Three types of conditionals and their verb forms in English and Portuguese

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Abstract

An examination of conditionals in different languages leads to a distinction of three types of conditionals instead of the usual two (indicative and subjunctive). The three types can be explained by the degree of acceptance or as-if acceptance of the truth of the antecedent. The labels subjunctive *and* indicative *are shown to be inadequate. So-called indicative conditionals comprise two classes, the very frequent uncertain-fact conditionals and the quite rare accepted-fact conditionals. Uncertain-fact conditionals may have a time shift in contemporary English and the future subjunctive in Portuguese (though not all of them do). Moreover, paraphrases of* if *with* in case *or* supposing *are usually possible with approximately the same meaning. Accepted-fact conditionals never have these features.*

Keywords: *conditionals; indicative; subjunctive; counterfactuals.*

1. Indicative and subjunctive

Conditionals are often classified into two types: subjunctives (or counterfactuals) and indicatives (Edgington 1995; Dancygier 1998; Bennett 2003). Here is an example of a subjunctive conditional:

(1) *If he were here today, he would certainly help her.*

The verb form used in the antecedent of this conditional is traditionally called the past subjunctive. The verb *to be* is at present the only verb in English that has a distinctive form for the past subjunctive (in the first and third persons singular: *were*). It should be noted that the past subjunctive refers to the present time. The use of the subjunctive implicates that the condition expressed by the antecedent is not real, but only imaginary. The main verb in the consequent (*help*) is preceded by the

Cognitive Linguistics 19–2 (2008), 219–240 0936–5907/08/0019–0219
DOI 10.1515/COG.2008.009
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modal verb *would*, and this verb-phrase corresponds to the conditional mood of other languages. It usually expresses an unreal, imaginary situation that would be the consequence of the condition expressed by the antecedent.

Thus, subjunctive conditionals typically involve unreal, imaginary situations. That is why they are often called counterfactual conditionals. It is usually agreed, however, that the falsity of the antecedent in counterfactuals is conversationally implicated rather than asserted (Anderson 1951; Stalnaker 1975; Iatridou 2000). This is because a subsequent sentence may assert it without redundancy or cancel it without contradiction.

The term counterfactual is somewhat too strong, since not always is the antecedent really deemed "contrary to fact". Sometimes this type of conditional is used when the speaker thinks that the antecedent is only probably (and not certainly) false. For example:

(2) *If she were at home, we might visit her now.*

Counterfactuals may be used even when the speaker considers the antecedent probable, but wants to avoid the conditional to be interpreted as too direct a suggestion. For example, Jean may say to Charles

(3) *If you took a taxi, you would arrive on time.*

believing that Charles will probably accept the implicit suggestion. But in saying so she is distancing herself from this suggestion by speaking as if she believed that he was not (or probably not) going to take a taxi; otherwise she would have simply said *If you take a taxi, you will arrive on time*.

The subjunctive verb form *were* is certainly related to the indicative form *were* used for the past, although the latter is not used for the first and third persons singular. *Would* may also be the past of *will*, but here it merely indicates an imaginary present or future. According to Iatridou (2000), past tense morphology as a component of counterfactual morphology is found not only throughout Indo-European languages but also in other totally unrelated languages. Imagining a situation that is not occurring now seems to be cognitively related to remembering a past situation which is similarly not occurring now. As Langacker (1991: Ch. 6) observes, both involve an epistemic distance between the designated process and the speaker. According to him, "instead of 'present' vs. 'past' we can speak more generally of a proximal/distal contrast in the epistemic sphere" (Langacker 1991: 245). As this contrast is usually referred to a time-line mental model, the predication of immediate reality is commonly interpreted as one of present time and that of non-immediate reality as one of past time (Langacker 1991: 246). In counterfactuals, by contrast, the distal morpheme is interpreted as one of unreal circumstances.

We should bear in mind that the verb forms described above are those of the English language. The same counterfactual conditional structure may be expressed in other languages with the aid of verb forms that do not have the same properties as those used in English. For instance, in German, the same verb form (Konjunktiv II) is used for both the antecedent and the consequent. What is important, however, is that there are verb forms for conditionals involving imaginary and unreal conditions that are different from those used in conditionals involving possibly real conditions, such as the following one:

(4) *If he was here yesterday, he certainly helped her.*

Here there is no *would* in the consequent, and the indicative is used in both the antecedent and the consequent. Conditionals of this sort are called "indicative conditionals". Instead of *he were*, as in (1), we have *he was*. It should be noted, however, that in contemporary English the meaning of (1) may also be expressed by:

(5) *If he was here today, he would certainly help her.*

In older days this was considered incorrect, and some still consider it so, but it is part of spoken and written language for many dialects of English. Many would say that the verb in the antecedent of (5) is in the indicative mood. Yet, the fact that a verb form normally used for simple statements about the *past* is here used for the *present* time—a past/present time shift—may at least be considered as an equivalent of the past subjunctive. *Fowler's Modern English Usage* (quoted in Edgington 1995: 240) gives the following examples:

(6) *If he heard, he gave no sign.*
(7) *If he heard, how angry he would be!*

The first *heard* refers to the past, the second to the present. According to *Fowler's*, "the first *heard* is indicative, the second subjunctive". Others would consider both as simple past indicative. It would be harder to maintain that *I were* and *he/she/it were* also belong to the simple past indicative.

