

# Metonymy and Pragmatic Inferencing

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John Benjamins Publishing Company  
Amsterdam/Philadelphia



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#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Metonymy and pragmatic inferencing / edited by Klaus-Uwe Panther, Linda L. Thornburg.

p. cm. (Pragmatics & Beyond, New Series, ISSN 0922-842X ; v. 113)

Revisions of papers presented in the workshop Metonymy and Pragmatic Inferencing organized for the 7th International Pragmatics Conference held in Budapest, Hungary, July 7-14, 2000.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

1. Metonyms--Congresses. 2. Pragmatics--Congresses. 3. Inference--Congresses. 4. Speech acts (Linguistics)--Congresses. 5. Linguistic change--Congresses. I. Panther, Klaus-Uwe, 1942- II. Thornburg, Linda L. III. International Pragmatics Conference (7th: 2000: Budapest, Hungary) IV. Series

P301.5. M49M488 2003

306.44-dc21

2003050290

ISBN 90 272 5355 2 (Eur.) / 1 58811 400 7 (US) (Hb; alk. paper)

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John Benjamins North America · P.O. Box 27519 · Philadelphia PA 19118-0519 · USA

# Metonymies as natural inference and activation schemas

## The case of dependent clauses as independent speech acts

Klaus-Uwe Panther and Linda L. Thornburg

For Juliane House on the occasion of her 60th birthday

### 1. Introduction

The syntactic correlates of speech acts are typically independent sentences such as *I will submit this article on time* (promise) or *Give me more time to finish this article* (request). Many speech acts are however realized as non-sentential constituents such as *Happy birthday!* (nominal expression) or *Sorry!* (adjective) that deviate from the sentential prototype. An especially interesting class of speech acts is exemplified by the expressions in (1)–(10) below – with data from English, German and French – that look like *dependent clauses* introduced by a syntactically subordinating conjunction. Moreover, in German, such expressions exhibit dependent clause, i.e. verb-final, word order, as seen in (7)–(9). Interestingly, these apparent dependent clauses can however “stand alone” and function as independent speech acts.

#### *English*

- (1) **If** you will come to order. [request]
- (2) Why, **if** it isn't Susan! (Quirk et al. 1985:842) [expression of surprise]
- (3) **If** you would like a cookie. [offer]
- (4) **That** you should say such a thing! [expression of indignation]
- (5) **That** you dare to show your face here! [reproachful indignation]
- (6) **For** you to even think that! [indignation]

*German*

- (7) **Wenn** Sie jetzt bitte zahlen wollen. [request]  
'If you will please pay the bill now.'
- (8) **Daß** (mir) niemand den Saal verläßt! [prohibition]  
'Nobody should leave this room!'
- (9) **Ob** er wohl kommen wird? [question]  
'I wonder whether he will come.'

*French*

- (10) **Que** personne ne sorte. (Grevisse 1993:624) [prohibition]  
'Nobody should leave.'

The expressions in (1)–(10) raise an intriguing question: How is it that the more or less conventional pragmatic forces with which they are associated result from what they literally convey (see also Okamoto, this volume, for a similar problem in Japanese)? In presenting our approach to answering this question we will focus on but one exemplar type in English – “independent” clauses beginning with *if*, like those in (1)–(3).

## 2. A cognitive approach to independent *if*-clauses

Our approach to independent *if*-clauses is “cognitive” in that it is based on conceptual, semantic, and functional principles. Our goal is to provide an explicit description of these clause types, to show that their pragmatic functions follow naturally from what is literally expressed, and that in many cases they constitute independent grammatical “constructions” in the sense of Goldberg (1995). We contend that the uses of these *if*-clauses are not arbitrary but that their particular pragmatic forces are *motivated*. We incorporate into our analysis an approach to speech acts as *scenarios* having metonymic structure, which we have developed in prior work (Thornburg & Panther 1997; Panther & Thornburg 1998; see also Stefanowitsch, this volume). We also make use of the theory of *mental spaces* (Fauconnier 1985; Fauconnier & Sweetser 1999:Ch. 1; also see Coulson & Oakley, this volume), a framework whose goal is to connect cognitive structure with linguistic structure.

## 2.1 The conceptual space of the independent *if*-clause

We begin with our characterization of the conceptual space of the independent *if*-clause. In the mental spaces framework, the conjunction *if* is what is called a *space builder* – that is, *if* is an overt means by which a speaker induces a hearer to set up a new mental space defined as a cognitive domain of structured information and inferences. Our characterization of this space is given in (11).

### (11) The Conceptual Space of the *if*-clause

WHAT IS EXPLICITLY EXPRESSED:

- a hypothetical/possible situation or state of affairs, *p*

WHAT IS IMPLICATED/METONYMICALLY ACTIVATED:

- some consequence, *q*, that, in a given context, may follow from *p*;
- an assessment of the truth of *p*, and by extension, *q*, e.g., true > possible/nonactual > doubtful > false;
- an evaluation of *p*, and by extension, *q*, e.g., good/desirable > neutral > bad/undesirable;
- an emotional attitude towards *p*, and by extension, *q*, e.g., surprise, awe, wonderment, gratitude, indignation, bitterness, indifference.

What an independent *if*-clause explicitly expresses is merely a hypothetical or possible situation or state of affairs, which we refer to as *p*. However, we claim that the conjunction *if* – as a space builder – allows the hearer to access additional conceptual material that is metonymically or inferentially linked to *p*: e.g., some consequence, *q*, that may follow from *p*; the speaker's assessment of the truth of *p* as well as an evaluation of *p*; and lastly, an emotional attitude towards *p* that the speaker may have.<sup>1</sup>

Since *if*-clauses create a mental space that is distinct from *reality space*, the distance between the two conceptual spaces can be exploited for various pragmatic purposes. We propose, for example, that by locating the imposition of a request within the hypothetical space of an *if*-clause – instead of in reality space – a speaker can minimize potential face-threat. Because of this distancing capability, *if*-clauses can serve the purpose of negative politeness in directive speech acts (cf. Brown & Levinson 1987).

