

Differential paraphrasability and epistemic stance in conditionals

Gilberto Gomes & Priscila Mattos Monken
UENF - Northern Rio de Janeiro State University

While Dancygier & Sweetser (2005: 48-49) view the epistemic stance in conditionals in general as non-positive, Taylor (1997: 301), Schwenter (1999) and Gomes (2008) admit the possibility of positive epistemic stance in conditionals, as in *If he did what he did, he deserves to be punished*. Gomes (2008) notes that positive-epistemic-stance conditionals with *if* may be paraphrased with *since* but not with *in case*. (*Since he did what he did, ...* **In case he did what he did, ...*) Conversely, neutral-epistemic-stance conditionals with *if* such as *If he did what they say he did, he deserves to be punished* may be paraphrased (without substantial change in meaning) with *in case*, but not with *since*. These paraphrases are not completely equivalent to the original sentences, but their differential paraphrasability seems to show two different meanings of the *if*-conditional, one involving a positive and the other a neutral epistemic stance. The aim of the present study was to study this differential paraphrasability of conditionals in Brazilian Portuguese. We have investigated the role of the attribution of epistemic stance to the speaker in the acceptance of paraphrases with *caso* (corresponding to the English *in case*) or *já que* (*since*). Subjects had to choose between two alternative paraphrases for each of 27 items. The original conditional sentence in each item had *Se (If)*, one alternative paraphrase had *Caso* and the other had *Já que*. The conditional sentences were presented by themselves in the first 9 items (indefinite context). Then the same sentences were presented preceded by a sentence acting either as a certainty inducing context or an uncertainty inducing context. For example, one of the items had the original sentence meaning *If she's Italian, she doesn't need a passport to go to France*. Two other items had preceding sentences meaning *She's Italian. [And if she's Italian, ...]* and *Maybe she's Italian*. 127 subjects participated in the study (76 female, 61 male). Statistical analysis was done using Pearson's chi-squared test. With an uncertainty-inducing context, most subjects chose *in case* paraphrases. With a certainty-inducing context, most chose *since* paraphrases. This indicates that *in case* and *since* are associated with the attribution of neutral and positive epistemic stances to the speaker, respectively. With an indefinite context, half of the subjects chose *since*-paraphrases, showing that an *if*-sentence is easily interpreted as involving a positive epistemic stance of the speaker. Female subjects chose more *in case* paraphrases than males (statistically significant difference). This shows that women had a greater tendency than men to attribute a neutral epistemic stance to the speaker who utters an *if*-conditional. Higher instruction level and age were both associated with a greater tendency to give *since* responses when the context was certainty-inducing and *in case* responses when it was uncertainty-inducing. Qualitative exploration of the reasons for discrepant responses showed that many subjects created their own contexts for the sentences presented with indefinite context, and then stuck to these created contexts in spite of the contexts given in later items. References: Dancygier, B.; Sweetser, E. (2005) *Mental Spaces in Grammar: Conditional Constructions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Gomes, G. (2008) Three types of conditionals and their verb forms in English and Portuguese. *Cognitive Linguistics*, v. 19, n. 2, p. 219-240. Schwenter, S. A. (1999) *Pragmatics of Conditional Marking: Implicature, Scalarity and Exclusivity*. New York and London: Garland.