2. The present subjunctive in English "indicative" conditionals

Consider now the following two examples, which are not counterfactual, since they involve possibly real conditions:

(8) *If he is here tomorrow, he will certainly help her.*
(9) *If he be here tomorrow, he will certainly help her.*

These say in relation to the future what (4) says in relation to the past. However, while in (4) there is no time shift and no subjunctive, in (8) we have a present/future time shift and in (9) a subjunctive.[1] In (8), *is*, which in simple statements is normally used in relation to the present, refers to the future. (9) follows the regular form for this kind of conditional in 16th- and 17th-century English. For example:

(10) *If he be not in love with some woman, there is no believing old signs.* (Shakespeare, *Much Ado about Nothing*, Act III, Scene II)

(11) *A commander of an army in chief, if he be not popular, shall not be beloved, nor feared as he ought to be by his army (...)* (Hobbes, Leviathan, Ch. XXX)

Here we have what is called the present subjunctive, by contrast with the past subjunctive that we have seen in counterfactual conditionals. This archaic form is still sometimes found in recent times:

(12) *If it be your will [...], I will speak no more.* (Song by Leonard Cohen, 1984)

(13) *I will be fine with you if you be good to me.* (Song by Rick Astley, 1988)

(14) *... in general, this has a negligible effect on the correlogram, but if the grouping be very drastic, it is possible to introduce corrections analogous to Sheppard's corrections ...* (L. B. C. Cunningham and W. R. B. Hynd, 1946)

(15) *But right now those considerations—if we be at war—are secondary to victory.* (Victor Davis Hanson, in National Review Online, 23 October 2001)

(16) *And if we be robbers, how can we expect anything different from our children?* (Sermon by Rabbi Barry H. Block, 17 February 2006)

(17) *"It would make it more important if that be the case," he [Ralph Nader] said yesterday.* (New York Daily News, 5 February 2007)

This use of the present subjunctive in English conditionals has usually been overlooked. Although rare now, it clearly infirms, for example, the following statement by Bennett (2003: 11): "The conditionals that are called 'indicative' under this proposal are indeed all in the indicative mood (...)."

The fact that "indicative" conditionals such as (9)–(17) use the subjunctive mood—though this use is now archaic—may be enough reason to question the adequacy of the traditional terms "subjunctive" and "indicative" for distinguishing these two classes of conditionals, even in English. The fact that the subjunctive mood is also used in many "indicative"

conditionals in Portuguese and in classical Spanish (see below) is an additional argument against this label.

The adequacy of classifying conditionals as indicative or subjunctive has previously been questioned for the opposite reason. Thus Dudman (1988) maintains that English counterfactuals use the indicative, not the subjunctive mood, in spite of *If I/he/she/it were*. Bennett (2003: 11) also states that "most and perhaps all of [subjunctive conditionals] are in the indicative mood also". To my mind, at least those with *If I/he/she/it were* are undeniably in the subjunctive mood. In addition, the subjunctive is also the rule in counterfactuals in other languages, such as German and Spanish. An example in Spanish:

(18) *Si el jefe estuviese/estuviera aqui no sucedería*
If the boss were here not would happen
eso.
this.
'If the boss were here, this would not happen.'
("Estuviese/estuviera" are alternative forms of the past subjunctive ("pretérito imperfecto de subjuntivo").)

My point against this nomenclature is not that most "subjunctives" in English use the indicative, but rather that "indicatives" may have the present *subjunctive* in English (*If it be*, etc.)—even if this is exceptional in current English—and the future *subjunctive* in Portuguese and also in classic Spanish. An example in classic Spanish:

(19) *Si fuere a México, visitaré las*
If go-1SG-FUT SBJ to Mexico, visit-1SG-FUT IND the
pirámides.
pyramids.
'If I go to Mexico, I'll visit the pyramids.'[2]

3. Three syntactical forms for conditionals in Portuguese

Let us now examine conditionals in Portuguese. (I will present the discussion in a way that can be followed by those who have no knowledge of Portuguese.)

(20) (I know that she is not Italian.)
Se ela fosse italiana, ela seria européia.
If she were Italian, she would be European.

(21) (I do not know whether she is Italian or not.)
Se ela for italiana, ela é européia.
If she be-1SG-FUT SBJ Italian, she is European.

(22) (I know that she is Italian.)
Se ela é italiana, ela é européia.
If she is Italian, she is European.

In Portuguese, there are three different forms of the verb in the antecedent in these three cases: *fosse—for—é.* (20) has the Portuguese imperfect subjunctive (corresponding to past subjunctive in English) in the antecedent: *fosse* (were). ("If she were *[fosse]* Italian, she would be European.") (21) has the Portuguese so-called future subjunctive in the antecedent: *for*. ("If she is *[for]* Italian [which is not certain], she is European.") (22) has the present indicative: *é* (is). ("If she is *[é]* Italian [as we know she is], she is European").