## 2.2 A scenario approach to speech acts

In prior research (Thornburg & Panther 1997; Panther & Thornburg 1998) we have defined speech acts and their felicity conditions in terms of scenarios –

that is, as complexes of conceptually contiguous elements that bear metonymic relations to each other and to the scenario as a whole.<sup>2</sup> In Figure 1 we give a simplified representation of one such scenario – the Request Scenario.

In Figure 1 the *BEFORE* component states preconditions and motivations for performing a request. These subcomponents of the *BEFORE* component are aligned respectively along the Background and Motivation branches of the scenario. The *CORE* and its immediate *RESULT* define the essential features of the request and the immediate pragmatic outcome of a felicitous performance of a request, respectively. The *AFTER* component describes the intended consequences of a request that lead to the realization of the propositional content of the request. The *AFTER* may or may not be followed by other *CONSEQUENCES*, e.g., the realization of a request may evoke some feeling in the speaker such as gratitude, relief, etc. These subcomponents are aligned along the Realization branch of the scenario. Thus, all subcomponents of the Request Scenario are linked to the *CORE* and to each other along and across the three branches. We propose that the activation of one (sub)component in a scenario offers the potential of activating – automatically or inferentially – other or even all components of the scenario. In what follows we apply the Request Scenario to the analysis of a portion of our data; other scenarios will be presented in later sections of the paper.

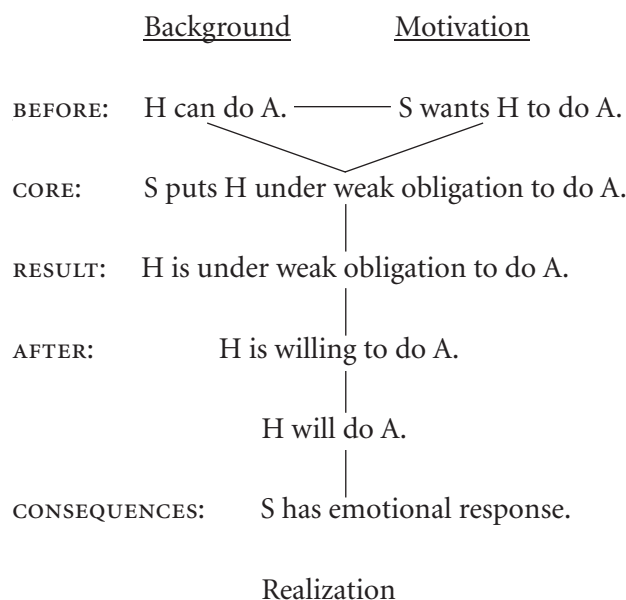


Figure 1. The *Request* Scenario

### 3. Analysis of data<sup>3</sup>

For each of the examples in the data set, we analyzed the pragmatic force with respect to (i) the content of the proposition in the *if*-clause in terms of its mental space structure, (ii) potential metonymic links to various speech act scenarios, and (iii) the degree of conventionalization, i.e. whether or not the pragmatic force of the *if*-clause is cancelable. To illustrate, consider example (1). *If you will come to order* is conventionally understood as a request to come to order.<sup>4</sup> To account for that fact, we begin with an analysis of the hypothetical space triggered by *if* along the lines we have proposed in (11). First, we note that the proposition within the clause, given in (1a):

Hypothetical space for *If you will come to order*

(1) a. Proposition p: you will come to order

explicitly refers to the addressees' action in terms of *future* time frame and *willingness* to undertake the action.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, we assume that there is a strong metonymic link between the hearers' willingness to perform the action and the *ability* to do so. Thirdly, because the hypothetical *if* space allows for potential consequent propositions in some context, in the context of a noisy classroom, say, in which a teacher utters *If you will come to order*, it is possible to infer the consequent given in (1b):

(1) b. Inferable q: ... then I will begin the lecture.

The potential consequent proposition q in (1b) refers to the speaker's imminent undertaking of an action. Fourthly, we can also infer then that the speaker *evaluates* the hypothetical proposition in the *if*-clause as desirable (and therefore also q as desirable) and that the satisfaction of that desire will lead to the speaker's consequent action.

Our analysis of the content of the hypothetical space of the *if*-clause – that is, its knowledge, inferential and activation structure – yields several elements that can be linked to the components of the Request Scenario as represented in Figure 2: *If you will come to order* contains *explicit references* to the hearers' willingness and to a future action as well as derivable *implicit references* to the hearers' ability to undertake the action and to the speaker's desire for the action. All of these explicit and implicit elements in the *if*-space correspond to subcomponents of the Realization, Background and Motivation branches of the Request Scenario, and together activate the remainder of the scenario – namely, the CORE and the immediate RESULT represented in the shaded box.

