

CONDITIONALS AND CONCESSIVES

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A number of studies concerning conditionals note their affinity to other types of adverbial clauses: of cause, of reason, of time, or of concession. In the present paper I will propose an analysis of these conditional sentences in which *if* is either overtly accompanied by *even* or understood as a combination of *if* and *even*. I will refer to them as concessive conditionals.

The suggestions discussed below have been formulated on the basis of data drawn from two languages, English and Polish. Since, however, the differences between realizations of concessive conditionals in English and in Polish are not striking, the main arguments will be exemplified only in English and some comments on the peculiarities of Polish will follow.

The most important question in interpreting concessive conditionals concerns the way they differ from regular sentences with *if* as a conjunction. Before we come to tackling that problem, however, we have to state our main assumptions concerning the interpretation of conditionals, as well as the interpretation of *even*.

In the discussion to follow we will make several assumptions concerning the character and interpretation of conditionals. I have argued in favour of such a framework elsewhere and I will thus use it here without further discussion. The first claim (also expressed by Van der Auwera 1986 and Sweetser 1984) is that conditional protases express sufficient conditions for their apodoses. I will further assume that "sufficient conditionality" can function on three levels, i.e., in other words, that conditionals can be interpreted in three different modes, with emphasis on the word "interpreted". This is because the mode of interpretation is established pragmatically and the same sentence can be understood in terms of more than one domain. The basic, prototypical level is the level of facts and states of affairs expressed by *p* and *q*. On this level the relation between the antecedent and the consequent

is that between facts or states of affairs in the real world, that is, between, as Lyons (1972) puts it, second order entities. We will thus refer to such relations, and in the majority of cases these are relations of cause and effect, as second order relations. Relations of the second level hold between propositions (third order entities), and they reflect steps in an inferential chain of reasoning; the protasis gives the premise, the apodosis the conclusion. The sentences of the third level, which I will refer to as conversational, have protases which qualify felicity, appropriateness, or assertibility of their apodoses.

As regards the analyses of *even* itself, most of them share the scalar interpretation of this item (see Fraser 1969, Horn 1969, Fauconnier 1975a and 1975b, König 1986). The one we will follow here (Karttunen and Peters 1979) claims that what *even* contributes to the interpretation of the sentence are two conventional implicatures: an existential and a scalar one. For a sentence such as *Bill likes even Mary* the implicatures can be spelled out as follows:

- Existential: *There are other x under consideration besides Mary such that Bill likes x.*
 Scalar: *For all x under consideration besides Mary, the likelihood that Bill likes x is greater than the likelihood that Bill likes Mary.*

In her 1984 dissertation Sweetser argues for an interpretation of *even if* which combines the sufficient conditionality thesis with the scalar interpretation of *even*. She claims that the protases of concessive conditionals represent conditions which are extremes of the scales of possible unfavourable conditions. However, such conditions are still sufficient for their apodoses to be fulfilled. As Sweetser puts it: "Y will occur whatever happens; since nearly all other circumstances are more favorable to Y than X is, Y will almost surely occur" (1984:210).

Sweetser's interpretation of *even if* has several advantages: it captures the scalar character of *even* and upholds the sufficient conditionality thesis at the same time. It seems, however, that it misses some points and oversimplifies others.

Firstly, I want to oppose the view common to all the interpretations of *even if* that I am familiar with, namely, that concessive conditions constitute poles of the implied scales. Concessive conditions do not have to be extreme, their ranking high on the scale notwithstanding. I admit that there are situations when the speaker stretches his imagination to the extremes:

- (1) *I'll get him if it's the last thing I do*¹

but such statements are usually produced as certain 'figures of speech' and not as realistically evaluated conditions.

¹ Examples (1), (15), (16), (17) are taken from Sweetser (1984).