The use of the future subjunctive always implicates doubt. For instance, if X tells Y that Maria has studied a lot, Y may respond:

(23) *Se ela estiver cansada, é melhor parar.*
If she be-1SG-FUT SBJ tired, is better to stop.
'If she is tired, she had better stop.'

This implicates that, although she has studied a lot, she may be tired or not. It also implicates that, if she is not tired, perhaps the best thing to do is to go on studying (for example, because of her test tomorrow).

Now let us imagine a second situation, in which X told Y that Maria *is* tired, because she has studied a lot. Y may respond:

(24) *Se ela está cansada, é melhor parar.*
If she is tired, is better to stop.
'If she is tired, she had better stop.'

Y could never use (23) in this situation. If he already knows that she is tired, he would never use *estiver*, which implicates doubt. He must use the present indicative *está*. In the first situation, by contrast, some dialects of Portuguese would use (24), but others would not (unless the speaker had already concluded that she *is* tired, from the fact that she has studied a lot).

Thus, the Portuguese language has three grammatical forms for the conditional, not just two. The one using the future subjunctive (or future perfect subjunctive) in the antecedent, which is absent in English, French, German and other languages, is usually a clear sign of doubt and is not used when the antecedent is treated as certain. In English (among other languages), the noncounterfactual conditional construction is usually used in situations involving uncertain conditions, but it can also be used in those involving conditions accepted as facts, like (22).[3] The three grammatical forms present in Portuguese and the differences in their use suggest a distinction among three types of conditional sentences.

4. Three types of conditional according to acceptance or as-if acceptance of the antecedent

What should we call these three types of conditional? Those such as (1)–(3), (5), (7) and (20), in which the speaker accepts or speaks as if she accepted that the antecedent is false or probably false, but imagines a situation in which it would be true, are often called *counterfactual conditionals*, a traditional name that may be kept.[4] I propose to call those such as (4), (6), (8)–(17), (19), (21) and (23), in which the speaker is or pretends to be or speaks as if she were uncertain about the truth of the antecedent, *uncertain-fact conditionals.* For those such as (22) and (24), in which the speaker accepts or speaks as if she accepted that the antecedent is true, I suggest the name *accepted-fact conditionals.*[5]

Thus, I suggest that we should prefer "counterfactual" to "subjunctive" to refer to the first class, and that so-called "indicative" conditionals should be divided in two classes: "uncertain-fact" conditionals and "accepted-fact" conditionals. This classification of conditionals based on the acceptance or as-if acceptance of the truth of the antecedent needs to be defended against objections that may be raised following two influential traditions in the philosophy of conditionals. First, several philosophers have noted that counterfactuals are sometimes used in cases in which the speaker believes the antecedent to be true. Second, it has been argued that the difference between counterfactual and indicative conditionals is deeper than and not explained by the belief in or acceptance of the truth of the antecedent. The first objection is discussed in the section 8 and the second in section 9.

5. The distinction between accepted-fact and uncertain-fact conditionals

Further examples of uncertain-fact and accepted-fact conditionals are given below. Suppose Johnny is trying to solve the following problem: What is the value of x if $x + y = 27$ and $x - y = 9$? He is a clever boy, but he has never studied algebra. He thinks: "27 may be the result of adding several pairs of numbers. Let's try one."

(25) *If x is equal to 20, then y is equal to 7.*
(26) *And if x is equal to 20 and y is equal to 7, then x minus y is equal to 13.*

"But $x - y = 9$. So x is not equal to 20." After trying another pair of numbers that add up to 27 and failing again, he decides to ask his older sister for help. Then she teaches him:

(27) *Look: $x - y$ is equal to 9. And if $x - y$ is equal to 9, then x is equal to $9 + y$.*
(28) *Now, if x is equal to $9 + y$ and $x + y$ is equal to 27, then $9 + y + y$ is equal to 27.*

From there she finds the solution.

The verb forms used in all these four conditionals in English are: IS–IS. If Johnny were thinking in Portuguese, (25) and (26) would typically have the verb forms FOR–SERÁ (future subjunctive–future indicative).[6] This would show that Johnny is just trying out numbers that may or may not be the right ones. By contrast, his sister would use the verb forms É–É (present indicative–present indicative) in (27) and (28), because she is dealing with certainties. In (28), for example, she is certain that *x* is equal to $9 + y$, because she deduced this (in (27)) from the second equation of the problem. In (27) and (28) we have accepted–fact conditionals, with IS–IS in English and É–É in Portuguese. In (25) and (26) we have uncertain-fact conditionals, with IS–IS in English and typically FOR–SERÁ in Portuguese.

We can see that the verb form used in the antecedent does not in general allow one to make the distinction between accepted-fact and uncertain-fact conditionals in English. In Portuguese, the use of the future subjunctive (or future perfect subjunctive) indicates an uncertain-fact conditional, but indicative forms may be used in both types.