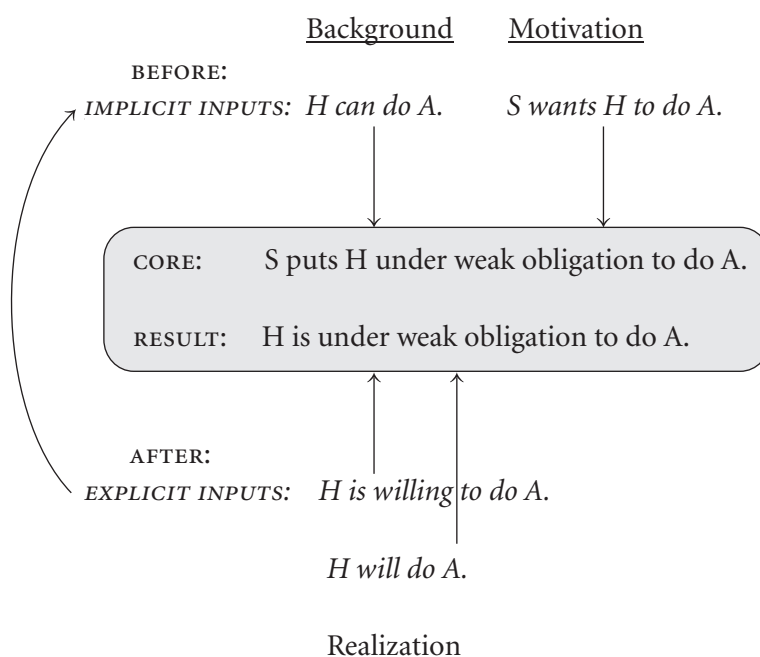


Figure 2. Inputs to the *Request* Scenario (utterance (1))

Having accounted for the request interpretation of *If you will come to order*, we further note that this reading is difficult – if not impossible – to cancel, as tested in (1c), which yields a pragmatic contradiction:

- (1) c. Cancelability: #If you will come to order ... but I'm not asking you to do that.

Lastly, we note that the independent *if*-clause is a good candidate to be conventionalized for the expression of *polite* requests because it creates its own mental space distinct from, and therefore “distant” from, reality space. The POLITENESS IS DISTANCE metaphor predicts that a request originating in hypothetical space would be more polite than a corresponding request in reality space. Indeed, *If you will come to order* is more polite than *You will come to order*.

At this point we would like to note that example (1) illustrates the use of an independent *if*-clause for a deontic communicative function. This turns out to be but one major function. The results of our pilot study indicate that independent *if*-clauses can also be used for expressive and for epistemic purposes (see Okamoto, this volume, for a discussion of similar pragmatic functions associated with reanalyzed [S *koto*] constructions in Japanese). We consider each in turn.



### 3.1 Deontic function

In this section of the chapter we present additional *if*-clause data that have predominantly deontic pragmatic force. That is to say, what the *if*-clause implicates requires that the world should change in such a way so as to match what is metonymically evoked. As Searle (1983:7 *et passim*), among others, has put it, the “direction of fit” in these cases is from the world to words, the so-called “so be it” use of language. In using *if*-clauses to issue directives or commissives or to express wishes, a speaker uses language to talk about the way the world will or should change to fit some propositional content.

#### 3.1.1 Directives

We present here additional examples of *if*-clauses with directive illocutionary force:

- (12) “This is awful,” Julia exclaimed in consternation. “Do please tell her to stop crying, Don Felipe. I can’t bear it. **If you could explain it isn’t that I really want to go home.** I just have to.” [LOB.P1]

For the *if*-clause in (12) our intuition is that the speaker is making a request of the addressee.<sup>6</sup> At issue is how we derive the pragmatic request force from what looks like a truncated conditional sentence. Using the methodology outlined and demonstrated above, we first note that the mental space triggered by *if* contains the hypothetical proposition:

- (12) a. Proposition p: you could explain it isn’t that I really want to go home

Embedded within the *if* space is another hypothetical space that is evoked by the modal *could*. This second hypothetical space contains the proposition that the addressee *is able* to perform an action of explaining.

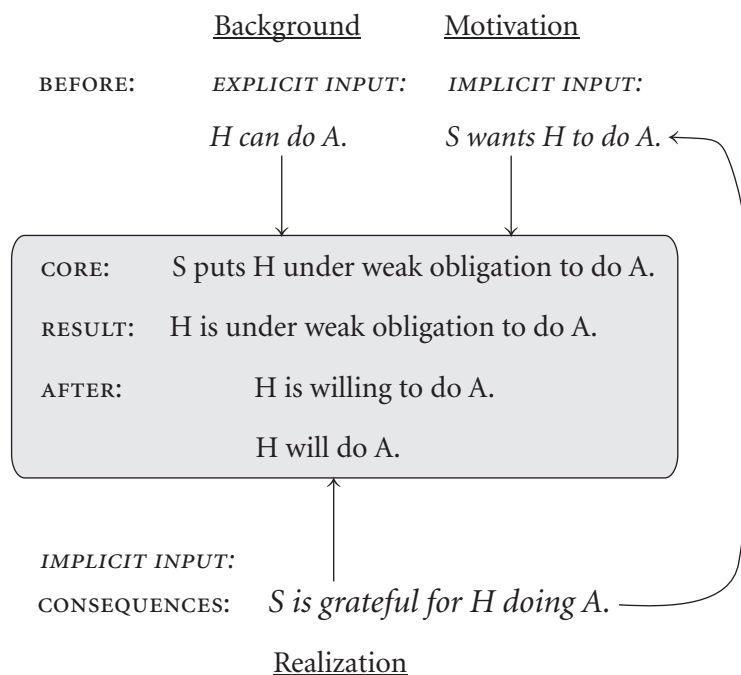
Secondly, given the context, a potential consequent proposition q in this doubly hypothetical space that very likely follows from the *if*-clause is:

- (12) b. Inferable q: ... then I would be so grateful to you.

This potential consequent proposition q (an expression of the speaker’s contingent gratitude) in (12 b) strongly implicates that the speaker desires that the addressee do some explaining. It follows then that the speaker evaluates the hypothetical action contained in p – explaining – as being *desirable*.

