A NOTE ON THE SO-CALLED INDICATIVE CONDITIONALS

BARBARA DANCYGIER

University of Warsaw

Almost every account of conditional sentences refers, explicitly or implicitly, to the apparently generally recognized class of indicative conditionals. The class is usually seen in opposition to subjunctive and/or counterfactual sentences and, consequently, its members are characterized in a way negatively, as the conditionals in which there is no subjunctive mood and/or counterfactual meanings. Apart from the imperatives, which tell a different story about conditionals, we are left with sentences in which the indicative mood is used.

In such an approach, indicative conditionals appear to be a very heterogeneous class. The term will refer both to the typical futurate conditionals such as (1):

(1) If I miss the bus, I'll be late for dinner

and to slightly less typical, or rather, attracting less attention from philosophers, sentences like (2) and (3):

(2) If you called the police right away, the kids are safe now
(3) If he's driving a Mercedes, he's finally won in the pools.

On the other hand, sentences like (4) and (5) will have to be considered independently of (1):

(4) If I missed the bus, I'd be late for dinner
(5) If I had missed the bus, I'd have been late for dinner,

even though these three seem to have a lot in common.

A recent account of conditionals by Dudman (1984) offers a uniform and convincing analysis of sentences like (1), (4) and (5), based on the observation that these sentences are characterized by a distinctive relationship between

tense and time. Namely, the time indicated in the verb form clashes with the time indicated by the interpretation, which is always LATER. I do not intend to repeat the whole of Dudman's very complex account here, but I want to investigate the consequences of assuming, as he does, that for the conditionals outside his analysis, e.g. (2) and (3), the tense used indicates the actual time, and that the two clauses of such conditionals are generated independently of each other and are each given the form of a simple sentence.

The interpretation of the so-called indicative conditionals which are left with the label after the futurate sentences have joined the opposition (which, incidentally, can no longer be legitimately called "subjunctive") has recently been attempted by a number of linguists (see e.g. Dancygier and Mioduszewska 1984, Smith 1983, Sweetser 1984, Dancygier forthcoming, Rusiecki forthcoming). The accounts differ, of course, in terms of detailedness, scope, and, first of all, terminology, they seem to share, however, a belief in the plausibility of having the sentences which depart from the schemas of (1), (4) and (5) as an independent class. The arguments for this are based first of all on the observation that such sentences do not express conditional relations between events, but rather reflect certain mental operations performed by the speaker. Sweetser (1984) uses the term "epistemic", Dancygier and Mioduszewska (1984) define "non-consequential" conditionals, Smith (1983) postulates "evidential" ones, Dancygier (forthcoming) argues for "inferential" sentences, while Rusiecki (forthcoming) divides conditional protases in terms of "facts" and "hypotheses". As these terms suggest, the authors of the respective accounts see the interpretations of sentences like (2) and (3) as two mental steps that the speaker has to take: assuming (knowing, accepting as true, treating as a premise) and concluding (finding reasons, postulating as true, exploring the consequences). Such interpretations, regardless of the terminological diversity, are generally seen as different from the basically causal ones we find in sentences like (1), (4) and (5).

Among the features attributed to the class distinguished above most authors note a specific status of the protases of such sentences. The varying definitions can be summed up under the term "contexutally given", although claims regarding that differ in strength, and some accounts refer to such *p*'s as "assumed by the speaker to be true". The contextual giveness is best seen in the possibility of introducing phrases such as *as you say*, *as x says*, *as we know*, etc. into the protases of (2) and (3) above. This seems to reveal one of the major differences between the (1), (4), (5) type and the one distinguished above, because the protases of the former make contextually independent hypotheses concerning the present, the future, or the past.

Another observation made by almost all authors enumerated above is that in the sentences under consideration the time in the apodosis can in fact precede the time specified in the protasis. For instance, in (3) above, the assumed

time of winning in the pools has to precede the time of driving; the protasis is thus interpreted as referring to the present, while what the speaker infers from it concerns the past. Such a reversed temporal pattern is not acceptable in the type exemplified by (1), (4), (5), which is certainly connected with their preferred causal interpretation. It is difficult to say, though, whether it is the causality that comes first, thus implying sequentiality, or whether the obligatory sequentiality of *p* and *q* invites the causal interpretation. This question, however, need not concern us here.