The question then arises whether the conventional meaning of the conditional construction is different or the same in accepted-fact conditionals as compared to what it is in uncertain-fact conditionals. Let us consider English conditionals without "would" in the consequent. One could argue that the default interpretation of the antecedent of such conditionals is that it refers to an uncertain fact and that, in certain cases, additional information may override this default interpretation, so that their antecedent is understood as referring to an accepted fact. Alternatively, one could argue that the meaning of the conditional construction does not include anything about the antecedent referring to an accepted fact or to an uncertain fact. In other words, one may ask whether the conditional construction in these cases is ambiguous or vague as regards the uncertain-fact/accepted-fact contrast.[7]

This is a difficult question, but there is an argument that favours the ambiguity thesis. This is the fact that *if* can usually be paraphrased with *in case* or *supposing* in uncertain-fact conditionals (but not in accepted-fact conditionals) and by *since* or *given that* in accepted-fact conditionals (but not in uncertain-fact conditionals). This points to a difference in the meaning of *if* in each type of conditional. In an accepted-fact conditional,

the meaning of *if* is similar to the meaning of *since* or *given that*, while in uncertain-fact conditionals it is similar to the meaning of *in case* or *supposing*. (This may be compared to the two meanings of *while*, a word that may either mean *whereas* or *during the time that.*)

Note that I am not claiming that *if*, as used in uncertain-fact and in accepted-fact conditionals, is synonymous with *in case* (or *supposing*) and with *since* (or *given that*), respectively, but only that their meanings are usually similar enough to allow the respective paraphrases. However, this differential possibility of paraphrasing accepted-fact and uncertain-fact conditionals is a linguistic fact that indicates a difference in the meaning of the conditional construction in these two types.

For example,

(29) *If you don't want me here, (then) I'll leave.*

may either mean something similar to

(30) *In case you don't want me here, (then) I'll leave.*

or something similar to

(31) *Since you don't want me here, (then) I'll leave.*

Example (29) could be used either by someone who is considering the hypothesis of being unwanted to be there (just as (30)) or by someone who has had clear evidence that she is really unwanted to be there (just as (31)). It will be an uncertain-fact conditional in the first case and an accepted-fact conditional in the second.

Suppose the following isolated sentence is overheard in an airport:

(32) *If your flight is late, you'll miss your connection.*

Two interpretations are possible: (1) There is a possibility of your flight being late and, in that case, you'll miss your connection; (2) Your flight is late and consequently you'll miss your connection. Excluding any influence of special intonation or facial expression, the conditional construction itself might favour the first interpretation. However, special circumstances might favour the second. Suppose that this takes place in a small airport with only one scheduled departure in the next three hours and that the person who hears the sentence knows that this departure is delayed. She may then think that the addressee is taking this flight and that the speaker is referring to the known fact that it is late. My point is that the hearer cannot fail to interpret the sentence one way or the other (or even consider both alternatives). According to the first interpretation, the sentence could be paraphrased as "In case your flight is late, you'll miss

your connection" or "Supposing your flight is late, you'll miss your connection". According to the second, it could be paraphrased as "Since your flight is late, you'll miss your connection" or "Given that your flight is late, you'll miss your connection".

Many conditionals in Portuguese are also ambiguous as concerns the uncertain-fact/accepted-fact distinction, as the following example:

(33) *Se ele foi contratado, vamos primeiro ver o*
If he was hired, go-1PL IMP first see the
trabalho dele para depois criticar.
work of him for after criticize.
'If he was hired, let's first see his work and then criticize it.'

The sentence could be used either by one who thinks that the man was hired or by one who is merely considering the hypothesis that he was.[8] As in English, however, different paraphrases for *se [if]* would be possible in each case. If (33) is meant as an accepted-fact conditional, *se* could be paraphrased with *já que [since]* or *dado que [given that]*, but not with *caso [in case]* or *supondo que [supposing]*. If it is meant as an uncertain-fact conditional, *se* could be paraphrased with *caso* or *supondo que* (in which case the verb tense would have to be changed to the past perfect subjunctive: *"Caso ele tenha sido contratado, ..."* or *"Supondo que ele tenha sido contratado, ..."*) but not with *já que* or *dado que.*

6. Comparison with other proposed distinctions

My distinction has nothing to do with the thesis of Dudman (1984, 1989) according to which indicatives should be divided in two classes according to the presence or absence of a time-shift (and that those presenting a time shift should be classified in the same group as counterfactuals). To my mind, the presence of a present/future time shift is undoubtedly significant, since it is a sure sign of an uncertain-fact conditional. (No accepted-fact conditional has a time shift.) However, there are many uncertain-fact conditionals that do not have a time shift. For example, when the antecedent refers to the past, as in (4), there is no time shift. Thomason and Gupta (1980: 299) give an example in which the present tense in the antecedent may refer to the present, thus without a time shift: *If he loves her, he will marry her.*

Haegeman (2003) proposed a distinction between two types of indicative conditionals that is also different from that between uncertain-fact and accepted-fact conditionals: the distinction between *premise-conditionals* and *event-conditionals*. According to her, the conditional clause in event-conditionals "structures the event": it expresses an event

which will lead to the main clause event. In premise-conditionals, by contrast, the conditional clause "structures the discourse": it expresses a premise leading to the matrix clause (Haegeman 2003: 318–19).