Thus the *if*-clause in (12) has three elements in the doubly hypothetical space that can be inputs to the Request Scenario in Figure 3: one explicitly refers

to the ability of the hearer to perform the action and the other two implicitly evoke the speaker's anticipatory gratitude for and desirability of the action. As subcomponents of the Request Scenario, they activate the remainder of the scenario, as represented in the shaded box:



**Figure 3.** Inputs to the *Request* Scenario (utterance (12))

The request reading of (12) is fully conventionalized and uncancellable without pragmatic infelicity, as shown in (12c):

- (12) c. Cancellability: #If you could explain it isn't that I really want to go home ... but I'm not asking you to explain ...

In example (13) we find a different type of directive. Here the speaker appears to *suggest* to the addressee that the two of them go up to the addressee's room.

- (13) "I have made a discovery, sir. It may be of no account, but I think that you will find it – interesting. **If we could go up to your room, sir...**" Nick wondered if he was about to be touched by a blackmailer, but the young man sounded genuine enough. [LOB.P1]

In the conceptual space created by *if*, the proposition, given in (13a):

- (13) a. Proposition p: we could go up to your room

expresses, in an additional hypothetical space created by the form *could*, the ability of both the speaker and the addressee to perform the action mentioned. Furthermore, a potential consequent proposition *q* likely to follow from *p* in this context is:

- (13) b. Inferable *q*: ... then I will reveal to you my interesting discovery.

The potential consequent proposition in (13b) strongly implicates a benefit to the hearer – that is, the speaker evaluates the action in *p* as good for the hearer. As with example (12), the doubly hypothetical space of the *if*-clause in (13) has two elements that can be inputs to a speech act scenario, which we represent in Figure 4: one that explicitly refers to the *ability* of the hearer to perform the action and another that implicitly evokes a *benefit to the hearer* in undertaking the action. Thus, in example (13) the activated speech act scenario is that of a suggestion, whose face-threat is minimized by the metaphorical distance of the *if*-clause:

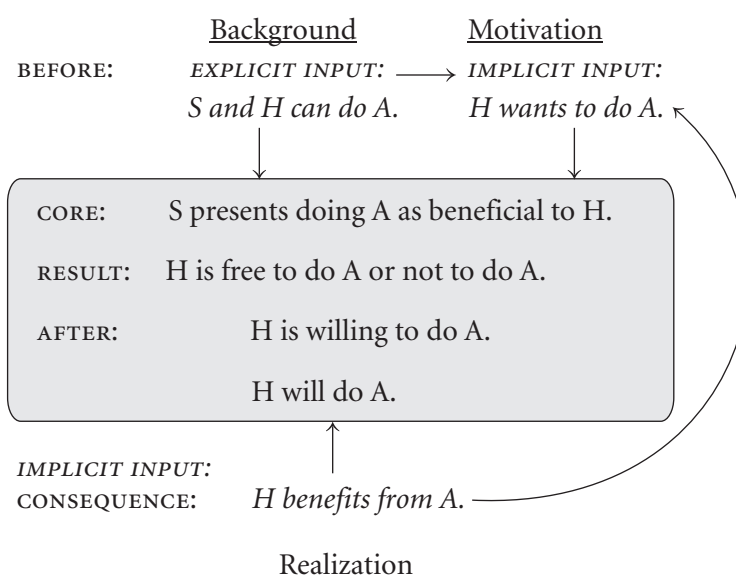


Figure 4. Inputs to the *Suggestion* Scenario

In the context of (13), the suggestive force is uncancellable:

- (13) c. Cancellability: #If we could go up to your room, sir ... but I'm not suggesting that we do.

### 3.1.2 Offers

Our LOB data yielded no examples of *if*-clauses with the force of an *offer* comparable to our constructed example in (3). Yet this example strikes us as plausible and we include it in our analysis, reproduced here as (14):

(14) If you would like a cookie.

In the conceptual space of the *if*-clause, possible inferable consequences of (14) are:

- (14) a. ... then I can give you one.  
b. ... then I will give you one.

In (14a) the proposition *I can give you one* is interpretable as being a subcomponent of the Background branch in the Offer Scenario (at the same time a BEFORE subcomponent), whereas the proposition *I will give you one* in (14b) is interpretable as being a subcomponent of the Realization branch in the Offer Scenario (simultaneously an AFTER component). Also in the conceptual space of the *if*-clause is the possibility of elaborating the proposition *you would like a cookie* into the proposition p':

- (14) c. Proposition p': you would like me (speaker) to give you a cookie

This expanded proposition p' contains as a sub-proposition A, the speaker's action of giving the hearer a cookie. Quite naturally, this action is interpretable as being both desirable to the hearer and within the speaker's capability. Thus, several propositions inferable within the hypothetical space of the *if*-clause give access to the Offer Scenario, as presented in Figure 5:

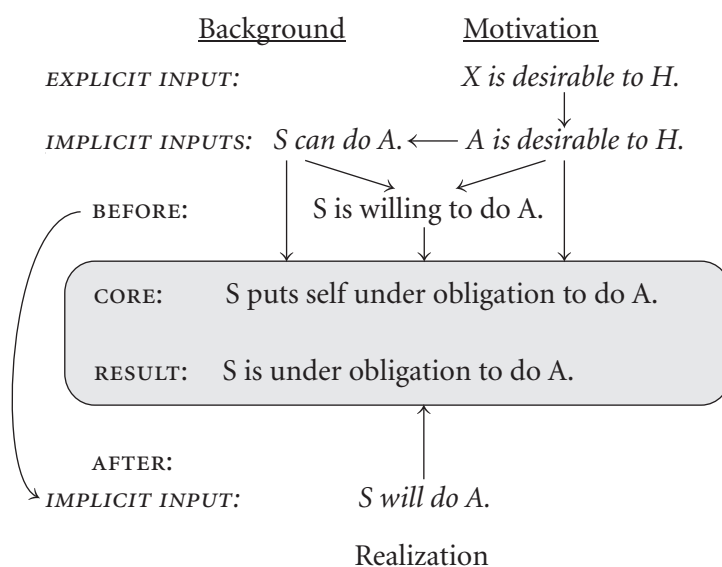


Figure 5. Inputs to the Offer Scenario

Cancelability of the offer interpretation of (14) seems impossible:

- (14) d. Cancelability: #If you would like a cookie ... but I'm not offering you one.