Also, I am not convinced that *even* has to be associated with an extreme of the scale. In a sentence such as *Bill likes even Mary* Mary is certainly seen as a highly unlikely object of Bill's nice feelings. However, she is not necessarily the top of the scale, for one can also say *Bill likes even Mary, though I admit she is not the worst of the gang* without falling into a contradiction connected with an attempt to cancel a conventional implicature. The same seems to hold for sentences with *even if*. Consider the following sentence:

- (2) *I won't work overtime even if they pay for it.*

The speaker does not necessarily assume paying to be the extreme of what an employer can do to make people work overtime. It can be seen in the possibility of appending the sentence with another one, such as *I will, though, if they give me an extra day off.*

One can of course defend the 'extreme' idea by saying that this is established by the context, but there does not seem to be any real need for referring to the extremes. I assume that the overall interpretation will not suffer if we claim that conditions expressed by *even if* clauses are 'expected to be sufficient'. In a situation such as the one described in (2) it is assumed to be sufficient for the employer to make a financial offer to ensure overtime work. More examples will be given below.

We should also note that the scales applicable to concessive conditionals are not necessarily scales of unfavourable conditions. It can be claimed that the condition expressed in the subordinate clause of (3) is indeed unfavourable:

- (3) *I'll go hiking even if it rains,*

the term can also be stretched to cover (4):

- (4) *She wouldn't marry me even if she loved me.*

But in both cases the scale implied is that of what is normally "favourable" to *q*; the condition expressed in *p* is not selected from among other unfortunate circumstances, it is contrasted with the fortunate ones. A similar observation is made by König in reference to the invited concessive interpretation of conditional questions. König explains this phenomenon in terms of Gricean maxims of cooperative conversation, and assumes that "speaker and hearer may have a certain opinion about the normal relationship between the eventualities expressed by *p* and *q*" (König 1986:238).

The contrast between concessive conditions and "normal" relations between *p* and *q* is clearly seen in Polish sentences such as *Nawet gdyby mnie kochała, też by za mnie nie wyszła* where the connective *też* (*also*) implies the reference to the "normal" situation whereby girls do not marry boys only if they do not love them.

I suggested above that concessive conditions are expected by the speaker to be sufficient. It remains to be seen, though, what they are expected to be

sufficient for and what is their relation to the apodosis. Let us consider examples (2), (3), and (4) above ((1) will be disregarded for the moment and we will come back to it later). Their protases express conditions which should be sufficient for the *non-occurrence* of what is given in the apodoses, but turn out not to be. That is, getting paid for overtime work should be sufficient for the employee to agree, but it is not; people usually do not go hiking if it rains, but the speaker of (3) decides to go anyway; girls usually want to marry the ones they love, but the subject of (4) still refuses.

Presumably, then, concessive conditionals invoke negative interpretation on two levels. On the one hand, what seems to be negated is the expectation of the condition's being sufficient (that is, perhaps, what has so far been described as surprise, opposition, or some such). On the other hand, the condition is expected to be sufficient for the occurrence of some fact or state of affairs which does not eventually occur, thus rendering the condition insufficient. Thus what is stated in the apodosis is the opposite of what the condition was expected to be sufficient for. In other words, the fact that the condition appears to be *not* sufficient results in the *non-fulfilment* of what was dependent on it, whether that meant causing something to happen or preventing it from happening.

The two advocates of Sufficient Conditionality Thesis mentioned above (Van der Auwera 1986, Van der Auwera 1985, and Sweetser 1984) claim that concessive conditions are sufficient conditions in the same way in which "normal" conditions are. What they mean is that a sentence such as

(5) *I won't go even if you go*

has to be interpreted to the effect that your going is, all things considered, a sufficient condition for my not going. In other words, they claim that it expresses the same type of conditionality as:

(6) *I won't go if you go.*

Such a position certainly stands counter to the suggestions formulated above.

I believe Van der Auwera's and Sweetser's position to be questionable for several reasons. First of all, the kind of antecedent/consequent relation we find in (6) is not present in its counterpart with *even*. Example (6) will probably receive a second order interpretation, i.e., it will be understood to the effect that in the real world the fact of my not going will depend on the fact of your going. The relation between the facts will presumably be seen as a cause/effect one; your going will result in (or will cause) my not going. This part of the interpretation will be lost if *even* is introduced in front of *if*. The fact of 'my not going' can no longer be seen as in any way dependent on the fact of 'your going', let alone being caused by it. On the contrary, the speaker will not pay attention to his interlocutor's decision and simply not go.