As it happens, almost all of her examples of *premise-conditionals* are accepted-fact conditionals or may be interpreted as such. Here is one:

(34) *John won't finish on time, if there's (already) such a lot of pressure on him now.* (Haegeman 2003: 322)

The speaker here clearly accepts that there is a lot of pressure on John. However, the following example, also classified by the author as a *premise-conditional*, is an uncertain-fact conditional:

(35) *If his children aren't in the garden, John will already have left home (. . .).* (Haegeman 2003: 325)

The speaker now seems uncertain about whether John's children are still in the garden or not. So we see that Haegeman's distinction does not coincide with mine.

In fact, I do not find the distinction between event- and premise-conditionals very clear. In (34), classified as a premise-conditional, we could also say that the event expressed by the conditional clause will lead to the main clause event, which is how Haegeman characterizes event-conditionals.

Edgington (2003) also found difficulties with Haegeman's distinction. She stresses the following two characteristics of event-conditionals as discussed by Haegeman: a causal relation between the conditional clause and the main clause, and "tense oddity" (what I have called a present/future time shift). And she concludes:

> Given that there can be tense oddity and no causation running from conditional to main clause, and vice versa, I am left somewhat uncertain about where to draw the line between event-conditionals and the rest (Edgington 2003: 396).

Haegeman states that event-conditionals may be clefted and premise-conditionals may not. (A conditional of the form *"A only if B"* is said to be clefted when it is transformed to one of the form *"It is only if B that A"*.) For example, we cannot say:

(36) **It is only if there is already such a lot of pressure on him now, that John will finish the book.* (Haegeman 2003: 323)

Edgington remarks that without the word *such* this example would be in order. She notes that the role of *such* here is to suggest that "the

speaker already knows that there is all this pressure on John now". She considers that conditionals in which the premise is really accepted by the speaker are "marginal and untypical" and notes that "while this is not part of Haegeman's official doctrine of premise-conditionals (...) quite a few of her examples are of this kind" (Edgington 2003: 397). Such conditionals are precisely my accepted-fact conditionals.

Other authors have also proposed distinctions between types of indicative conditionals that do not coincide with the one I am arguing for. Eve Sweetser, for example, makes a distinction between *content conditionals*, in which "the realization of the event or state of affairs described in the protasis is a sufficient condition for the realization of the event or state of affairs described in the apodosis" (Sweetser 1990: 114), and *epistemic conditionals*, in which "knowledge of the truth of the hypothetical premise expressed in the protasis would be a sufficient condition for concluding the truth of the proposition expressed in the apodosis" (Sweetser 1990: 116). Both may either be uncertain-fact conditionals or accepted-fact conditionals. Incidentally, it may be noted that an example such as (4) (*If he was here yesterday, he certainly helped her*) fits both of Sweetser's categories.[9]

7. Features and uses of accepted-fact conditionals

Accepted-fact conditionals are no doubt much rarer than those of the two other types. In chapters 1–8 (part 1) of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, I found only one accepted-fact conditional against 41 uncertain-fact and 11 counterfactual conditionals. In chapters 1–6 of *Portrait of a Lady*, by Henry James, I also found only one accepted-fact conditional against 17 uncertain-fact and 9 counterfactual conditionals. In Portuguese, a search in *Contos Fluminenses* by Machado de Assis revealed 6 accepted-fact conditionals against 31 uncertain-fact and 16 counterfactual conditionals. (Atypical conditionals as defined elsewhere (Gomes 2007) and discussed in section 10 were excluded from these counts. The search involved only conditionals with *if* in English or *se* in Portuguese.)

One might ask why people would use a conditional if they are certain about the antecedent. They may do so to draw a conclusion from a known fact or an accepted premise. Examples are Johnny's sister's sentences (27) and (28). Another example is the following (in a context in which the speaker had a life-threatening illness):

(37) *If I'm alive, (it's because) my doctors did a good job.*

Dudman (1986) quotes two other good examples of what I call accepted-fact conditionals:

(38) *If it had not been possible to stop, or even delay, the Japanese up country with the help of prepared defences and relatively fresh troops, it was improbable that they would be stopped now at the gates of the city* (J. G. Farrell 1978).

(39) *If they weren't my doing, and they weren't, then I couldn't control their appearance or disappearance* (Donald E. Westlake 1974).

In accepted-fact conditionals (as noted earlier), *if* (or *if . . . then*) may often be paraphrased with *since* or *given that* with little change in meaning, as for example in (38). This may lead one to question whether accepted-fact conditionals are in fact conditionals (see Bennett 2003: 5). I will argue that they are, for four reasons. First (most obviously), they share the same overall linguistic structure with other conditionals. They use the same conjunctions (*if; if . . . then*), the same pattern for building the compound sentence and the same or similar intonation and prosody in speech. They may have different verb forms, but counterfactuals also do and this does not prevent us from considering them as conditionals. From a grammatical point of view, there is no reason not to consider them as conditionals.

