

Conditional clauses as adverbial clauses: external and internal syntax

The general approach to the syntax of conditional clauses is to assimilate them maximally to that of other adverbial clauses. In each part of the proposal, therefore, conditional clauses will be viewed as a subcase of adverbial clauses and arguments will be based on the overall patterns displayed by adverbial clauses

(1) The typology of conditional clauses

The presentation looks at the typology of conditional clauses as part of the wider typology of adverbial clauses. The presentation starts from the observation that (at least) three kinds of adverbial clauses seem to have to be distinguished, exemplified by the three *while* clauses in (i): in (ia), the *while* clause is a **temporal** modifier of the event (i.e. the announcement of the resignation) expressed in the host clause; in (ib) the **concessive** *while* clause provides **background assumption** for the **proposition** encoded in the host clause; in (ic), the *while* clause is a temporal modifier of **speech act** itself, providing a motivation for the utterance ‘her proposals are very innovative’.

- (i) a. While we were talking about Theresa May, the BBC announced her resignation.
- b. While the Prime Minister may be a conservative, her proposals are very innovative.
- c. While we are talking about Theresa May, her proposals are very innovative.

Many languages display the same sort of multivalent conjunctions (e.g. Dutch *terwijl*, French *tandis que*), so the phenomenon is of a comparative interest.

Conditional clauses too display the three readings illustrated in (i) as shown by the examples in (ii): (iia) encodes a condition on the **event** expressed in the matrix clause, (iib) illustrates a conditional **assertion** and echoes a background assumption which serves as the basis for the processing of the matrix proposition, (iic) expresses a **condition on the speech act**.

- (ii) a. If more cabinet ministers resign, the PM will have to go.
- b. If three more cabinet ministers are going to resign tomorrow, the PM might as well decide to leave now.
- c. If you’re interested, three more ministers have resigned.

The presentation will investigate the external syntax of these clauses focussing on the extent to which the three types of clauses can/must be given different syntactic representations in terms of the formal relation with the associated clause.

Evidence will be provided from English as well as from the Germanic languages, illustrated on the basis of Dutch and Flemish, with particular attention being paid on the behaviour of adverbial clauses in the Germanic ‘Verb Second’ pattern.

(2) The typology and interpretation of adverbial clauses and Verb Second transgressions

The typology of adverbial/conditional clauses in relation to the Verb Second pattern is pursued focussing on a set of unusual so called ‘Verb Third’ patterns which are considered unacceptable by speakers of standard Dutch but which have been reported as fully acceptable for speakers of the West Flemish dialect.

The relevant pattern is illustrated by the event conditional in (ii). While all varieties of Dutch have (iia), in which the conditional clause *als hij niet slaagt* (‘if he does not succeed’) is immediately followed by the finite verb *kan* (‘can’), only West Flemish speakers (hence %) accept (iib) in which the conditional clause is followed by the subject *Jan*, which is then followed by the finite verb. Such patterns as in (iib) are referred to in the literature as ‘V2 transgressions’ and have been the focus of much research.

- (ii) a. Als hij niet slaagt kan Jan herkansen.
 if he not succeeds kan Jan resit
 b. % Als hij niet slaagt, Jan kan herkansen.
 if he not succeeds, Jan can resit

The micro-variation displayed by (iib) will be explored from a comparative perspective. Data such as this show the importance of detailed study of language variation for a better understanding of the language faculty. The work is grounded on native speaker intuitions as well as on the philological and dialectology tradition that has long been the hall mark of the Dutch Department at Ghent University.

(3) The internal syntax of conditional clauses

In this presentation the focus is on the internal syntactic properties. In particular, it will be shown that event conditionals such as (iia) seem to have an impoverished internal structure as compared to conditional assertions (iib). For instance, in (iia) the event conditional is incompatible with argument fronting. This pattern is also found in temporal adverbial clauses (iib,c):

- (iii) a *If these exams you don't pass, you won't get the degree.
 b *While her book Mary was writing this time last year, her children were staying with her mother.
 c *When her regular column she began to write, I thought she would be OK.

Adjunct fronting remains available

- (iv) a If on Monday the share price is still at the current level then clearly their defence doesn't hold much water. (*Observer*, 11.7.4, business, p. 22 col 5)
 b If last week you had shown me the piece of pipe system that Laila and I built on Tuesday, I would never have believed it. *Guardian*, G2, 27.2.4 page 8, col 3
 c I used to listen to them dutifully in the car until one day the car was stolen and I thought: 'Well, I'm sorry to lose the car but there is one consolation...'
 (*Observer*, 27.3.5 page 1 review col 3)
 - d When last month she began to write a regular column for the Times (at a reported £ 250,000 a year), I thought, that's it – the parachute – she and Harry are bailing out and going home. (*Guardian*, G2, 21.1.2, page 8 col 5)

On the other hand, echoic conditional clauses/conditional assertions are compatible with fronting of arguments as shown in (iv). The same observation holds for contrastive *while* clauses.

- (iv) a % If MY papers they aren't even reviewing, HERS they accepted without discussion
- b If his face not many admired, his character still fewer felt they could praise.
- c If roses you don't like, why not plant anemones instead?
- d If some precautions they did indeed take, many other possible measures they neglected.

The differences between the two types of adverbial clauses will be presented and two syntactic analysis will be discussed. One which postulates an impoverished internal structure for the event conditionals which is a function of the absence of the encoding of assertion, the other which follows a long tradition that postulates that adverbial clauses are derived like relative clauses and according to which the effects noted in (iii) are due to a conflict between relativization and movement of a constituent.