Apparently, what Van der Auwera and Sweetser really refer to when they talk about sufficient conditionality in such cases is the observation that the presence of *even* does not affect the propositional content of the antecedent and the consequent in separation. In other words, they note that in (5) as well (6) you will go and I will not.

There are, however, other forms of contrast between sentences with *if* and *even if* which might tell us something about the relation between the two conjunctions. Let us consider (7), (8), and (9):

(7) *She would do it if she knew how.*

(8) *She wouldn't do it even if she knew how.*

(9) *She would do it even if she didn't know how.*

Example (7) specifies a sufficient condition for her to perform the task; (8), on the other hand, contradicts (7) by questioning the sufficiency of the condition; finally, (9) states that the non-fulfilment of the condition will not suffice to prevent her from doing what she is supposed to.

The next question to be considered is whether concessive conditionals can be interpreted in terms of the three levels mentioned in the introduction. As regards the level of second order entities, we have already seen (recall examples (5) and (6)) that causal relations cannot be expressed by the antecedents and consequents of concessive conditionals. Similarly, the presence of *even* apparently breaks chains of premises and conclusions. Consider:

(11) *If the post office is closed, it's past five o'clock.*

(12) *It's not five yet, even if the post office is closed.*

In (11), the inference about the time is drawn from the premise given in the protasis. Example (12), on the other hand, states a fact which stands counter to what one can conclude from the antecedent. In other words, the protasis spells out a premise which should give sufficient grounds for concluding that it is already past five, but actually does not.

Presumably, then, concessive conditionals can indirectly refer to sufficient conditions on the level of second and third order entities but one cannot claim their protases and apodoses to be in a second or third relation. In a classical second order conditional the protasis specifies causes of the result given in the apodosis; in an inferential conditional its *p* and *q* are premises and conclusion respectively. With *even if* it is no longer the case; the content of *q* does not result from *p*, but, on the contrary, from some other condition whose fulfilment is sufficient.² Similarly, the consequent of a sentence such as

² It is worth noting that in some cases the situation is totally reversed: the apodosis gives the cause and the protasis the result (consider *I'll climb that mountain if it kills me*).

(12) is not a conclusion, but an independent assertion, made regardless of what should apparently be concluded. Consequently, if concessive conditionals can be claimed to be causal or inferential it is with regard to cause-effect chains and inferences they refute.

Concessive conversational conditionals seem to be plausible, however. Consider examples such as the following:

- (13) *Mary is already on her way here, even if you don't want to hear about it*
 (14) *Where have you been all night, even if it's rude to ask.*

The sentences are concessive counterparts of conditionals such as *Mary is already on her way here, if it will satisfy you to know it* or *Where have you been all night, if it's not rude to ask*, in which the speaker spells out the conditions under which the assertion (or question, or any other speech act) is felicitous. Examples (13) and (14) can be interpreted parallelly to the concessives analysed above: for instance, X's unwillingness to listen to Y's revelations should be sufficient to stop Y from saying anything, it turns out, however, to be insufficient to overcome Y's talkativeness; (14) can be interpreted along the same lines. It should be noted, however, that conversational relations appear in concessive conditionals more readily than others because the apodoses of such sentences are to a large extent independent. The conditions expressed in their protases are predominantly hedges and politeness devices.

The above considerations refer to the concessive conditionals in their full form, i.e., with the word *even* overtly present in the sentences. There are, however, conditionals which are interpreted as concessive even though *if* is their only surface conjunction.

Not all of the *even if* sentences can retain their concessive interpretation without *even* being overtly present in the sentence. If we remove *even* from a sentence like *Even if Mary goes, I won't go* we will obtain a regular conditional which cannot be interpreted concessively.

On the other hand, there are sentences which can be interpreted either as concessives or as regular conditionals. Sweetser notes correctly that the choice of the interpretation is based on pragmatic factors and that a sentence such as

- (15) *I would marry you if you were a monster from Mars*

can be interpreted as a regular second order conditional if uttered by a girl who is dreaming about creatures from the outer space, and acquires a concessive meaning if the speaker is so determined to marry the addressee that she is ready to put up with his antennae.

It should also be noted that there are sentences for which it is difficult to find a context favourable to the non-concessive interpretation — our

example (1), as well as the sentence given in Footnote 2, which we repeat here as (16), seem to be among them.

