

Short course on Cognitive Linguistic approaches to conditional constructions

Eve Sweetser, Professor, Department of Linguistics, University of California, Berkeley

This short course is an introduction simultaneously to cognitive linguistics and the analysis of conditional constructions (there will be crosslinguistic comparison of conditional constructions, including examples from French and Japanese (both well studied), but the focus will be on the English constructions.

Readings: selections from Dancygier and Sweetser (2005) *Mental Spaces in Grammar: Conditional Constructions* (Cambridge University Press).

SESSION 1. Problems with logical understandings of conditional semantics: why take a cognitive linguistic approach? In this class we will discuss the gaps in a logical treatment of conditional semantics, and begin to outline an alternative cognitive linguistic approach.

First part of the class: laying out the problems. Why do logical treatments give a truth value of True to any “If P, Q” where P and Q are both true? This does not reflect speakers’ intuitions at all: “If Paris is in France, the sky is blue,” would not be said by speakers to be a true statement, but an incoherent one. Also, what about all the many uses of conditionals where there is no truth-conditional dependency and yet the conditional is well-formed for speakers? Speech-act conditionals, for example, as when a restaurant waiter says, “If you need any help, my name is Chris.” Obviously, the waiter’s name is not different if the customer does not need assistance. **Second part of class: Concepts of Mental Spaces, ALTERNATIVES and PREDICTION.** A Predictive conditional is one which uses alternative Mental Spaces to predict a result WITHIN one possible mental space. E.g. “If it rains, they’ll cancel the game” *predicts* game-cancellation within the possible future space of rain happening. What is a Mental Space? Discussion of Fauconnier (1984,1997), Fauconnier and Turner (2002). Differences between Mental Spaces and Possible Worlds logical structures. How are IF-conditionals building Mental Spaces? And how is CAUSALITY related to conditionality in the Alternative Spaces model? It is assumed that rain will *cause* game cancellation.

SESSION 2: Construction grammar as a tool for analysis of conditionals

What does it mean to take grammatical constructions as meaningful symbols with Saussurean form-meaning correspondances? Problems of compositionality vs. larger-construction semantics. What does the meaning of present and past tenses contribute to the meaning of English conditional IF-clauses (protases) and apodoses (with or without THEN-marking)? Is meaning of tenses a constant in contributing to larger constructions? Is the meaning of IF a constant? What about THEN? **Case example: TENSE forms.** Verb forms in English: *will, gonna*, present, past. Meaning categories: alternative-based predictives, generics, non-predictives. In If it rains, they’ll cancel the game, what does the PRESENT tense-marking in the IF-clause contribute, and what does the WILL-future in the apodosis contribute? Larger constructions: COMBINING present and WILL-future. Discussion of temporal clauses with WHEN. What is past tense marking doing in “distanced” conditional constructions? (References to Fleishman’s work on tense and epistemic distance.) How does past tense marking “distance” interact with past tense marking deictic time? And: how does this relate to the logical semantic concept of *counterfactuality*? Most “counterfactual” linguistic conditional uses are not actually logically counterfactual. Contrast between *counterfactuality* and *epistemic distance* (Fillmore).

SESSION 3: THEN and EVEN IF conditionals.

A minor paradox: it is supposed that THEN and EVEN IF cannot co-occur. Why is this normally the case? Why are the (few) attested cases of “Even if P, Then Q” coherent and acceptable? What semantic analysis makes this fall out? **First part of class: semantics of scales and EVEN IF** (cf. Paul Kay’s work). How does the semantics of *even* combine with the semantics of conditional IF and building conditional spaces? The idea of a scalar relationship between mental spaces, and scalar inference across mental spaces. **Second part of class: Then and deixis.** The semantics of *then* as referring to a particular time. Is it equally deictic in conditionals, but referring to a particular mental space constructed in the IF-clause? If so, then it is incoherent with the scalar semantics of EVEN IF. **Third part of class: What possible mental space structure allows EVEN IF...THEN?** Unique pragmatic-semantic settings allow convergence of scalar semantics with unique deictic THEN reference. **Major point:** semantic compositionality, even when you think the meanings are not compositional.

SESSION 4: Unless and stance, Only if, coordinating conditionals

There are so many conditional constructions which do not involve IF, or which involve IF and other markers such as ONLY. This class will survey these and discuss the problems they pose for logical and for cognitive approaches. An analysis of *unless* constructions easily falls out of a cognitive analysis of IF constructions. A basic conclusion will be that pragmatics – cf. work of Grice and Searle – is needed to understand how *P AND Q* or *P OR Q* constructions can be

interpreted as conditional in meaning – which they are, in a wide range of languages. This can easily be combined with a cognitive semantic approach, particularly since P AND Q regularly indicates *sequence* and sequence implicates causality, while P OR Q indicates alternativity, a crucial factor in causal-conditional interpretations. Also, there are some very specific constructions (such as *only if* and *if only*) which have unique pragmatics and semantics that need to be attached specifically to these constructions.

SESSION 5: Basic Communicative Spaces, causals and conditionals (and Metonymy, speech acts, wrap-up)

There is an overarching cognitive linguistic model of **Basic Communicative Space Networks**, developed since Dancygier and Sweetser's work, which models the ways in which speakers' meaning is constructed. This model has been used in understanding conditional and temporal constructions, particularly in English and Dutch (see more recent work of Sanders, Sanders and Sweetser; also Van Krieken, Sanders and Sweetser). In part, this work develops an idea of complex mental space networks which are conventional: any speech act evokes mental spaces of the speaker's conceptual structure, the linguistic form, the addressee's conceptual structure, etc. as well as embedded space structures like conditional ones. In this final class, we will therefore examine the ways in which conditional constructions fit into a broader set of mental space constructions, in particular EMBEDDINGS of one space within another. Thus, we will fit out analysis of conditionals into a broader "mental spaces" framework, updated since the work of Fauconnier. We will also look at the ways in which PARTIAL uses of forms can perform whole speech acts, by metonymy. ("If you only touch that cake..." can mean "If you touch that cake, I will bring bad consequences on you," even if those are unexpressed.) We will consider the relationship between metonymy and grammatical interpretation.

GOALS: Students should come out of this class with some understanding of the formal models of mental spaces theory, cognitive semantics and construction grammar, as developed with respect to the analysis of conditional constructions.