

IF, UNLESS AND THEIR POLISH EQUIVALENTS

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In the majority of descriptions of English conditional sentences *if* is considered to be the principal conjunction to which all other conditional conjunctions can be referred. In the present paper I shall attempt to compare *if* with its negative counterpart *unless*. I shall make use of both English and Polish language material.

The problem of Polish equivalents of *if* and their distribution has already been touched upon in a forthcoming paper by Dancygier and Mioduszevska. Since, however, the problem was then treated very marginally I shall attempt to offer a more exhaustive account here.

The distribution of Polish conjunctions which have functions similar to those of *if* seems to confirm the possibility of interpreting conditional sentences in terms of factual, theoretical and hypothetical meanings (see Dancygier and Mioduszevska forthcoming). All the conditional conjunctions fall into basically two sets: conjunctions expressing hypothetical meanings (by means of the *-by* particle) and non-hypothetical ones. That is, we have *gdy* and *gdyby*, *jeżeli* (*jeśli*) and *jeżeliby* (*jeśliby*), *jak* and *jakby*. The verb in the subordinate clause is in the indicative after all conjunctions.

The six conjunctions listed above appear in conditional sentences with different frequency, and also in different functions.

Jeśli (or *jeżeli*) seems to be the most common conditional conjunction in Polish. It introduces clauses with factual and theoretical meanings, with all possible types of time reference (present, past and future for theoretical clauses, present and past for factual ones). (For other aspects of the semantics of *jeśli* see Faryno 1972).

The hypothetical variant of *jeśli* (*jeżeli*) — *jeśliby* (*jeżeliby*) is interesting in that it is apparently able to express only non-counterfactual hypothetical meanings, i.e. it preferably appears with future time reference:

- 1.a. Jeśliby się przygotował, zdałby ten egzamin (Future)
 1.b. *Jeślibym znała francuski, byłabym teraz we Francji (Present)
 1.c. *Jeśliby wtedy nie zlekceważył sprawy, nie narobiłby sobie kłopotów (Past)

The conjunction which is most commonly used to express hypothetical meanings is *gdyby*. Its non-hypothetical variant *gdy* (when) basically a temporal conjunction. It has functions parallel to those of it when the sentence is impersonal in form, as in: *Gdy się chce kierować przedsiębiorstwem, trzeba mieć doświadczenie*.

Gdyby can accompany present, past and future sentences, although the verb is usually put in the indicative regardless of the actual time reference (*Gdyby napisał ten list jutro {dzisiaj} {wczoraj}, mógłby dostać stypendium*). In past hypothetical sentences *plusquam perfectum* is sometimes used, but such forms are considered unnatural and obsolete). *Gdyby* is also sometimes used in the optative sense or in making polite requests (*Gdyby pan zechciał...*).

It is generally true for English that the so called mixed conditionals are never mixed between hypothetical and non-hypothetical clauses (i.e. it is impossible to say e.g. **If he is typing in his room, he wouldn't hear the bell* or **If I were you, I won't answer the phone*). Interestingly enough, there is a class of Polish conditional sentences which begin with *gdyby*, i.e., a hypothetical conjunction, and indicative, future main clauses, as in: *Gdyby zadzwoniła, dam ci znać*. It is also, apparently, the only case in which *gdyby* can be freely substituted by *jeżeliby/jeśliby*, as well as *jeżeli/jeżeli* and *jak*. It must also be noted that such sentences are not, in fact, mixed, as they clearly have future reference, both in the antecedent and in the consequent. It seems that the presence of the *-by* particle here expresses the speaker's negative expectation.

Jak is a conjunction which is basically used to substitute *gdy* in colloquial discourse, i.e. in temporal clauses. As a conditional conjunction *jak* is usually met in theoretical sentences with future or present reference. Past indicative after *jak* is unacceptable (e.g. *Jak nie chcesz, to nie idź* (Present), *Jak nie zechcesz, to nie pójdziesz* (Future), **Jak nie chciałeś, to nie poszedłeś* (Past)). *Jakby* can apparently be used with any time reference, although it is most commonly met in sentences referring to the future.¹

The last conjunction to be mentioned here is *skoro* (since), which is very interesting in that it accompanies only factual meanings, with both present and past reference. It must be noted, however, that *skoro* is never used in

¹ The interpretation of *jak* seems to pose certain problems. *Słownik Języka Polskiego* (1978), for instance, defines *jak* as a conjunction introducing temporal and conditional clauses. *Gramatyka Języka Polskiego* (1984), on the other hand, treats *jak* mainly as a temporal conjunction; in connection with conditional clauses *jak* is mentioned only once, as a substitute of *jeżeli* in its half-temporal sense, very close to *gdy*. Even then, however, the stress is put on the temporal relationship it establishes.

non-consequential conditionals, since it implies some degree of causality. Moreover, it cannot be claimed to be identical to factual *if*, because it expresses a stronger conviction on the part of the speaker.

