propose to) update the QUD
- Commands etc. (propose to) update the TDL

So what are conditional speech acts?

An idea that won't work:

> *It is as if one affirmed* if p then q *by handing the hearer […] an envelope labeled "open in case p," and containing a slip of paper with q written on it.* *(Jeffrey 1963)*

So what are conditional speech acts?

An idea that won't work:

> *It is as if one affirmed* if p then q *by handing the hearer […] an envelope labeled "open in case p," and containing a slip of paper with q written on it.* *(Jeffrey 1963)*

But conditional speech acts create real commitments (just conditional ones).

- Conditional bets are real bets (money might have to be set aside).
- Conditional imperatives are real imperatives (get ready to act).

We're going to focus on imperatives and the TDL now …

Adding triggers to the scoreboard

- TDL before: set of properties
- TDL after: set of pairs of a trigger proposition and a property

An agent α should act to make all the properties on their TDL true that have a true trigger.

Unconditional imperatives: tautology *T* as the trigger

Kai's TDL

$$\Big\{ \langle T, \lambda x.\ x \text{ sends email to Sabine and Thony tonight} \rangle,$$
$$\langle \lambda w.\ \text{the talk goes badly in } w, \lambda x.\ x \text{ has one extra beer tonight} \rangle \Big\}$$

Cf. Jeff Horty's systems for non-monotonic deontic logic

How conditional speech acts might work

Three ways:

- speech acts in a subordinate context created by a prior speech act
- speech act operators restricted by an *if*-clause
- speech acts with a special content that effects a conditional commitment

Way #1: Supposition and subordinate speech acts

(14) Suppose Alex comes.
Tell him I'm not here!

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(14) Suppose Alex comes.
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(15) Alex might come.
Tell him I'm not here!

- The *suppose*/*might* utterance makes salient a hypothetical context where Alex comes.
- The imperative speech act can then be interpreted as happening relative to that hypothetical context.
- We need a process by which the outcome of such a subordinate speech act is recorded in the global scoreboard with a conditional commitment.

Interpretation in the hypothetical context is optional:

(15) Alex might come.
Tell him I'm not here!

(16) Alex might come.
Clean your room!

What about *if*-clauses?

Could *if*-clauses be treated just like *suppose*-utterances?

No: *if*-clauses embed freely while *suppose* doesn't.

Way #2: *if*-clauses restricting speech act operators

If sentences contain speech act operators, then *if*-clauses could restrict them and all we would have to do is write the semantics of the speech act operators so that they give rise to conditional commitments when they are restricted by an *if*-clause.

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If sentences contain speech act operators, then *if*-clauses could restrict them and all we would have to do is write the semantics of the speech act operators so that they give rise to conditional commitments when they are restricted by an *if*-clause.

But that's a big if. Portner argues that there are no speech act operators.

In any case, if there are speech act operators, it's fairly easy to give them a semantics that lets us conditionalize them with an *if*-clause.

For example:

(17) $[\![\text{IMP}]\!] = \lambda p.\lambda Q.\lambda s.\ s^{+}$
where s^{+} is just like s except that $TDL^{\alpha}_{s^{+}} = TDL^{\alpha}_{s} \cup \{\langle p, Q\rangle\}$,
where α is the addressee

Way #3: Restriction "from below"

Conditional bets again:

(18) I bet that [if the next throw is odd, it's a five].

(19) I bet that [the next person through the door wears a hat].

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These express conditional bets. But there's no restrictor high enough to operate on the *bet*-expression.

Conditional imperatives from below

(20) Make it so that if Alex comes, you tell him that I'm not here!

Conditional imperatives from below

(20) Make it so that if Alex comes, you tell him that I'm not here!

(21) Arrest any trespasser!

Restriction “from across”

von Fintel & Gillies. 2015. Hedging your *ifs* and vice versa.
`http://kvf.me/hedging`

(22) A: If the next throw is odd, it's a five.

B_1: Maybe so.

B_2: Actually, that has only a 1-in-3 chance.

If *so* and *that* pick up the meaning of the conditional in (22A), how can the result be a restricted *maybe* and a restricted *have a 1-in-3 chance*?

Solutions discussed by von Fintel & Gillies

1. A three-valued (or partial proposition) meaning for *if p, q* + a three-value-sensitive meaning for operators (Belnap)
2. A dynamic semantic reconstruction of the three-valued approach
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Solution in Kratzer (2015)

4. Material implication + plus introduction of *p* as a proposition that can restrict operators elsewhere

Yet another solution

5. Triggered meanings: $\langle p, \phi \rangle$ (trigger + ordinary meaning)

really, a kind of structured meaning

Also needed:

- a meaning for any operator (or operation, such as a speech act) that can take a restriction from below such that it can profitably combine with the meaning of *if p, q*

Sample analysis of conditional imperatives

1. The denotation of the conditional imperative

(10) If Alex comes, tell him I'm not here!

Meaning: λw : Alex comes in w. λx. x tells Alex I'm not here

$\rightsquigarrow$ only defined for worlds where Alex comes and then denotes the property of telling Alex I'm not here

2. What speech act the utterance of such a conditional imperative performs

Uttering a partial function f from worlds to properties puts on the hearer's TDL the pair of the proposition that f is defined and the property it denotes when defined

$$\left\langle \lambda w.\ w \in \mathsf{dom}(f),\ \text{the } P : \exists w \in \mathsf{dom}(f).\ P = f(w) \right\rangle$$

In our case:

$\left\langle \lambda w.\ \text{Alex comes in } w,\ \lambda x.\ x \text{ tells Alex I'm not here} \right\rangle$

If this is on your TDL, whether you are supposed to tell Alex that I'm not here, turns on the truth of the trigger proposition that Alex comes.

Gordian Knot solution?

Since what we want to put on the TDL is a triggered property, maybe having the conditional imperative denote a triggered property is the easiest solution.

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Essential ingredients:

- a way to hypothetically update the context
- context-sensitive expressions (such as modals)
- a way to update the global scoreboard based on what happened in the hypothetical context

Three kinds of conditional constructions

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2. Grammatical restriction: *if*-clause + restricted operator
3. Restriction "from below": operator-hungry meaning that can feed a restrictor-sensitive meaning from below

Conclusion

It's a fallacy to think that there is just one kind of conditional. There are many. *If*-clauses (and their cousins in other languages) are just one device among many that can give rise to conditional meanings.

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Given this rich typology of conditional meanings and constructions, and the tendency to try to find a one-analysis-fits-all theory, it's no wonder that we have not reached a consensus of how conditonals work.

Please send comments to

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