

On the Presence/Absence of Future *Will* in *If*-Clauses

Hideki Tanaka, Yuji Tanaka,
Hiroyuki Tahara, and Takashi Yoshida

This study is an attempt to characterize the semantics of conditional sentences such as (1a), the protasis of which, though referring to a future event, does not allow the occurrence of *will*, as shown in (1b).

(1) a. If it rains tomorrow, we worked in vain yesterday. (Comrie 1982: 149)

b. *If it will rain tomorrow, we worked in vain yesterday.

We will argue that the tense form of the verb in the protasis is determined by the interpretation of the relationship which holds between protasis and apodosis. In particular, it will be made clear that future *will* should drop in the protasis in case the protasis is interpreted as a cause of the apodosis (or at least the part of it) that has futurity in its content.

Declerck (1984) argues that future *will* is not licensed to occur in *if*-clauses when the following conditions are satisfied:

(2) a. The condition is open, hypothetical or counterfactual.

b. There is a close relationship between protasis and apodosis.

To have some idea of how these conditions work, let us consider the following contrast:

(3) a. If it rains tomorrow, I'll take an umbrella. (Comrie 1986: 95)

b. *If it will rain tomorrow, I'll take an umbrella.

(3a) is open, since it may or may not rain tomorrow; thus, it satisfies (2a). (3a) meets (2b) as well, because there is a causal, hence close, relationship between the protasis and apodosis: whether or not the speaker takes an umbrella depends on tomorrow's weather. The conditions, therefore, account for the fact that future *will* is excluded from the protasis, as in (3b).

The conditions in (2) can also explain the fact that future *will* cannot be omitted from the protasis of (4).

(4) If it will rain tomorrow, we might as well cancel the match now.

(Nieuwint 1986: 373)

Sentence (4) meets (2a), but not (2b), as is clear from its meaning: from the information that it may well rain tomorrow, we draw the conclusion that we should cancel it now. Notice that (4) does not mean that tomorrow's weather causes us to cancel the match now.

The conditions in (2), however, erroneously predict that future *will* cannot drop in (1a). It may be an open conditional for the same reason as (3a), but there is no close

relationship between the protasis and apodosis. This is because a past event cannot depend on any future event. Thus, Declerck's analysis, as it stands, cannot deal adequately with the question of why future *will* cannot occur in (1a). In what follows, we will propose an alternative analysis.

Sentence (1a) can be accounted for in terms of the relationship between protasis and apodosis and the cognitive domain in which it is interpreted. We assume, following Sweetser (1990), that conditionals are interpreted in a certain cognitive domain (i.e., the physical, epistemic, or social world). (1a), we believe, is subject to interpretation both in the epistemic and physical domains: It is understood as encoding an inferential relation in the epistemic domain, and a cause-effect relation at the level of the physical world. The speaker, informed of the next day's weather, makes an inference of the effect that it has on his/her work. Note that tomorrow's weather is understood as a potential cause that brings about the situation in which the work is in vain: the work will be in vain if it rains tomorrow; otherwise, it will not. Given the cause-effect relation of protasis and apodosis, we can assimilate the grammatical behavior of (1a) to that of (3a).

In general, the tense interpretation of the protasis is determined by that of the apodosis if the two clauses are closely linked via the cause-effect relation. Thus, the present-tense verb *rains* in (3a) is understood as referring to a future event, since it is interpreted in relation to the apodosis that is future both grammatically and semantically. So is *rains* in (1a). Although headed by the past-tense verb *worked*, the apodosis is interpreted as "what we did yesterday will be in vain". Because of this futurity involved in the apodosis, the present-tense verb of the protasis should refer to the future event.

References

- Comrie, Bernard. 1982. Future time reference in conditional protases. *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 2: 143-152.
- Comrie, Bernard. 1986. Conditionals: A typology. In *On conditionals*, edited by Elizabeth Closs Traugott, Alice ter Meulen, Judy Snitzer Reilly, and Charles A. Ferguson, 77-99. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Declerck, Renaat. 1984. 'Pure future' *will* in *if*-clauses. *Lingua* 63: 279-312.
- Nieuwint, Pieter. 1986. Present and future in conditional protases. *Linguistics* 24: 371-392.
- Sweetser, Eve. 1990. *From etymology to pragmatics: Metaphorical and cultural aspects of semantic structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.