One more question has to be raised in connection with the above distinction. The question is whether the "indicativeness" as seen above is the feature of sentences or clauses. Dudman (1984) claims that *p*'s and *q*'s of sentences such as (2) and (3) are generated independently, hence the selection of verb forms. Other analyses mentioned above (except Rusiecki forthcoming) seem to tacitly assume that the interpretational (inferential, temporal) link between p and q requires that the sentence be analysed as a whole. Rusiecki's account, on the other hand, applies the relevant distinction (fact vs. hypothesis in Rusiecki's terms) to the protases only. To illustrate this, Rusiecki lists seven sentences, each of which begins with *If Mark left the Institute at four* and continues with a different consequent, displaying an impressive variety of forms. It is then shown that some of the protases reflect "facts", while other "hypotheses".

One cannot help noting, though, that each time that *left* is interpreted as "fact" its tense is past and its time reference is past, while each time it is interpreted as a "hypothesis" its time reference is not past. Also, nothing is really known about one or the other interpretation until the whole sentence has been uttered, and once it has been uttered there is usually no doubt as to which one to choose.[1] This is due to the fact that sentences such as (1), (4) and (5) (hypotheses in Rusiecki's terms) do display patterns of verb forms and modals, also in the temporally mixed cases (e.g. *If she had listened to me, she would be still alive*). This seems like an obvious thing to say, but it is perhaps less obvious to suggest that this is only true for these sentences, and not for our revised indicative ones.

In the above paragraphs we have relegated sentences with future reference and present tense in their *if*-clauses from what has so far been referred to as a class of indicative conditionals. The question arises whether there are futurate sentences with *will* in their *if*-clauses which have features similar to (2) and (3): the match between time and tense, contextual giveness, and/or reversed temporal relations.

The essential question is whether there is a possible match in English be-

[1] I disregard here examples like the one given by Dudman (1984):
(i) If Grannie missed the last bus she would walk home
which is ambiguous between a generalization about the past and a more particular claim about the future.

tween future tense and future time. Apparently not, simply for the lack of future tense as such. It would have been impractical, though, to leave the question at that, in view of the fact that the verb *will* is a well established expression of futurity.

Non-volitional[2] uses of *will* in *if*-clauses have been noted in several papers published recently. Close (1980) sees the contrast between the present tense and *will* as that between "prediction" and "likelihood" respectively. Haegeman and Wekker (1984) and Haegeman (1984) view the problem in syntactic terms, assigning the *if*-clauses with *will* to the class of "peripheral" clauses, which either are comments on speech acts or "provide a motivation why the proposition is expressed in the way and at the time it is expressed" (1984:487). The most accurate and exhaustive account, however, seems to have been offered by Comrie (1982) and (1986).

First of all, Comrie notes that *will* appears in the *if*-clauses which are contextually given, as in (6):

(6) If nothing will cure me except rest, then I'll just rest.

Secondly, he observes, contextually given protases are often paired with apodoses which are temporally anterior to them, as in:

(7) If he won't arrive before nine, there's no point in ordering for him.

It seems, then, that this gives us a very neat distinction. There are basically two types of conditional interpretations: causal/sequential and contextual/non-sequential. In the former the actual time as later than suggested by the tense used, in the latter the tense matches the time. The protases in both types range through future, present and past reference.

There remains the question of the overall reference of the sentences containing such protases. The causal/sequential type of interpretation seems to raise little doubts, as the apodoses there can only remain within the same time period, or advance forward along the time axis. This results from their essentially iconic character, whereby events or states of affairs which are causes are followed by events or states of affairs which are effects. As Dudman suggests, the time reference of such sentences will always be later than what the tense used in the protasis actually indicates.

