The Pragmatic Role of *Then*

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In this joint research, we are concerned with the pragmatic role of *then* in conditional constructions.   Observe the following example:

(1)   If Max comes, (then) we can play poker.

Example (1) shows that the occurrence of *then* does not affect the grammaticality of the sentence.   Thus, the occurrence of *then* has been considered to be optional. Indeed, Dancygier (1998:181) claims that *then* is usually optional in a conditional construction – it may be used, but does not have to be.

However, there are cases where the occurrence of *then* is not optional.   Let us observe the following examples:

(2) a.   If they accept you, (*then) they'll kill for you, I'm not sure.
    b.   If he has passed into your ownership, he'll have to obey.   If not, *(then) we shall have to think of some other means of keeping him from his rightful mistress.

The presence of *then* renders the sentence in (2a) ungrammatical.   On the other hand, *then* occurs obligatorily in (2b).   The facts observed in (2) have not been dealt with in previous researches.

The occurrence of *then* has been studied in connection with its grammatical status (cf. Dancygier (1998)).   Roughly speaking, *then* is an anaphoric pronoun referring to *if*-clauses.   We admit that *then* is an anaphoric pronoun, but it does not fully explain the occurrence of *then* exemplified in (1) and (2).   To deal with the occurrence of *then* adequately, other facets must be taken into consideration.   In what follows, we show that the occurrence of *then* is pragmatically constrained.

To begin with, the alleged optionality of *then* can also be observed in paratactic conditional constructions (pseudo-imperative+*and*), exemplified below:

(3)   Give me some money and (then) I'll help you escape. (Tsubomoto (1986:61))
(4)   Give a dog a bad name, and (*then) he'll live up to it. (Tsubomoto (1986:61))

According to Tsubomoto (1986), there is no objective causal relation between the event in the antecedent clause and the one in the subsequent clause in (3):   the semantic connection between the two clauses is subjective.   That is, it is the speaker's

subjectivity that relates the two clauses. The occurrence of *then* is optional in this case. In the case of (4), on the other hand, *then* cannot occur: the semantic connection between the antecedent clause and its subsequent clause is established automatically. By the word *automatically*, he means that the connection between the two clauses is unavoidable or inevitable. That is, they are connected objectively by natural laws or common sense. Thus, *then* in this construction functions as a marker of a subjective relationship between the antecedent and subsequent clauses.

This explanation can be applied to *then* in *if*-conditional constructions. Observe the following data:

(5)   If you give me some money, (then) I'll help you escape.
(6)   If you give a dog a bad name, (*then) he'll live up to it.

The intended meanings of the *if*-conditionals in (5) and (6) are almost the same as those of (3) and (4), respectively; that is, the two clauses in (5) are connected subjectively, while the two clauses in (6) is connected objectively. In (5), *then* is optional, as in (3). On the other hand, in (6), *then* cannot occur, as in (4). This parallelism shows that *then* in *if*-conditionals also marks a subjective relationship between the antecedent and subsequent clauses.

Let us turn to the second fact. It is generally acknowledged that *then* does not occur in so-called speech-act conditionals (cf. Sweetser (1990)):

(7)   If she phoned yesterday, (*then) I was abroad.

In speech-act conditionals such as (7), the antecedent clause does not denote a condition for the actualization of the state described in the subsequent clause: the event *she phoned yesterday* does not cause the speaker's existence in a foreign country. In this sense, the connection between the two clauses is not objective, but subjective. Note here that *then* does not occur, although the connection between the two clauses is subjective. This means that *then* has some function other than showing a subjective relationship between the two clauses. In this regard, Declerck and Reed (2001) point out that the subsequent clause in this type of conditionals does not denote a conclusion drawn from its antecedent clause, but the evidence or intermediate step for a further, implicit conclusion. In fact, sentence (7) can be paraphrased as follows:

(8)   If she phoned yesterday, she can't have {reached / told} me, because I was
       abroad.   (Declerck and Reed (2001:304))

As shown in (8), the overt subsequent clause of sentence (7) actually functions as evidence or a reason for the implicit conclusion *she can't have {reached / told} me*. This indicates that *then* occurs when it functions as a marker of a conclusion of the speaker's inference.

Furthermore, *then* does not mark a mere conclusion of an inferential process; rather, it marks the *final* conclusion drawn from the proposition described in an *if*-clause. What *final* means here is literal: the speaker has no further or alternative conclusions. To clarify this point, let us observe the following example:

(9)   If he has passed into your ownership, he'll have to obey. If not, *then* we shall have to think of some other means of keeping him from his rightful mistress.   (J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*)

In (9), the two conditionals are presented contrastively. Here the speaker's final conclusion is presented in the subsequent clause of the second sentence. Because *then* marks the speaker's final conclusion, it cannot be deleted nor can it occur in positions other than the one exemplified in (9):

(10) a. # If he has passed into your ownership, he'll have to obey. If not, we shall have to think of some other means of keeping him from his rightful mistress.

b. # If he has passed into your ownership, *then* he'll have to obey. If not, *then* we shall have to think of some other means of keeping him from his rightful mistress.

c. # If he has passed into your ownership, *then* he'll have to obey. If not, we shall have to think of some other means of keeping him from his rightful mistress.

In (10a), *then* is deleted from the second sentence. In (10b), *then* appears in both sentences. In (10c), *then* occurs only in the first sentence. All these examples are anomalous and unacceptable in this context, which proves that *then* pragmatically functions as a marker of the speaker's final conclusion.

As seen above, the pragmatic function of *then* is to mark the subjective relation between the antecedent and subsequent clauses, and to present the latter as the speaker's final conclusion. This is empirically corroborated by the following dialogue:

(11)   "If they save Harry–"

"– *then* I will never say another word against them," said Mr. Weasley wearily. "It's too late, Molly, we'd better go up…"

(J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prince of Azkaban*)

In (11), the second interlocutor interrupts the first speaker, and gives his own conclusion. The *then* in the second utterance marks his final conclusion, which is explicitly shown by the last utterance terminating the argument. In this case, *then* obligatorily occurs. The deletion of *then* renders the sentence anomalous:

(12)   # "– I will never say another word against them," said Mr. Weasley wearily. "It's too late, Molly, we'd better go up…"

In addition, if the first speaker in such a dialogue as (11) does not accept the second speaker's utterance as the final conclusion, the former can present his/her own final conclusion. In this case, too, the use of *then* is obligatory:

(13) A: If they save Harry
     B: – *then* I will never say another word against them.
     A: No! I want to say that if they save Harry, *(*then*) we can shake hands and make up with them!

The function of *then* as a marker of the final conclusion having no alternatives is further endorsed by the following examples:

(14)   If they accept you, (**then*) they'll kill for you, I'm not sure.   (= (2a))
(15) a. * If he typed her thesis, *then* he loves her or he got paid.
     b. * If he typed her thesis, *then* he loves her or *then* he got paid.

The example in (14) demonstrates that the use of *then* strengthens the degree of the speaker's conviction, which is incompatible with the expression *I'm not sure*, weakening the conviction. The examples in (15) indicate that *then* must be followed by one and only one conclusion. These phenomena can be attributed to the function of *then* as a pragmatic marker of the speaker's final conclusion.

We conclude from all the above observations that the occurrence of *then* exemplified in (1) and (2) is motivated by the two pragmatic functions of *then*: connecting subjectively the two remarks described in the antecedent and subsequent clauses and showing explicitly that the remark in the subsequent clause is the speaker's final conclusion drawn from the premise described in the antecedent clause.