

# Presupposition and Implicature in Chimerical Conditionals

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines *if p, q* constructions, which include indicative conditionals. It is widely assumed that the *if*-clause specifies the circumstances under which the consequent is true. For example, the sentence in (1) indicates that Mary's leaving has something to do with John's arrival. Such sentences are generally interpreted under the assumption that, in *Standard Conditionals* (SCs) such as (1), there is a dependent relationship between the two propositions that appears to imply a causal relationship between the two actions accomplished.

- (1) If John comes, Mary will leave.

However, several examples stand in contrast to this assumption. In the famous example in (2), which Austin (1956) calls *Biscuit Conditionals* (BCs), the *if*-clause specifies the circumstance under which the consequent is relevant but not the circumstance under which it is true.

- (2) There are biscuits on the sideboard if you want them.

As pointed out by Austin, BCs and SCs then differ in their inferential implications: BCs imply the truth of the consequent, whereas SCs do not. That is, (2) implies that there are biscuits on the sideboard, whereas (1) does not imply that John is arriving. The intuitive meaning of (2) is that the speaker implicitly authorizes the interlocutor to take biscuits. This is the independent-biscuits reading.

The interpretation of (2) presents a puzzle: if we faithfully follow the assumption about the indicative conditionals, we would expect (in a science fictional context) the sentence to have a dependent reading, such as, "There is a causal connection between her hunger and the presence of biscuits on the sideboard." Thus, given the right background assumption, any BC

can be read as dependent, and vice versa (Austin, 1956). It is difficult to discern whether conditionals and consequents are dependent on or independent from each other, which immediately raises the following two questions:

- (I) How is such an independent-biscuits reading obtained?  
(II) How does the ambiguity–chimericity come about?

In this article, I adopt Karttunen and Peters' (K & P's) (1979) approach to the treatment of presupposition projection and suggest that the ambiguous–chimeric interpretation can be calculated in the following way. In *if p, q* constructions, if *p* were the *ps* of *q*, then the projection would be saturated. This would limit the meaning of the constructions to a dependent reading. If the *ps* of *q* were not satisfied by *p*, the projection of *p + q* as *ps* would continue until the projection is saturated. This would produce the independent-biscuits reading. This also shows that the ambiguity is due to the semantic properties of antecedents. More specifically, I suggest that following the observation of Japanese conditionals in which the same type of ambiguity is observed, the semantic property of the antecedent *p* as an S-Topic<sup>1</sup> /contrastive topic is a good candidate for acting as the trigger of the independent interpretation.

## 2. PREVIOUS ANALYSIS

In this section, I will pursue questions (I) and (II) above by testing two prior assertions<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Büring (1997), the S-Topic is the entity/information that is mentioned in the preceding discourse or the one that can engage in a part-of relationship with a previously given entity/piece of information. The latter corresponds to a contrastive topic.

<sup>2</sup> For alternative analyses of BC, see Ebert, C. C.

## 2.1 FRANKE (2007)

Franke's position can be summarized as follows. The standard dynamic semantics of conditionals, which hold that, if  $c$  were a simple context set, updating with "if  $p$ ,  $q$ " would be given as in (3) would reveal a three-step procedure: (i) the original context  $c$  is updated with  $p$  to yield a hypothetical context  $c + p$ , (ii)  $q$  is evaluated in  $c + p$ , and (iii) the effects of the evaluation in (ii) are merged back into the original context. Therefore, "if  $p$ ,  $q$ " would be optimal in  $c$  only if it were optimal in  $c + p$  and not in  $c$ . An advantage of this approach is that it makes it easy to capture the pragmatic function of BCs that secures the optimality of the utterance. The cross-linguistic data support this line of analysis. In both cases, the literal meanings are dependent readings, but their pragmatic readings are independent readings.

- (3)  $c + \text{"if } p, q\text{"} = (c \cap p \cap q) \cup (c \cap \sim p)$   
 (4) There is beer in the fridge if you're thirsty.  
 (5) Si tu veux venir, tu as le droit. (If you want to come, you have the right.) (Ducrot, 1991)

However, one problem of this approach is that, when the relevant data have independent readings, it might be difficult to consider  $q$  to be the consequent.