### 3.1.3 Wishes

We turn now to examples of *if*-clauses that have the force of a wish expression.

- (15) 'That girl's nothing but a load of trouble, I'm warning you.' 'Kitty's all right,' Bone contradicted flatly. 'It's her boy-friend that's the trouble. **If we could get rid of him...**' Harry nodded his grizzled head like an old hound. [LOB.L1]
- (16) "But meanwhile, I must find her. **If only I had a clue where to look for her.**" "Has it occurred to you that when you told her about us it was such a shock to her that she has run away." [LOB.P1]

We think both these examples have the force of a wish expression.<sup>7</sup> However, the wish interpretation is weaker in (15) and cancelable; in contrast, *if only* in (16) makes the wish interpretation conventional and thereby uncancelable.

In (15) the hypothetical proposition:

- (15) a. Proposition p: we could get rid of him

explicitly denotes the possibility for the interlocutors to carry out an action in future time, an action that is doubly hypothetical by virtue of both *if* and *could*. This gives rise to the inference that the action has not yet occurred.

Given the context in (15), an inferable consequence might be:

- (15) b. Inferable q: ...then our troubles would be over.

– a satisfactory outcome from which it is possible to infer that the speaker evaluates the sub-proposition p'

- (15) c. Sub-proposition p': we get rid of him

as desirable. In the hypothetical space of (15), then, we can identify four components that are inputs to the Wish Expression Scenario depicted in Figure 6: (i) the explicit reference to the *possibility* to undertake an action *to get rid of him*; (ii) the inference that the action has not occurred; (iii) implicit reference to the *desirability* of the action; and (iv) implicit reference to resulting feelings of *satisfaction*.

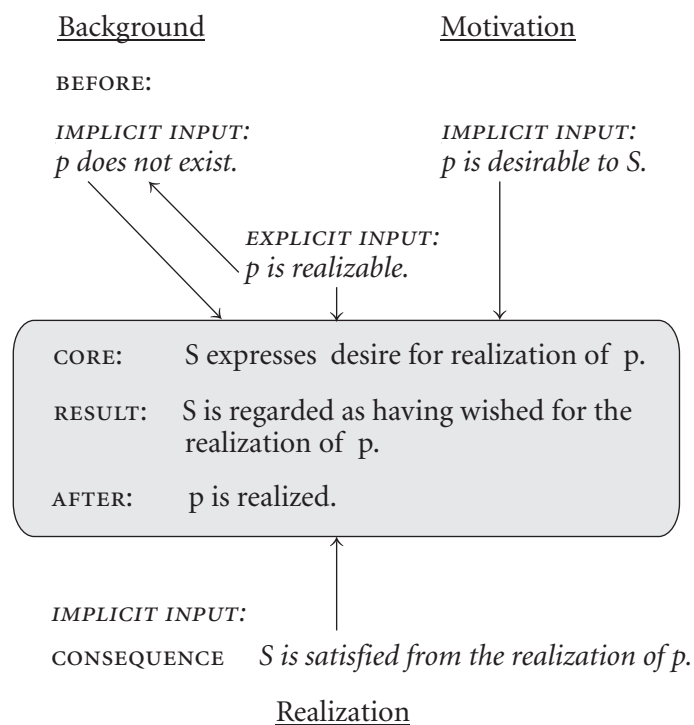


Figure 6. Inputs to *Expression-of-Wish* Scenario: (*p* = some state of affairs)

As mentioned earlier, the *wish* force of (15) seems cancelable; in other words, the wish sense is not part of the conventional meaning of the *if*-clause:

- (15) d. Cancelability: If we could get rid of him but I'm not saying I *wish* we could get rid of him – I'm just entertaining the thought.

The cancelability of (15) contrasts with examples like (16) containing *if only*. The proposition in this example presented in (16a):

- (16) a. Proposition *p*: I had a clue where to look for her

is counter-factual at the time of speaking. The focus particle *only* singles out one proposition to the exclusion of others – it highlights the importance or relevance of that proposition for the speaker; *only*, then, triggers an implicature of emotional involvement and high desirability with respect to the proposition. The *wish* interpretation is not cancelable in this case, as seen in (16b):

- (16) b. Cancelability: #If only I had a clue where to look for her, but I don't wish I had a clue where to look for her.

We also note that in (16) the proposition is non-factual but also potentially fulfillable. This contrasts with examples (17) and (18) in which the propositions refer to non-occurrent past events that have no possibility of future realization.

- (17) Tom, she thought. **If only I could have asked Tom's advice.** But now it's too late for that. [LOB.L1]
- (18) Watching him go, unable to speak, she felt that part of her was leaving with him. She couldn't hate him... **If only he would have confided in her, given some explanation.** Now there was nothing – not even friendship. [LOB.P1]

The Wish Scenario for (17) and (18) – in contrast to that given in Figure 6 – would contain a background assumption: Some state-of-affairs is impossible. Furthermore, the unfulfillability of such wishes implicates the absence of emotional satisfaction. The emotions that are likely to be associated with unfulfillable wishes are strongly negative, such as regret, bitterness, anger and so on – which likely characterize examples (17) and (18).