Second, they usually share many basic logical and cognitive properties with the other two types of conditionals. All three types are often used to make inferences. They may be used to draw a conclusion, based on regularity or on logical necessity, or to indicate this regularity or logical necessity itself. They may all be used to make a prediction, dependent on some condition. They may also be used to indicate the subject's intention to do something in the future, conditional on a certain circumstance.

Third, though in accepted-fact conditionals *since* can often be used to paraphrase *if*, this does not show that their subclause is merely a reason clause. This is shown by the fact that many *since*-clauses cannot be paraphrased with *if*-clauses. For example: *Since she was not there, I went away.* The subclause here is not meant as conditional and consequently we cannot say: **If she was not there, I went away.* Thus, the subclause in accepted-fact conditionals is not merely an adverbial clause *of reason (or cause)*, as might be thought from the possibility of paraphrasing *if* with *since*, but a real *conditional* adverbial clause.

Fourth, accepted-fact conditionals may in many cases supply an adequate contrapositive for counterfactual conditionals. For example:

(40) *If she were Italian, she would be European.*

(41) *If she isn't European, she isn't Italian.*

Within a context that gives reason to state (40), (41) is an accepted-fact conditional, since in fact we know that she is neither European nor

Italian. If we did not, we would not assert the counterfactual (40). Other examples:

(42) *If it had rained, the road would be wet.*
(43) *If (as is indeed the case) the road isn't wet, it hasn't rained.*
(44) *If she were very ill, she would be in bed.*
(45) *If (as is indeed the case) she is not in bed, she is not very ill.*

The phrase *as is indeed the case* was included in parentheses in (43) and (45) to make clear that these are intended as accepted-fact conditionals. It could be omitted in a suitable context. In many dialects of Portuguese, we would not need to include the corresponding phrase, since the verb form (present indicative) would already implicate that. (If we had been in doubt, we would have used the future subjunctive.)

Although quite rare, accepted-fact conditionals should be recognized and distinguished from other "indicative" conditionals. *They* are the conditionals that are really indicative, since they involve conditions that the speaker considers (or acts as if she considered) to be real. The others deal with uncertain conditions, and in some cases this is reflected in the use of a time shift in English (and other languages) and of the future subjunctive in Portuguese and classic Spanish.

8. Acceptance and as-if acceptance

In rare cases, a counterfactual is employed even though the speaker does not really accept the antecedent as false. Anderson (1951) gives the following example:

(46) *If he had taken arsenic, he would have shown just these symptoms [those which he in fact shows].*

Note, however, that this example could have been used as a usual counterfactual, in a situation where the speaker believes the antecedent to be false. Suppose that there is another medical condition that presents the same symptoms as arsenic poisoning and that the result of a special test has shown that the patient has that medical condition. The sentence would then be just a comment on the similarity of symptoms. Alternatively, the counterfactual could have been used to convey that the speaker finds it highly improbable that the man has taken arsenic, and that he is perplexed by the similarity between his symptoms and those of arsenic poisoning.

If the sentence is used in a situation where the speaker believes the antecedent to be true (the possibility that the example is intended to show), we should first ask why the speaker would have chosen to use it, instead

of saying something simpler as, for example: *He shows symptoms of arsenic poisoning.* It seems that the latter would be a clear suggestion that the man has taken arsenic, and that making such a direct suggestion is precisely what the speaker is trying to avoid in (46). Here is where an as-if acceptance of the falsity of the antecedent can be identified. The speaker acts as if she was making a default assumption that the man has not taken arsenic, but remarks that, had he done so, he would have shown just the symptoms he in fact shows. It is a euphemistic way of suggesting that he has indeed taken arsenic.

An uncertain-fact conditional could have been used to make the same point in a simpler (though not as euphemistic) way:

(47) *If one takes arsenic, one shows just these symptoms [which he shows].*

Edgington (1995: 240) gives another example:

(48) *People in line are picking up their bags and inching forward—and that's what they would be doing if a bus were coming.*

It would seemingly be more natural to say: *and that's what they usually do if a bus is coming*. The counterfactual here seems to be a more elaborate way of saying the same thing. It is as if the speaker were saying something like: "First let's assume that no bus is coming, since we cannot see one from here. Then let's imagine a situation that we'll treat as unreal in which a bus is coming. What would people do in this situation? They would pick up their bags and inch forward. Now, what are they doing now? They are picking up their bags and inching forward. So let's revise our initial assumption and conclude that a bus is probably coming." Again, the speaker seems to provisionally act as if she accepted that the situation described in the antecedent is unreal. It is a way of avoiding commitment to the hypothesis that a bus is coming.

As noted earlier, the falsity of the antecedent in counterfactuals is usually considered to be conversationally implicated rather than asserted (Anderson 1951; Stalnaker 1975; Iatridou 2000), since a subsequent sentence may assert it without redundancy or cancel it without contradiction. The same applies to the truth of the antecedent in accepted-fact conditionals, as shown in the following example by Sweetser (1990: 128):

(49) *Well, if (as you say) he had lasagne for lunch, he won't want spaghetti for dinner. But I don't believe he had lasagne for lunch.*

Declerck and Reed (2001: 45) have also shown that there are cases in which the antecedent is accepted only to be challenged by a question in the consequent.