It is generally assumed that *unless* contains an element of negation (derived from the main or the subordinate clause, see Jespersen 1909—1949) and that it can be substituted by an *if* clause in the negative form. In the majority of cases both forms (with *unless* or *if not*) really seem to be acceptable, but this does not mean that they are used for the same purposes. I am going to argue here that in many cases one of the forms is preferred and that the choice in the remaining cases is governed semantically and pragmatically.

Consider the following sentences:

- 2.a. Consult the dictionary if you can't do without it
 2.b. Consult the dictionary unless you can do without it.

The most common equivalent of *unless* in Polish is the conjunction *chyba że*. Polish translations of the two examples given above can be interpreted similarly to 2.a. and 2.b.:

- 3.a. Sprawdźcie w słowniku, jeśli nie dacie sobie rady bez tego
 3.b. Sprawdźcie w słowniku, chyba że dacie sobie radę bez tego.

It seems that 2.a. and 3.a. sentences have two possible interpretations, only one of which can be treated similarly to the interpretation of sentences with *unless* and *chyba że*. We might call one of the interpretations "causal" and claim that its structure can be represented by the following formula:

- (A) q because (not p)
 q ponieważ (nie p)

The other interpretation can tentatively be referred to as "circumstantial" and represented as follows:

- (B) q in case (not p)
 q w przypadku gdy (nie p)

In the former formula the stress is put on the cause-effect relation holding between q and *not p*, in the latter *not p* is treated as a condition (or, rather, a circumstance) under which q might occur. It might be claimed that the A interpretation has a more general character, while in interpretation B the content of p (or, rather, *not p*) comes as a kind of afterthought, which is marked by a slight pause in pronunciation.²

² In their paper on classification of conditionals Dancygier and Mioduszevska (forthcoming) introduce two classes of conditional sentences: consequential and non-consequential; the former class covers all sentences expressing cause-effect relationships of any type. In view of the observations made in the present paper the class of consequential conditionals has to be divided into two subclasses defined in terms of the causal/circumstantial opposition.

As regards the sentences 2.b. and 3.b. (with *unless* and *chyba że*), they cannot usually be related to the causal interpretation of 2a. and 3a. sentences. They are, on the other hand, similar to 2a. and 3a. sentences in their circumstantial interpretation in that they also tend to be pronounced with a pause (especially in Polish) and that the content of the subordinate clause expresses something similar to a reservation.

The main question to be asked in the analysis of *unless/chyba że* sentences relates to the problem of the actual scope of negation. *If not* clauses seem to be interpretable basically as *if (not p)*, i.e., *not* comes as a sentential negation of *p*. This does not seem to be the case with *unless*, which can be confirmed by two observations. First of all, *unless*-clauses in English can be put in the negative, which means that *unless* itself does not have a negative meaning. Besides, suppletive forms do not have to be used after *unless*:³

- 4.a. You'd better keep silent if you haven't anything to say
- 4.b. You'd better keep silent unless you have something to say
- 4.c. *You'd better keep silent unless you have anything to say
5. I won't open my mouth unless nobody else agrees to speak.

Our suggestion is that what *unless* really negates is *q*, not *p*. That is, *unless* and *chyba że* strings can be interpreted not as subordinate simple clauses, but as complex structures containing conditional sentences with negated *q*'s as consequents and *p*'s as antecedents:

(C) *q* unless *p*=*q*; [(not *q*) if *p*]

In other words, the speaker wants to say that *q*. He is, however, also considering the circumstances under which *q* might not occur. To refer this to our 2.b. and 3.b. sentences, students are told to consult their dictionaries; they are also told that they are not supposed to do that if they already know the meanings of all the vocabulary items included in the exercise.