We now briefly summarize Section 3.1. We discussed *if*-clauses whose predominant function is deontic – serving to metonymically convey requests, suggestions, offers, and wishes. We saw that the conceptual distance created by the space builder *if* is exploited in the cases of other-directed speech acts like directives and commissives to minimize negative face-threat. We also saw that the metonymically evoked pragmatic forces of these clauses tend to be uncancellable suggesting that they are highly conventionalized; i.e., the scenarios associated with them are automatically activated. In such cases the *if*-clause can be said to have achieved the status of a construction.

### 3.2 Expressive function

As we saw with unfulfillable wishes like (17) and (18), it is difficult to know if the speech act was predominantly deontic – the expression of a wish – or primarily an expression of emotion. In what follows we will focus on *if*-clauses whose *primary* function seems to be the expression of a strong emotional attitude with regard to some state of affairs.

#### 3.2.1 *Negative p*

We begin with example (2) from Quirk et al. (1985), reproduced here as (19a). We also provide some examples from the OED given in (19b–f). All of them contain exclamation marks and/or other devices indicating that the *if*-clauses are uttered with attendant emotions.

- (19) a. Why **if it isn't Susan!** (Quirk et al. 1985:842)  
       b. **If he is not equipped for a housebreaker!** [1702 Vanbrugh False Friend iii. ii]

- c. And, so help me never! if his nibs didn't go and dossed with her the same night. [1846 Swell's Night Guide 49]
- d. 'If it ain't Frisco Red!' exclaimed one prone figure. [1914 Sat. Even. Post 4 Apr. 10/1]
- e. 'Oh, Gee, well, ain't that the limit?.. 'If you aren't the grouch.' [1925 T. Dreiser Amer. Trag. I. xvii. 145]
- f. Well, by jing, if it ain't Tom. [Ibid. II. iii. 184]

We first note that this type of *if*-clause has the highest degree of syntactic and pragmatic independence. That is, they don't have plausible implicit consequent propositions, except perhaps for absurdities like that in (19f'):

- (19) f'. Inferable q: 'Well, by jing, if it ain't Tom, then I'll eat my hat!

Secondly, we note that all the propositions in (19a–f) assert at the moment of speaking a non-factual state of affairs, for example *it ain't Tom*, when in fact it is precisely Tom. In other words, what the speaker does not do is simply assert what is empirically true in reality space, which for (19f') might be:

- (19) f". Well, by jing, it is Tom!

Why might a speaker choose an *if*-clause containing a non-factual proposition for the purpose of exclaiming what is empirically true rather than a "simple" declarative sentence? Our analysis – represented schematically in Figure 7 – is the following: In speaking within hypothetical space – which the *if*-clause makes possible – the speaker places those propositions that correspond to his/her expectations of what constitutes a normal course of events. In hypothetical space, someone that you do not expect to see is not present; thus, *it ain't Tom* would be a true proposition in the hypothetical space of the speaker in (19f) prior to seeing Tom. In encountering Tom, the speaker expresses the proposition in his hypothetical space – i.e. his world of ordinary expectations – that Tom is not present. Tom's unexpected appearance in reality space is the very contradictory of the *it ain't Tom* proposition in hypothetical space. The clash between expectation and reality surprises the speaker, an emotion that is expressed in the uttering of the hypothetical proposition, which is now no longer true.<sup>8</sup>

It seems that the expression of an emotional attitude such as surprise or amazement cannot be canceled in these cases involving contradictions between *if* space and reality space.



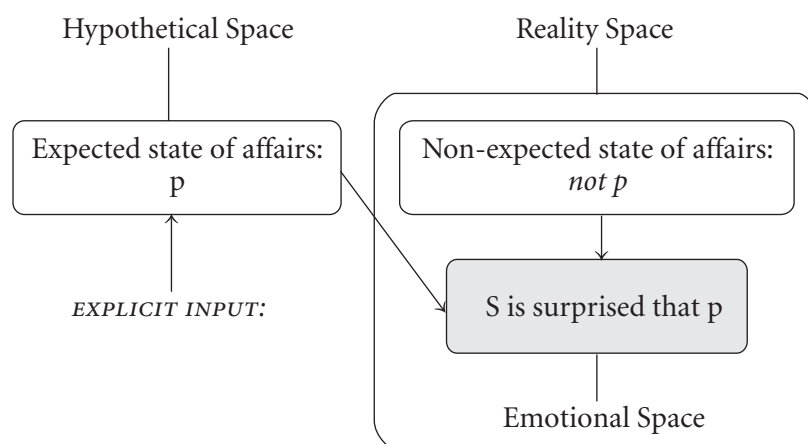


Figure 7. Input to the *Exclamatory if not p* Scenario:

A slightly different case is (19e), which seems rather to express irony. In (19e) we find that what is posited as expected in the speaker's hypothetical space is the norm:

- (19) e. posited norm: *you aren't the grouch*

By using an *if*-clause in this case the speaker can achieve multiple effects: avoid directness, metonymically implicate the contradictory in reality space, namely, *you are the grouch* (implicating "it is so"), convey a normative evaluation – one shouldn't be a grouch – and express a negative emotion such as dissatisfaction.