- (16) *I'll climb that mountain if it kills me.*

It is of course not inconceivable to consider being killed a sufficient condition for climbing a mountain, but such a situation is highly improbable to say the least. It is precisely due to the improbability of this interpretation being the correct one that the concessive sense strikes the hearer as the intended one. As we noted above, sentences such as (1) and (16) have protases which are used rhetorically rather than literally, and their main function is to reinforce the speaker's determination to do something. Among other things, this is reflected in the fact that such sentences are fairly resistant to changes of person and tense. *You'll climb that mountain if it kills you* strikes me as odd, for when getting killed is considered, one should rather speak for oneself. It also seems awkward to say *I got him if it was the last thing I did, I would have climbed that mountain if it had killed me*, etc.

Thus, even though the content does determine the interpretation, the one that requires less mental effort, or, in other words, calculating a smaller number of implicatures, will probably be selected. Consequently, an *if*-clause will be interpreted concessively if its most natural interpretation (in a given context) excludes its expressing a sufficient condition for whatever is given in the apodosis. On the other hand, the concessive meaning will not arise if the protasis can simply be interpreted as a sufficient condition for the apodosis. In some cases, both interpretations will be possible.

Haiman (1986) notes that concessive meanings arise mostly in those conditionals in which the protasis follows the apodosis; otherwise the protasis is marked with a very specific intonation, which Haiman calls "a contemptuous squeal". Haiman's explanation of the order restrictions is that the sequence of clauses reflects a sequence of events, suggesting a causal relation between them. Thus a protasis-apodosis order without a squeal would suggest a "normal" conditional interpretation.

Haiman's solution seems very tempting: concessive conditionals are ruled out where the "normal" ones properly belong. However, several arguments can be raised against it. Firstly, it is not necessarily true that the apodosis-protasis order is less typical for conditionals than the protasis-apodosis one. It is certainly more basic in terms of what Haiman assumes about conditionals — that their protases constitute topics of utterances (see Haiman 1978). And it is, indeed, often the case that a sentence-initial protasis is that element of the sentence which is presupposed, or even "given" I will claim, however, that sentences with sentence initial apodoses are none the less typical, although certainly different. They appear in two forms:

either with a pause (a comma) separating the clauses, or without it. In the former case the apodosis is asserted and has sentence final intonation, while the protasis comes only as a comment or an afterthought; in the latter what is being asserted is the (causal) relation between the clauses, and the apodosis is often presupposed. (For more details see Dancygier forthcoming).

Thus, the apodosis-protasis order does not miss the causality at all. What is more, it seems to be better suited to be associated with causality only, because it does not admit inferential interpretations at all, while conversational ones appear only in the variant with the sentence-final intonation (which is perfectly justified, because conversational conditionals make independent assertions anyway). Presumably, then, the claim about the protasis-apodosis order being a better reflection of causality does not find enough support.

My second objection to Haiman's proposal refers to the fact that there are examples of sentence-initial protases which admit concessive interpretations (and do not require a "squeal"):

(17) (*Even*) if he is a stuffed shirt, he's not a fool

(18) (*Even*) if he attacks me, I've got a gun

(19) (*Even*) if she called yesterday, I was out at the time.

These are certainly not the garden variety causal conditionals — in none of the sentences is the apodosis dependent directly on the protasis, at least not in the sense of second order relations. Also, the order of the clauses seems to be important here. In (17) we are dealing with a conversational conditional in which the gradation of expressions of disapproval is an important element of meaning. Reversing the order is apparently possible, although *even* would then obligatorily appear on the surface, but the intentions of the speaker are distorted.

Examples (18) and (19) are still more interesting in that the relevance of their apodoses can only be explained through elements of meaning which are not expressed on the surface. Thus, (18) can be informally paraphrased as *If he attacks me, I still won't be in danger, because I've got a gun*, while (19) as *You say she called yesterday but I don't know anything about it, so I conclude I was out at the time*. It only remains to be noted that in both cases the unexpressed meanings render the surface conditions insufficient for what they were expected to be sufficient for, and we have explained, at least to some extent, why the concessive interpretation is the invited one here. We should also observe that in such (very specific) cases the scope of *even* is not the sentence as a whole, but the surface protasis with its underlying continuation. One can thus suppose that in the cases where *even* does not contain *q* in its scope, clause order restrictions are released.