## 2.2 FRANCEZ (2015)

Building on Franke's approach, Francez pursues the second question: what is the source of ambiguity–chimericity? Francez argues that the source of ambiguity is rooted in the ambiguous interpretation of the definite description in the consequent clause, which is associated with the familiarity of  $ps$ . The different ways in which context satisfies these  $ps$  give rise to different interpretations, such as viewing it as a rigid designator or as an individual concept. In the former interpretation, the consequent cannot be dependent on the antecedent; in the latter interpretation, the consequent can be dependent on the antecedent. Thus, when "the fridge" in (4) refers to a specific refrigerator, there is an independent relationship between the existence of beer and the thirst of the listener; however, when "the fridge" denotes the individual concept, there is a dependent relationship. However, this analysis can

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Ebert & S. Hinterwimmer (2014), van Rooij, R. (2007) and Siegel, M. (2006) among others.

be challenged in (5), which is the same as (4) except that the  $ps$  of "le droit" (the right) is satisfied by the antecedent. Therefore, the available interpretation of "le droit" (the right) should be "le droit de venir" (the right to come), regardless of whether (5) has a dependent or an independent reading. This is not predicted under Francez's approach.

## 3. PRESUPPOSITION, PROJECTION, AND BC

When "if  $p$ ,  $q$ " has an independent reading, it is difficult to treat  $q$  as the consequent. The discussions above led us to predicted interpretations (2) and (5) given in (6a, b). Note that this line of reasoning seems to be on the right track because these interpretations are associated with an implicature  $r$  as an implicit consequent. The relevant pragmatic meaning is given in (6c). The question is: Where does this reading come from?

- (6) a. Take biscuits if you want.  
 b. You may come if you want.  
 c.  $(p \cap q) \rightarrow r$  or  $(c \cap p \cap q) \rightarrow r$

At first glance, it looks as though these patterns are not easy to account for semantically/pragmatically, given that the antecedents and consequents together do not always bear the pre-condition to drive  $r$ . Nevertheless, this line of thought seems to be on the right track if some inferential pattern in (6) is taken into account, and we argue that the antecedent may initiate a sequence of utterances such as  $((c + p) + q)$  when construed as some kind of S(entential)-Topic/contrastive topic that attracts  $q$  as foci.

As for the first point, note that the inferential pattern in (6c) seems to be adequate because it is parallel to the one in (7), which is taken to be appropriate, as we will see below.

- (7)  $(p \rightarrow r) \cup (q \rightarrow r)$

The inferential pattern in (7) can be calculated in the following way:

- (8) a. If you are thirsty, you may drink beer.  $(p \rightarrow r)$   
 b. If there is beer in the fridge, you may drink it.  $(q \rightarrow r)$   
 c. You are thirsty or there is beer in the fridge.  $(p \cup q)$

d. Either way, you may drink it. (r)

This means that in either case, “You may drink beer.” One can easily see in this reasoning that the listener has inferential ground based on which she can draw from *r*. Therefore, given (6), the line of reasoning in (3), i.e., “*q* is evaluated in *c + p*” cannot be maintained. Rather, the readings in (6) seem to be triggered by a presupposition (*ps*) projection such as ((*c + p*) + *q*), which provides a pre-condition to derive *r*. This tight relationship between the semantic content and the *ps* heritage suggests that what matters is the projective behavior of a separate conjunct, “*if p, q*”, which proceeds incrementally as a sentence is pronounced or heard. Under this view, we can state that, given the effect of the *ps* heritage, the (in)dependent readings seem to derive from a *ps* projection rather than context sets that are updated. If the (in)dependent readings come from the different *ps* heritage properties, then it is possible to consider that the independent interpretation of BC comes from the *ps* heritage ((*c + p*) + *q*), whereas the dependent interpretation of SC comes from the *ps* heritage (*c + p*).

As for the second point, the difference between BC and SC can be further confirmed by the type of the antecedents (and the consequents), with antecedents in BC construed as a kind of S-Topic/contrastive topic in the sense of Büring (1997) (and consequents in BC construed as foci). While languages often do not make a morphological distinction between BC and SC (e.g., in English, *if* appears in both BC and SC), antecedent clause head markers in Japanese BC are distinguishable from those in SC by their forms (e.g., *-nara* (and sometimes *-tara*) can follow BC, whereas *-ba* and *-to* cannot; they are limited to SC (*Modern Japanese Grammar*(2008)). This tight relationship between clause marker and the type of conditionals enables us to discern the difference between BC and SC accurately.

#### 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article, it has been shown that the ambiguous-chimeric interpretation can be calculated in the following way. In *if p, q* constructions, if *p* were the *ps* of *q*, then the projection would be saturated. This would limit the meaning of the constructions to a dependent reading. If the *ps* of *q* were not satisfied by *p*, the projection of *p + q* as *ps* would continue until the projection is saturated. This would produce the

independent-biscuits reading.

Based on the observation of Japanese conditionals, I have also shown that the difference between BC and SC can be further confirmed by the semantic property of antecedents: BC includes information provided in the context prior to the utterance, whereas SC includes information supposed. Furthermore, this semantic property of antecedent is taken to be the trigger of *ps* projection and closely related to the ambiguous interpretation.

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