It is also worth noting that in *unless/chyba że* sentences *p* is understood to be the only condition under which *q* does not occur, i.e., that "if only" is a plausible paraphrase in such cases:

- 6.a. Consult your dictionaries; don't do that only if you can do without it
- 6.b. Sprawdźcie w słowniku; nie sprawdzajcie tylko wtedy, gdy dajecie sobie radę bez tego.

We cannot apply the above "if only" test to sentences like 2.b. and 3.b. — simply because *unless* and *chyba że* do not appear with *only*. We can show, however, that *unless* does not equal *only if not*.

³ Similar observations can be found in Geis (1961).

- 7.a. Stay in bed if you don't feel better $\neq >$
- 8.a. $\neq >$ Stay in bed only if you don't feel better
- 7.b. Stay in bed unless you feel better $\neq >$
- 8.b. \Rightarrow Get up only if you feel better.

As it was suggested earlier, *unless/chyba że* sentences resemble *if not* clauses with circumstantial interpretation. It has been shown above how *if not* and *unless* clauses differ with regard to the place of negation, the circumstantial character of the condition, however, seems to be independent of these differences. *If not/jeśli nie* circumstantial sentences can be interpreted to the effect that the occurrence of *q* depends on the circumstances described by *not p*, in *unless/chyba że* clauses the occurrence of *q* is assumed, but the speaker is at the same time considering *not q* as a possible result of the unique set of circumstances described by *p*. The claim that *unless/chyba że* sentences do not basically express causal relationships can be supported by the fact that *unless/chyba że* usually do not appear in structures in which the causal interpretation is preferred or more probable. Consider:

- 9.a. I'll be happy if she doesn't go to hospital
- 9.b. Będę szczęśliwa jeśli ona nie pójdzie do szpitala
- 10.a. *q* (be happy) because *p* (she not go to hospital)
- 10.b. *q* (być szczęśliwym) ponieważ *p* (ona nie pójdzie do szpitala)
- 11.a. *q* (be happy) in case *p* (she not go to hospital)
- 11.b. *q* (być szczęśliwym) w przypadku gdy *p* (ona nie pójdzie do szpitala)
- 12.a. ? I'll be happy unless she goes to hospital
- 12.b. ? Będę szczęśliwa, chyba że ona pójdzie do szpitala.

The sentences 9.a. and 9.b. will probably be interpreted to the effect that "her not going to hospital will make me happy", i.e., in accordance with 10.a. and 10.b. The interpretations given in 11.a. and 11.b. and *unless/chyba że* sentences in 12.a. and 12.b. are rather unlikely. It seems that both 11 and 12 imply that the state described by *q* is temporary, while causal sentences have a more general interpretation. In particular, it seems that circumstantial interpretation is rarely given to *q*'s which denote states, as it can be seen in the following *unless/chyba że* sentences:

- 13.a. I'll be glad if he doesn't fail the exam
- 13.b. Będę zadowolona jeśli on nie obleje egzaminu
- 14.a. She'll be sorry if she doesn't manage to submit the text on time
- 14.b. Będzie jej przykro jeśli nie zdąży oddać tekstu na czas
- 15.a. ? I'll be glad unless he fails the exam
- 15.b. ? Będę zadowolona, chyba że on obleje egzamin
- 16.a. ? She'll be sorry unless she submits the text on time
- 16.b. ? Będzie jej przykro, chyba że odda tekst na czas.

Interestingly enough, 15 and 16 can obtain absolutely acceptable interpretations if the context accounts for other reasons for which the people mentioned will be glad or sorry. The *unless/chyba że* clauses would then specify some additional circumstances. That is, one can anticipate a certain emotional state and at the same time consider the circumstances which may prevent it.

The observation made above that causal subordinate clauses do not take *unless* or *chyba że* conjunctions, which seem to be exclusively circumstantial, sheds some light on another problem which also calls for explanation. Namely, *unless* sentences in English are not used in hypothetical meanings. This also holds true for Polish:

17.a. *He would have passed the exam unless he had been ill

17.b. *Zdałby egzamin, chyba żeby był chory

Two factors seem to be responsible for the above restriction.