### 3.2.2 Positive *p*

Unlike the examples discussed thus far in Section 3.2, example (20) does not contain a negative proposition in the *if*-clause:

- (20) 'You must think I like the military sticking its nose in.' I said bitterly: 'We spend our lives running things the quiet way. Then the army arrives – a blow, a false word – bang – suddenly there are shots. All right. **If that's the way they want it.** But don't ask me to clean up the mess.' [LOB.K1]

Here the speaker uses the hypothetical space of an *if*-clause to convey the positive proposition:

- (20) a. Proposition *p*: that's the way they want it

This implicit assertion has a words-to-world direction of fit – it describes a state of affairs. But it also functions to metonymically evoke the speaker's disagreement with the proposition, namely, that that's not the way the speaker

wants it.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, an inferable consequent proposition that easily follows from (20a) is:

- (20) b. Inferable q: ... then they can have it.

which expresses a grudging concession to the way they want it and provides additional grounds that the speaker evaluates the proposition as undesirable, out of his control and most likely irreversible, and – like unfulfillable wishes – gives rise to negative feelings like bitterness and regret. This dissatisfaction with the state of affairs does not seem to be cancelable, as shown in (20c):

- (20) c. Cancelability: #If that's the way they want it, fine, it's also my profoundest wish.

The examples in (19) and (20) have been presented with the claim that their primary function is the expression of an emotional attitude with regard to a state of affairs – i.e. some “it is so” description. In the cases in (19), the *if*-clause provides a mental space for conveying an expected state of affairs that is contradicted in reality space. Because of the discrepancy between what is hypothetically denied but empirically true, the construction is a potential vehicle for the expression of attitudes like surprise or amazement, a use which is conventional. In contrast, in cases like (20), the construction is used to conventionally signal disapproval of what is conceded in hypothetical space, an emotional attitude that results from the speaker's opposition to what he/she concedes.

### 3.3 Epistemic function

#### 3.3.1 *Reasoning from premises*

In this last part of our data analysis we show how a speaker may use an *if*-clause for predominantly epistemic, i.e. reasoning, purposes. In these cases the direction of fit is from “words-to-world” – using language to convey the sense of “it is so.” In the first set of examples below the main function of the *if*-clause is to introduce a premise on the basis of which non-expressed conclusions can be drawn. Consider (21) and (22):

- (21) So it had been chance that saved the organisation. **If Rickie Oppenheimer hadn't picked up the wrong valise...** But Rickie shouldn't have been carrying a brief-case that morning. Every other time he'd left it in the office at the Blue Bottle Club. Monday night he'd broken a long-standing habit. [LOB.L1]

- (22) Judging from the spot where it lay it had been planted between the underside of the mattress and one of the cross-supports. **If I hadn't re-made the bed... if Sonia and I hadn't made love...** Sonia. Nothing else accounted for the presence of that hellish box. I'd left her alone in the bedroom when we awoke from the brief sleep of exhaustion. [LOB.L1]

We note first that the *if*-clauses in (21) and (22) – unlike those in (19) – have a *low* degree of pragmatic independence; rather, they give the impression of being highly elliptical *if*-clauses. Secondly, they are classical cases of counterfactuals. In uttering a counterfactual premise in hypothetical space – as represented in Figure 8 – the speaker pragmatically activates the shared background knowledge in reality space that the proposition is false and at the same time invites the hearer to consider the counterfactual proposition as a premise from which to reason to unstated consequences.

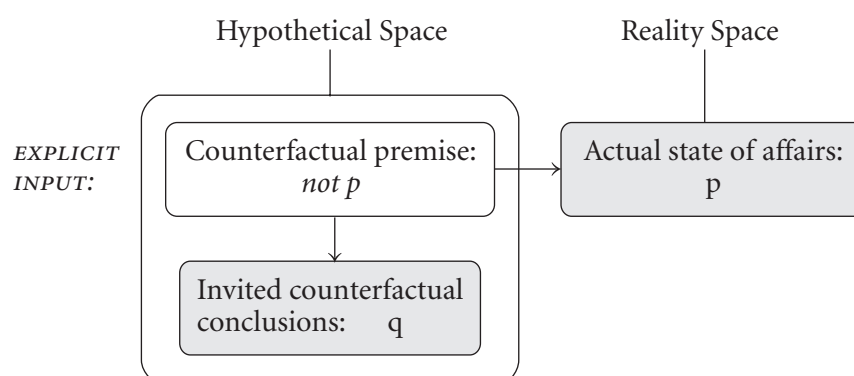


Figure 8. Input to the *Reasoning* Scenario

Example (23) is similar to (21) and (22) in inviting the reasoner to complete the conditional by drawing conclusions from the premise it expresses.

- (23) Farland summed up. Quite fair to hold out on Winter. It seems he's keeping things back. **If he knows about the knife... And if he knows that Wally did attack the girl...** There were voices in the hall and Winter entered with the visitor.

In this example, however, the premise is not counterfactual but merely not known to be true. Nevertheless, despite the lack of certainty about the truth of *p*, the reasoner seems to believe that it is rational to assume that *p*. What we see in (23) is a kind of hedged assertion or reasonable supposition that *p*. Note, however, that the (weak) assertive force can be canceled very easily, as in (23a) and (b):

- (23) a. If he knows about the knife... But I don't believe he really knows about it...
- b. And if he knows that Wally did attack the girl... But I don't think he knows that Wally attacked the girl...

### 3.3.2 Challenging prior assumptions

Example (24) is quite different from the preceding cases in having a fairly autonomous status:

- (24) "I've told you I have no idea who this warning could have been for. **If it was a warning.**" "Did anyone turn up at her place," he probed patiently, "soon after she was dead?" [LOB.L1]

As for the examples in (19), for (24) there do not seem to be any plausible consequent propositions that follow from the *if*-clause. Our proposal for the conceptual structure of (24) is represented in Figure 9. That is, given a context in reality space in which some proposition like 'it was a warning' is generally assumed to be true, the speaker, in using an *if*-clause, conveys in hypothetical space that he/she does not know *whether* the proposition is true, thereby strongly implicating a challenge to the *assumed* truth of *p* in reality space.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, the implicature raised by *if p* seems difficult, if not impossible, to cancel:

- (24) a. Cancelability: "I've told you I have no idea who this warning could have been for. **If it was a warning.** #But I think it was a warning."