The sentences we claimed to be interpretable in terms of contextual givenness and non-sequentiality do not render themselves to an overall analysis of this type. Having stated that each of the clauses there refers to the time indicated by its tense we cannot find their common temporal denominator in

[2] Throughout the paper I disregard the cases where *will* is used to express volition. Such uses would certainly cut across distinctions being introduced, as there are very few restrictions on their occurrence.

any of the verb forms used. We thus have to look for it on the level other than that of events and states of affairs given in each of the clauses.

This brings us back to the problem of such sentences being reflections of certain mental processes of the speaker. In such view, the temporal frame of the sentence is the time of the speaker's formulating premises, gathering relevant evidence, recalling relevant facts and then drawing conclusions, taking decisions, making suggestions. And this is invariably the moment where these operations are given verbal form — that is the present.

If we view the sentences such as (2), (3), (6), and (7) (and a host of others displaying all the conceivable time configurations) in terms of what is being done through them, and when, we will note that they are in fact sequential, though on a different level, and that they are basically relevant to the present. As regards (2), it draws on a past action to console the hearer now, (3) explains the present state of affairs by pointing to its past source, (6) announces the present decision and gives somebody else's prediction to motivate it, and, finally, (7) makes a suggestion (or even decision) concerning the present with regard to the expected course of events in the future. It is worth noting that the present relevance of these sentences can sometimes be seen in the use of adverbs and in some paraphrases. For instance, the sentences with premise/conclusion structure can mark their apodoses with a present tense phrase like *it means that*. It can appear in sentences like (8)

(8) If you haven't done your part yet, (then it means that) I don't have to rush with mine

but also with ones referring to the past:

(9) If he told you I was going to marry him, (then it means that) he was lying.

It seems that a phrase like *it means* retains the time reference of the actual act of drawing the conclusion.

Also, let us note that the apodoses referring to past events as justifications of present states of affairs, opinions, suggestions, etc. are rarely expressed with the past tense, and preferably use the present perfect forms. If one considers two basic uses of such forms — to mark anteriority with regard to the present, or to denote "past with present relevance" — the choice of the perfect aspect seems to be well justified.

Apparently, the present relevance of such inferential (or epistemic) sentences explains why they can be characterized as "contextually given" and at the same time as non-sequential in terms of time reference. Grounds for present decisions or conclusions have to be assumed by the speaker, and in the majority of cases they are also rooted in the speaker's and hearer's shared knowledge — hence contextualization of premises. On the other hand, mental

processes like inferring do not have to follow the real-world sequence of events, and the only sequence that matters in the sentences in question is that of the elements in the inferential chain.

To finish this section of the paper, let me quote an example given by Close (1980).

(10) If you will be alone on Christmas Day, let us know now.

The sentence appeared on a poster on the door of a social welfare institution, two weeks before Christmas. As Close notes, the *will* here cannot possibly be substituted by *are*, because then its apodosis would be nonsensical — one cannot wait and see what the future brings and let somebody know about the turn of events two weeks in advance. Thus the relevance of the *if*-clause is certainly not that of the future, and in view of the *now* in the apodosis we can treat this sentence as relevant to the present. So far it does not differ essentially from the examples above. And yet there is a difference: the protasis is not contextually given in the way other examples of the type were. Apparently, then, this is not a necessary condition for the interpretation of future as relevant to the present.

The above proposals lead to a paradoxical claim that when one uses the future form in an *if*-clause one is actually talking about the present, while the use of the present tense in the conditional protasis ensures future reference. This should not, in fact, be so much surprising in view of the various modal meanings of *will* as well as the fact that future actuality in temporal clauses is also obligatorily expressed with the present tense. The problem that we have to face, though, is the interpretation of sentences which seem to share features of both modes of interpretation distinguished above. Consider:

(11) If this solution turns green when I add the reagent in a moment or two, the deceased died of hyoscine poisoning
(12) If you run out of gin, there's a bottle in the pantry
(13) If it rains tomorrow, we worked in vain yesterday[3]

