

Linguistic Properties of Conditionals: A Minicourse

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Conditionals have been of interest to us for a long time because of their importance in logic and the formal study of meaning more generally. This has been a productive line of inquiry but in this class, we will turn things around and examine what we can learn from looking at the syntax of conditionals and how conditional meaning is encoded morpho-syntactically. The five lectures that will constitute this class will be organized as follows:

Session 1. Foundational questions: are conditionals a structurally natural class cross linguistically?

What are some common syntactic and morphological devices used to indicate conditional meaning? Where is conditional meaning located – is there a dedicated two-place operator along the lines of material implication?

Session 2. The external syntax of the antecedent of the conditional: where does the antecedent of the conditional (henceforth conditional clause) attach with the main clause? Here we will also consider adnominal conditionals (*the consequences if we lose*). A very influential line of work has conditionals restricting modals and adverbs of quantification. More recently, it has also been proposed that conditionals can restrict quantifiers. We will examine how to connect these proposals with the overt syntax. Our overarching goal will be that antecedents of conditionals are just a particular kind of adjunct clause and their external syntax should follow from general properties of adjunct clauses.

Session 3. The internal syntax of the conditional clause: what is the categorial status of the conditional clause? Where is the conditional marker *if* located? Here our discussion will be motivated by the fact that *if* also appears in embedded polar questions in English, the complementary of *if* with conditional inversion, and the fact that some languages use something that looks like a relative pronoun as the conditional marker. This last fact suggests that conditional clauses involve relativization. However, unlike relative clauses which allow for long-distance constructions, conditional never allow for long-distance constructions. We will examine the explanations given for this restriction in the literature, converging on the idea that the source of the restriction is the nature of the variable being abstracted over, namely worlds.

Session 4. *Then* and the conditional-correlative link: In many languages, in addition to the conditional clause (the antecedent) and the main clause (the consequent), there is an additional element, *then* in English. We examine its structural properties such as its interaction with verb movement, its location in the structure and whether it undergoes movement, as well as its impact on the meaning of the conditional. Our syntactic proposal analyzes *then* as a correlative proform. We explore parallels between bona fide correlatives and conditionals. We also examine *then* in the context of the literature on doubling constructions.

Session 5. Beyond hypothetical conditionals: The discussion in the preceding three lectures focuses on the properties of hypothetical conditionals. In this lecture we will touch upon three other kinds of conditionals, which have been argued to be structurally distinct from hypothetical conditionals. These are relevance conditional (also called biscuit conditional: *There are biscuits on the sideboard if you want them*), factive conditionals (*If you like her so much, you should invite her*), and counterfactual conditionals (*If kangaroos had no tails they would topple over*). For the former two, we will pursue the proposal that they attach at a location that is distinct from the location where hypothetical conditions attach.