It is thus clear that in special cases an accepted-fact conditional may be used even though the antecedent is not in fact accepted as true. In such cases, however, an as-if acceptance is always the reason for using this type of conditional. Suppose someone believes that the other person is lying and this is why he is nervous. She says:

(50) *If you are not lying, there is no reason to be nervous.*

This may be seen as an ironic (or cautious) equivalent of:

(51) *If you were not lying, there would be no reason to be nervous.*

Pretended belief or a provisional strategic acceptance of the antecedent is again the explanation. In (50) the speaker acts as if she accepted as a fact that he is not lying, when in fact she believes he is. The utterance seems to function as a *reductio ad absurdum.* If the addressee is not lying, there is no reason to be nervous and a person does not get nervous when there is no reason to be nervous. But the addressee *is* nervous, so it is not true that he is not lying. The feigned belief in the truth of the antecedent (achieved by giving it the form of an accepted-fact conditional) is precisely what makes the sentence ironic, since the speaker is suggesting something (the fact that the addressee *is* lying) which is the opposite of the natural implicature of the sentence (which could be accepted if in fact the addressee were not nervous).

The antecedents of some accepted-fact conditionals are said to be "echoic", since they repeat something that has previously been stated by the interlocutor. It has been noted (Sperber and Wilson 1986; Dancygier 1998) that in such cases the speaker does not necessarily share the belief in the assumption echoed. However, she certainly acts as if she shared that belief. She manifests at least a provisional acceptance—which may be ironic or not—of the content of the antecedent.

An uncertain-fact conditional may also be used instead of a counterfactual for irony. Instead of saying that since he is not Superman he will not be able to do it, one might say:

(52) *If he is Superman, he will be able to do it.*

In saying this, one acts as if one considered his being Superman as an uncertain fact, while in fact one believes it to be false.

9. Degree of acceptance or as-if acceptance of the antecedent as a basis for distinguishing the three types of conditionals

I will now argue that the speaker's degree of acceptance or as-if acceptance of the reality or probability of the condition described in the

antecedent is sufficient for explaining the difference between the three types of conditionals. Consider a situation in which three people saw a man kill John. X is uncertain whether this man was Oswald or not and says:

(53) *If Oswald wasn't the one who killed John, then someone else was.*

Y is sure that the man was *not* Oswald and says:

(54) *If Oswald wasn't the one who killed John (as in fact he wasn't), then someone else was.*

Z is sure that the man *was* Oswald and says:

(55) *If Oswald had not been the one who killed John, then someone else would have been the one who killed him.*

Though these three sentences sound unnatural, they are grammatical and make sense. They could certainly be replaced by simpler ones, but they were chosen on purpose to have a parallel formulation in the three cases and at the same time avoid different contextual assumptions that would be induced by a simpler wording (see Fogelin 1998).

The only difference between the three is the belief that the speaker has concerning the truth of the antecedent (and that of the consequent, as a result). Y believes it is true, Z believes it is false and X is uncertain about it.[10] If they did not have these respective beliefs, at least they would be implicating acceptance of, non-acceptance of and uncertainty about the truth of the antecedent, respectively.

We have a different situation in the following famous pair of examples (from Lewis 1973: 3, based on Adams 1970):

(56) *If Oswald didn't kill Kennedy, then someone else did.*
(57) *If Oswald hadn't killed Kennedy, then someone else would have.*

The person asserting (56) implicates that she is uncertain and the one asserting (57) implicates that she is certain about Oswald having killed Kennedy. As Fogelin (1998) has shown, however, in addition to the different degree of acceptance concerning the truth of the antecedent, each conditional involves different contextual assumptions. Thus, they are interpreted differently by the listener and they would be asserted by people wanting to communicate different thoughts. One believes that Kennedy was bound to be killed; the other is merely concerned with the identity of the killer.

Pairs of examples such as this (first suggested by Adams 1970), have been considered by Lewis (1973) and many others after him as evidence that the difference between indicative and subjunctive conditionals cannot

be explained by the speaker's opinion about or acceptance of the truth of the antecedent. However, I am in complete agreement with Fogelin (1998) in attributing any further difference to the contextual setting. He shows that the disparity in the reasons for believing each conditional simply disappears when the relevant contextual features are held constant. This is obtained by changing the wording of the sentences, as in (53) and (55).[11] (I have merely added (54) to complete the picture of the three types.)

Counterfactuals are thus used when the speaker accepts or speaks as if she somehow accepted that the antecedent is false or highly improbable; uncertain-fact conditionals are used when the speaker accepts or speaks as if she somehow accepted that the antecedent is uncertain; and accepted-fact conditionals are those used when the speaker accepts or speaks as if she somehow accepted that the antecedent is true or highly probable.