All these examples are characterized by protases which refer to the future through tense, but their apodoses do not continue further into the future, they go back with their time reference into the present or even into the past. They thus seem to follow one pattern of interpretation (the sequential one) in the protasis, and the other (non-sequential) in the apodosis. Regardless of the apparent incoherence I want to claim that examples (11)—(13) refer to the future as wholes. For instance, the conclusion as to the causes of the patient's death will be drawn after the solution turns green and if it does. The invitation to open another

[3] Example (11) is taken from Dudman (1984), example (12) from Dudman (1984a), while example (13) from Comrie (1982).

bottle of gin will be valid after the guests finish this one, and, finally, the effort will turn out to be in vain (or not) only tomorrow. In example (13), which I owe to Comrie, there is a possibility of rephrasing the apodosis in the future perfect, and thus restoring the overt future reference throughout the sentence.

The question arises, though, whether examples (11)—(13) suggest, contrary to our initial assumption, that the clauses forming conditionals involving discrepancies of time and tense are generated independently. One way of finding support for the suggestion would be to give examples of subjunctive protases followed by indicative apodoses and interpretable in the protases' time reference. I have not, however, come across uses of the type.

It seems, however, that the sentences under (11)—(13) depart from our assumed generalizations in a different way. Namely, they apparently do not have surface apodoses at all. The clauses in the position of the apodoses are indeed generated independently and they do not link with the content of the protases. It is also worth noting that for (11) and (13) we can postulate elliptical apodoses in which the surface q clauses are embedded (e.g. *If it rains tomorrow, we'll have to conclude that we worked in vain yesterday*), while in (12) the surface q clause cancels the implicit negative consequences of the situation considered in the protasis.

The final example to be considered is (14), which has been very interestingly analysed by Comrie:

(14) If it will amuse you, I'll tell you a joke.

Comrie's line of reasoning goes as follows: *if*-clauses have *will* if they are contextually given. If they are temporally reversed without being contextually given they have present tense (as in (11)—(13) above). They can have *will*, though, if the reversed temporal relation is accompanied by bicausal relation between p and q (p causes q and q causes p). This, for Comrie, is the case for (14).

I want to argue against this interpretation. The fact that we know that jokes are meant to cause amusement is our general knowledge, but it does not enter the meaning (nor the interpretation) of (14). Neither is the speaker's desire to amuse seen as the reason for his telling a joke. In my view, the protasis contains a condition relevant to the present making of the offer: the speaker offers to tell a joke, but leaves it to the interlocutor to decide whether he wants to hear one (consider *if you think it will amuse you...*).

It is not necessary to force causality into the interpretation of (14) in order to account for the presence of *will* — as we have seen also in (10), the reversed temporal order, combined with present relevance (and in fact resulting from it), can explain the use of *will* in the protases which are not contextually given.

Let me close the discussion with some remarks concerning Polish. According to Comrie (1986), the contrasts he establishes between *will* and the present

tense have to be lost in languages like Polish, which have future tenses and will use the same form in all the situations discussed above. This is only partially true. Polish speakers will probably be able to grasp the contrast advocated above, and it will be due to the factors which are either independent of the tense form, or merely trigger it (such as relevance, contextual givenness, or reversed temporal relevance). Also, Polish is not totally helpless as regards overt expressing of at least some of these meanings. For instance, the use of *mieć*+infinitive in conditional protases often does the job of signalling contextual givenness (*Jeżeli ma padać...*, *Jeżeli to ma mnie uzdrowić...*). In view of the fact that contextually given protases constitute the majority of relevant examples, the remaining area of potential ambiguity is markedly reduced. Finally, I do not think Poles would use the future tense in sentences like (10), and the preferred translation would use the verb *spodziewać się* (*to expect*): *Jeżeli spodziewasz się być sam na Święta, daj nam znać już teraz.*

Presumably, then, the opposition between clauses generated independently and conditional sentences of the causal/sequential type can be found not only in different temporal frames (present, past and future), but also in languages which apparently do not have sufficient formal means to express it.

Finally, it has been shown that the term "indicative conditionals", as it is traditionally used, covers a very heterogeneous class of sentences, or rather, members of one class, plus some members of the other. Its further use, then, requires redefinition of its scope.

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