It should also be noted that sentences like (18) and (19) cannot function in the same way if the order of their clauses is reversed — apparently because

their apodoses can only be considered relevant in relation to what comes in the scope of *even*.

Presumably, then, Haiman's claims concerning the clause order restrictions in concessive conditionals do not find sufficient support.

It remains to be seen whether the openness of *if*-clauses to concessive interpretations can be observed also in other languages. In Polish, however, I can find no evidence of such tendencies. All the examples given above would have to be rendered in Polish with conjunctions having overt concessive elements: *jeśli nawet* or *nawet jeśli*, *gdyby nawet* and *nawet gdyby*, (i.e. *even if*), *choć*, *choć*, or its subjunctive variant *choćby* (i.e. *although*). Sometimes the concessive element is "doubled", as in *choćby nawet*; in colloquial speech one can also find *nawet* in combination with *żeby*, a conjunction typical for clauses of purpose, but still in the sense of *although*.

It is interesting to note that the subjunctive form like *choćby* appears not only in subjunctive sentences such as *Wyszłabym za ciebie choćbyś był potworem z Marsa* (translation of (15)), but also in the protases of basically indicative sentences like *Wejść na tę górę, choćbym miała paść* or *Dopadnę go, choćby to miała być ostatnia rzecz w moim życiu* (translations of (16) and (1) respectively). Apparently, this is a reflection of hypotheticality introduced by *if*.

This brings us to the question of the relation between *although* and concessive *if*. Van der Auwera (1986) recalls the question raised by Mackie (1973) why *even if* can be substituted by *although* in a sentence like

(20) *Even if she's fat, she's still pretty,*

but not in

(21) *Even if Mary goes, I won't go,*

and why *if* can mean *even if* or *although* in

(22) *He's sound if unimaginative.*

One of the most defended claims about *if* is that it introduces clauses (and sentences) which are not factual, but hypothetical; it is reflected, among other things, in the use of subjunctive and counterfactual forms, as well as in the restrictions on the use of future markers after *if*. No such restrictions hold for *although*, which presupposes the clauses that follow it to express facts (see König 1986). One can also note that sentences with *although* do not assert second order relations between their propositions. They contrast two facts or states of affairs, but as independent entities.

There are, however, conditional sentences which get very close to being factual. They refer to people's claims which are communicated to the speaker as facts. The speaker may or may not follow his interlocutor in giving a proposition a factual status, but he cannot give it a hypothetical form. Apparently,

the same can happen in a conversational concessive conditional like (20), in which the speaker admits that it may be true that the girl is fat, and claims that she is nevertheless still pretty. Each of the clauses is thus an independent statement, and the only link between them is that they are contrasted with regard to appropriateness. There is, however, no second order relation here.

If *even if* is substituted by *although*, the resulting sentence is very close to (20), but still different from it in that it asserts the factual status of the protasis. This cannot happen in (21) for two reasons: first, it refers to the future and thus cannot be factual at all, secondly, it focuses on the relation between Mary's going and the speaker's going. Neither of its clauses is an independent assertion to be contrasted with the other and evaluated for appropriateness or validity. In other words, (21) is a second order conditional, which is never factual, and which focuses on the type of relation between the propositions of *p* and *q* (usually causal), while (20) is a conversational conditional, which can employ statements communicated as facts, and which is concerned with appropriateness or assertibility of its constituent clauses.

Example (22) is in fact very similar to (20). It is reduced in form, but if all its elements are recovered we will obtain a usual concessive statement such as *He is sound, even if he is unimaginative*; similarly to (20), the sentence is concerned with the appropriateness of descriptive terms used, and not with causal relations between clauses. The applicability of *although* can thus be justified in terms of arguments raised for (20).

It is possible, then, to put forward a hypothesis that *although* and *even if* share the feature of contrasting two propositions; they do not, however, assert any content relation between them (such as the cause/effect relation). Furthermore, *even if* differs from *although* in that it introduces hypotheticality and sufficient conditionality.

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