10. Atypical conditionals

I have distinguished three types of conditionals. This is not to say that every conditional should fall into one of these types. There are also some deviant ones, which I call atypical conditionals. (I have elsewhere proposed a definition and an explanation of atypical conditionals (Gomes 2007). For instance (from Edgington 1995: 240):

(58) *If he took arsenic, he's showing no signs.*

The person who says so probably believes the antecedent is false and could have said:

(59) *If he had taken arsenic, he would be showing signs of arsenic poisoning—but he isn't.*

At least she is uncertain about it and could have said:

(60) *If he took arsenic, signs of arsenic poisoning are expected—but he's showing no such signs.*

Example (59) includes a typical counterfactual and (60) a typical uncertain-fact conditional—and they also include a comment with *but* after these conditionals, to convey the meaning of the atypical (58).

11. Conclusion

An examination of conditionals in English and Portuguese has thus led us to distinguish three types of conditionals instead of the usual two

(indicative and subjunctive). The labels "indicative" and "subjunctive" were found inadequate, since subjunctive verb forms may be found in "indicative" conditionals (in the archaic use of the present subjunctive in English and of the future subjunctive in classical Spanish, and in the current use of the future subjunctive in Portuguese). Moreover, so-called indicative conditionals comprise two classes, the very frequent uncertain-fact conditionals and the quite rare accepted-fact conditionals.

Uncertain-fact conditionals may have a time shift in contemporary English and the future subjunctive in Portuguese (though not all of them do). Accepted-fact conditionals never have these features. Although accepted-fact conditionals are rare, I have argued that they are genuine conditionals, which have the theoretically important function of providing a contrapositive for many counterfactuals (when a contrapositive is valid). When the verb forms used do not permit the identification of an accepted-fact conditional, it may be recognized by the possibility of adding "(as is indeed the case)", "(as you say)" or "(as X says)" after *if*, or by the possibility of paraphrasing *if* with *since* or *given that*.

I have argued that the degree of real or as-if acceptance by the speaker of the truth of the proposition expressed by the antecedent is sufficient to explain the differential use of these three types (and that further differences are accidental and due to contextual features). The task of establishing common or different truth conditions for them may be considered as a subsequent one, which is outside the scope of this paper.

Received 14 May 2007
Revision received 15 December 2007

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Notes

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1. Interestingly, Gibbard (1980) considers conditionals in which there is a present/future time shift as "grammatically subjunctive".
2. The following abbreviations are used in the glosses: 1, 3—first, third person; SG—singular; FUT—future; SBJ—subjunctive; IND—indicative; IMP—imperative; PERF—perfect.
3. Although I have emphasized in section 2 that there is an archaic use of the present subjunctive in "indicative" conditionals in English (which questions the adequacy of this label), I am not claiming that this use is preferentially associated with a type of conditional, as the future subjunctive is in Portuguese.
4. Against the term "counterfactual", Bennett (2003: 12) remarks that it may be considered as "based on a feature that has nothing to do with the antecedent's being

contrary-to-fact, but only with the speaker's thinking that it is so". However, I do not think that this is really a problem. The label's reference to the speaker's opinion may easily be considered as implicit: a conditional will be called counterfactual when *the speaker accepts or speaks as if she accepted that* the antecedent is (or probably is) contrary-to-fact.

5. Following Auwera (1986), Comrie (1986) and Bhatt and Pancheva (2006), among others, one might call such conditionals *factual conditionals*. However, the term has already been used in relation to uncertain-fact conditionals that express habitual or general facts. Moreover, "accepted-fact" shows that the speaker may merely be treating the antecedent as true, without in fact committing herself to its truth.
6. Though they might also have É–É (present indicative–present indicative).
7. I am indebted to the Editor for this observation.
8. However, the use of the indicative seems to favour the accepted-fact interpretation. Using the future perfect subjunctive, this could be framed unambiguously as an uncertain-fact conditional:

   Se *ele* *tiver sido* *contratado,* *vamos* *primeiro* *ver* *o*
   If he be-1SG-FUT PERF SBJ hired, go-1PL-IMP first see the
   trabalho *dele* *para* *depois* *criticar.*
   work of him for after criticize.
   'If he was hired, let's first see his work and then criticize it.'

9. This accords with the following observation by Dancygier and Sweetser (2005: 17): "Since reasoning from cause to likely effect is just as possible as reasoning from effect to likely cause, epistemic conditionals can also follow the direction of content causal contingency."
10. In Portuguese, a different verb form could have been used in each: (56) *Se não tiver sido* ... (57) *Se não foi* ... (58) *Se não tivesse sido* ...
11. The context of (57) is fixed by changing the pair to: *If Oswald did not kill Kennedy, then someone else stepped in and did. If Oswald had not killed Kennedy, then someone else would have stepped in and killed him* (Fogelin 1998). The first sentence might have been used by a conspirator who was unsure whether Oswald had succeeded in killing Kennedy. That (56) might be used in a context similar to that of (57) had already been pointed out by Bennett (1995: 334–5). The same conspirator having the same beliefs concerning the presence of someone prepared to step in if Oswald failed might utter (56) before knowing that Oswald had succeeded and (57) after knowing that he had. By contrast, the context of (56) is fixed by using wordings similar to those of (53) and (55) (Fogelin 1998).

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