We briefly summarize the analysis of data in this last section regarding the use of *if*-clauses in relation to reasoning. We saw that in posing within an independent *if*-clause a premise whose truth value is not known – as in (23), a speaker can implicate in hypothetical space a weak assertion, which is cancelable, as

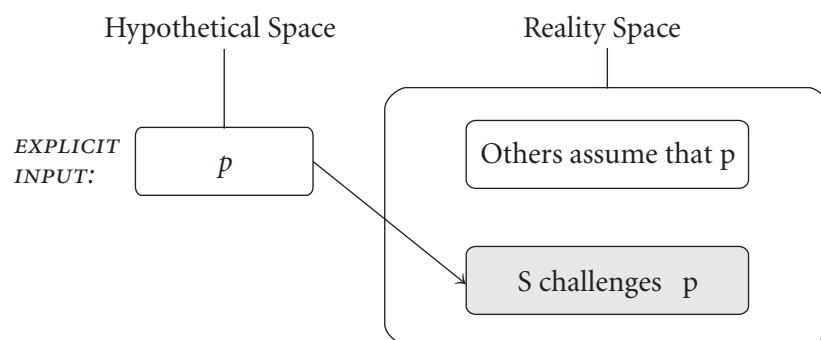


Figure 9. Input to the *Challenge-to-p* Scenario

well as implicate unstated conclusions. But in posing a premise within an *if*-clause whose truth value is known to be counterfactual – as in (21) and (22) – or assumed to be true – as in (24), the speaker has access to two mental spaces at once: the hypothetical space created by *if* and the reality space in which the opposite state of affairs holds. *If* plus a past counterfactual implicates a line of reasoning leading to a false conclusion while simultaneously metonymically evoking an opposite line of reasoning leading to a known conclusion – an economical way of reviewing two chains of events: what might have happened and what in fact happened. On the other hand, *if* plus a premise assumed by others to be true conventionally conveys that the speaker questions that assumption.

#### 4. Summary and conclusions

When independent *if*-clauses are used as directives and commissives, *if* creates a hypothetical space that is metaphorically mapped onto negative politeness where “non-reality” corresponds to “non-imposition.” Within that polite space, mentions of ability, willingness, benefit, future action, etc. are interpreted as BEFORE and AFTER components of speech act scenarios and thus function as conceptual metonymic links to these scenarios.

When independent *if*-clauses are used to express wishes, *if* (*only*) simply creates a hypothetical world that may even be counterfactual. Within that space, mention of e.g. possibility can metonymically evoke the wish scenario as a whole in which the speaker “implores” the world to change in such a way as to match a description. In the case of unrealizable wishes, the *if*-clause can also convey strong emotional attitudes (regret, despair). In the use of an independent *if*-clause to express surprise, amazement, irony, etc., *if p* describes an expected state of affairs in hypothetical space that contrasts with its metonymically linked opposite state of affairs in reality space.

When independent *if*-clauses are used epistemically, *if* establishes a hypothetical space for reasoning to an unknown conclusion. Especially interesting are the cases when the *if*-clause is used to reason with a counterfactual premise known to be false or to challenge a proposition assumed by others to be true. In these cases what is expressed in the *if* space is metonymically linked to an opposite state of affairs in reality space.

We conclude that the pragmatic speech act forces conventionally associated with the deontic, expressive, and epistemic functions of independent *if*-clauses are not arbitrary pairings of pragmatic meaning with linguistic form, but rather are motivated largely by metonymically based pragmatic inferences.

## Notes

1. We regard the components “assessment of the truth of p” and “evaluation of p” to be an elaboration of Fillmore’s notion of *epistemic stance* (cited in Sweetser 1996:318) – “the speaker’s mental association with or dissociation from the world of the protasis [...]”
2. Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez and Pérez Hernández (this volume) would call relations between parts of a scenario and the whole scenario ‘source-in-target’ metonymies.
3. The majority of our data were collected from the Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen-Corpus [LOB], which consists of contextualized naturalistic language. We extracted from the results of our search only those examples of *if*-clauses lacking an apodosis plus the surrounding context of each. Additional data were taken from the CD-ROM version of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.
4. Stefanowitsch (this volume) would treat such examples as constructions with a fixed conventional illocutionary meaning.
5. We take the meaning of *will* in this context to be ambiguous. Cf. Sweetser (1996:329ff.) for discussion of the meaning of *will* in protases.
6. This intuition is supported by the *please* test. That is, *please* can be inserted into the *if*-clause making the utterance a request.
7. Example (15) could also be construed as a suggestion, which we don’t consider here.
8. A Gricean analysis might argue that the speaker has flouted the Maxim of Quality: that is, in asserting what is empirically not the case, a speaker implicates “the most obviously related proposition [...] the contradictory of the one he purports to be putting forward” (Grice 1975: 53). This argument seems to apply where irony is the intended contextual effect as in (19e), but does not seem to account for the exclamatory force of the other examples in (19).
9. See Voßhagen (1999) on the notion of opposition as a metonymic principle.
10. Examples of the type in (24) are probably quite numerous. We surmise that they will contain adverbs such as *really*, *ever*, etc. to signal that the speaker is in doubt about the truth of the hypothetical proposition, e.g.:
  - (i) If it was actually Mary (and not Sheila, Linda, etc.).
  - (ii) If she really did write that letter (as they claim).
  - (iii) If he ever did propose to her (as she claims).

Another characteristic of this type of *if*-clause is that it is used for “afterthoughts”; i.e., it cannot be used to initiate a conversation but rather expresses a reaction to some assumed state of affairs.

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