Firstly, hypothetical sentences are apparently able to express only causal, and not circumstantial meanings. This can be seen in the following:

18.a. We'll have dinner out if you are not tired

18.b. Zjemy obiad na mieście, jeśli nie jesteś zmęczona

The above sentences will typically be interpreted as circumstantial: I want to have dinner out (for reasons not mentioned), but this may be prevented from happening if the circumstances are such that you are tired. Consequently, the *unless/chyba że* version is perfectly acceptable:

19.a. We'll have dinner out unless you are tired

19.b. Zjemy obiad na mieście, chyba że jesteś zmęczona.

In the hypothetical versions of 19 the interpretation changes:

20.a. We'd have dinner out if you were not tired

20.b. Zjedlibyśmy obiad na mieście gdybyś nie była zmęczona.

In 20.a. and 20.b. *q* and *p* can be claimed to carry the following meanings:

20.c. We won't have dinner out / you are tired

20.d. Nie zjemy obiadu na mieście / jesteś zmęczona.

In order to join the clauses of 20.c. and d. in such a way as to preserve the meanings of 20.a. and b. we have to use the conjunction *because/ponieważ*:

20.e. We won't have dinner out, because you are tired

20.f. Nie zjemy obiadu na mieście, ponieważ jesteś zmęczona.

Presumably, then, hypothetical sentences imply causal, not circumstantial interpretations, which prevents them from appearing with *unless/chyba że*.

The second factor which seems to restrict the use of *unless/chyba że* in hypothetical meanings is the implied negation of *q*. As I have suggested above, the

meaning expressed by *unless/chyba że* sentences can be accounted for by a formula in which both *q* and *not q* are present: *q* is assumed to hold true or is expected to occur in the future, while for *not q* to be true or to occur in the future the condition *p* has to be fulfilled. In other words, *unless/chyba że* sentences assume the possibility for either *q* or *not q* to happen. This, however, is impossible in hypothetical sentences, which are negatively truth-committed, or counterfactual, i.e., they allow only one interpretation: *q*, if the clause is in the negative form, or *not q* if there are no overt markers of negation.⁴ Not surprisingly the same argument can be raised in favour of the claim that *unless* sentence, do not express factual meanings. The only difference is that factual conditional sentences are positively truth-committed.

The suggestions made above find rather unexpected support in Polish. Polish "hypothetical" particle *-by*, which can be attached to most conditional conjunctions, can also be added to *chyba że*, giving *chyba żeby*. Interestingly enough, sentences with *chyba żeby* do not admit conditional forms of the verb in the main clause (see 17.b.) and they are acceptable only if the main clause is in the indicative:

21. Zda ten egzamin, chyba żeby był chory.

Still, the presence of *-by* in the subordinate clause does not imply counterfactuality, because the whole sentence has future reference and a future tense form is used in the main clause.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that due to the emphasis put on *q* in *unless/chyba że* clauses the most common surface sequence of the antecedent and the consequent is *q unless/chyba że p*. Still, it is often possible to change the sequence in English, while in Polish *chyba że* cannot take the initial position in a sentence.

22.a. Unless I am very much mistaken, she is Spanish

22.b. *Chyba że się mylę, ona jest Hiszpanką

⁴ Interestingly enough, the actual content of hypothetical *if*-clauses can be made explicit in Polish sentences with *gdyby* which are parallel to the English expression *if not for the fact that ...*

Thus in Polish we can have both

a. *gdybyśmy nie mieli dzieci*
(if we had no children)

or b. *gdybyśmy mieli dzieci*
(if we had children) --

and

a. *gdyby nie to, że mamy dzieci*
(if not for the fact that we have
children)

or b. *gdyby nie to, że nie mamy dzieci*
(if not for the fact that we have no children).

An interesting point is that the English paraphrases lose their hypothetical meaning, while the Polish ones retain the hypothetical character due to the fact that the particle *-by* accompanies the conjunction, and not the verb form.

23.a. ? Unless you ring the bell, he won't open the door

23.b. *Chyba że naciśniesz dzwonek, nie otworzy drzwi.

Sentences like 22.a. and 23.a. are likely to be paraphrased as "either...or..." sentences:

22.c. Either I am very much mistaken, or she is Spanish

23.c. Either you ring the bell, or he won't open the door.

This, however, does not change the interpretation. Consider:

q = she is Spanish, p = I am very much mistaken

q unless p = q ; not q if p

unless p , q = either p or q = either p (and, consequently, not q), or q

The "either ... or ..." paraphrase, however, reduces the stress put on q as a more probable option than *not* q .

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