

## INDICATIVE AND SUBJUNCTIVE TYPES OF CONDITIONALS

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the semantic, pragmatic, and cognitive distinctions between indicative and subjunctive conditionals in English. Indicative conditionals typically convey factual or epistemically possible scenarios, while subjunctive conditionals are used to express hypotheticals or counterfactuals. The paper examines how these two types of conditionals differ in truth-conditions and inferential behavior, highlighting debates over whether they reflect fundamentally distinct meanings or subtler pragmatic differences. Key theoretical perspectives are discussed, including Lewis's variably strict semantics for subjunctives, material implication with pragmatic enrichment for indicatives, and alternative views such as the conditional assertion and No Truth-Value approaches. Additionally, the study considers the cognitive underpinnings of conditional reasoning, suggesting that the capacity to assert conditionally may precede the formation of fully defined conditional propositions. Despite semantic differences, both indicative and subjunctive conditionals share important patterns in reasoning, such as the failure of Strengthening the Antecedent, indicating overlapping functional roles in human thought. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of how conditional structures encode meaning, guide inference, and reflect cognitive strategies in hypothetical reasoning.*

**Key words:** *condition, subjunctive, indicative, conditional assertion, truth conditionals.*

### INTRODUCTION

Conditionals have been studied by a number of scholars and researchers in world linguistics. It can be studied from different perspectives: semantic, pragmatic, cognitive and etc. In particular, as Reuneker mentioned "Conditionals enable us to express our thoughts about possible states of the world. In communication, we use conditionals, most prominently if-then sentences, to express thoughts about situations we are unsure about, situations we judge to be hypothetical, likely or unlikely, or

situations we deem contrary to our current knowledge of the world (what if...)”. “Conditionals have been the subject of debates between scholars for centuries, as we will see in detail in the following chapters. Many of those debates revolve around the question concerning the general meaning of conditionals” [ 4, p.3].

### **Main part**

Conditionals are sentences that talk about a possible scenario that may or may not be actual and describe what (else) is the case in that scenario; or, considered from “the other end”, conditionals state in what kind of possible scenarios a given proposition is true. The canonical form of a conditional is a two-part sentence consisting of an “antecedent” (also: “premise”, “protasis”) marked with if and a “consequent” (“apodosis”) sometimes marked with then [1, p.2].

The distinction between indicative and subjunctive conditionals revolves around their truth-conditions and semantic interpretation. Research shows that while both types of conditionals have distinct truth-conditions, it is debated whether this reflects fundamentally different meanings or a subtler difference. Philosophers and logicians vary in their approaches: David Lewis argued that his variably strict semantics does not apply to indicatives, favoring material implication with pragmatic enrichment instead, while others propose more radical analyses such as the conditional assertion view or the No Truth-Value (NTV) view for indicatives. Despite these theoretical differences, indicatives and subjunctives appear to share similar inferential behavior, as illustrated by the failure of Strengthening the Antecedent in both cases. This suggests that although their semantics may differ, the two types of conditionals may operate similarly in reasoning patterns [1].

The distinction between indicative and subjunctive conditionals is primarily grounded in their truth-conditions and semantic interpretation, yet the precise nature of this distinction remains a topic of ongoing debate in philosophy and linguistics. Indicative conditionals, typically used to express factual or epistemically possible scenarios, and subjunctive (or counterfactual) conditionals, often used to consider hypotheticals that are contrary to known facts, both exhibit distinct truth-conditions. However, scholars dispute whether these differences signal fundamentally different types of meaning or merely reflect subtler pragmatic or contextual effects. For example, David Lewis, a seminal figure in the semantics of conditionals, argued that his variably strict semantics, which successfully accounts for subjunctive conditionals, does not naturally extend to indicatives; instead, he suggested that indicative conditionals are best understood as material implications enriched by pragmatic inference. In contrast, alternative theoretical frameworks have proposed more radical approaches to indicative conditionals, such as the conditional assertion

view, which treats indicatives as speech acts whose primary function is to assert a conditional proposition rather than to express a truth-conditional relationship, or the No Truth-Value (NTV) view, which denies that indicatives possess classical truth values altogether. Despite these divergent accounts, evidence from inferential patterns indicates that indicatives and subjunctives often behave similarly in reasoning contexts. One illustrative example is the failure of the principle known as Strengthening the Antecedent: in both indicative and subjunctive conditionals, adding extra information to the antecedent does not necessarily preserve the conditional's truth or acceptability. This convergence suggests that, while the underlying semantic mechanisms of indicatives and subjunctives may differ, they share important functional characteristics in how speakers draw inferences and reason hypothetically, highlighting the need for a nuanced theory that can accommodate both their semantic differences and pragmatic similarities.

The nature of conditional assertions and their intricate relationship with truth-values and conditional propositions, highlighting both semantic and cognitive dimensions of conditional reasoning is investigated. It proposes that a conditional may be characterized as irrelevant or denied a classical truth-value when its antecedent is false, suggesting a distinctive feature of conditional assertion. However, this approach does not fully resolve foundational questions about the nature of conditionals, particularly regarding how they function as communicative acts versus truth-evaluable propositions. In addressing the coordination problem, the discussion emphasizes that merely asserting a conditional because the conditional probability of the consequent given the antecedent is high cannot be universally justified within the framework of standard propositional assertion. This indicates that conditional assertions operate according to principles that extend beyond classical truth-conditional logic. Efforts to construct a notion of a conditional proposition with an indeterminate truth-value-essentially a proposition that is only partially defined-demonstrate that the lack of a classical truth-value does not nullify the act of asserting conditionally. This insight points to a more nuanced understanding: conditional assertion may be governed by pragmatic or cognitive factors rather than purely semantic ones. Finally, the text advances the view that the capacity to assert conditionally may constitute a primitive cognitive ability, preceding and supporting the development of fully formed conditional propositions. In some cases, individuals appear to treat the act of asserting a conditional sentence as equivalent to conditionally asserting its consequent, suggesting that this capacity reflects an underlying reasoning skill that is more basic and foundational than the formal structures of propositional logic. Overall, this perspective underscores the cognitive

primacy of conditional reasoning, suggesting that our ability to navigate hypothetical scenarios and make conditional claims may be rooted in fundamental mental operations rather than merely in formal semantic rules [2].

Unconditionals convey a core meaning that the choice of antecedent alternative does not affect the outcome (the indifference implication), which is central to their compositional semantics. From this follows consequent entailment, the intuitive idea that the consequent is guaranteed. Additionally, unconditionals rely on two presuppositions - distribution (all alternatives are possible) and exhaustiveness (these are the only possible alternatives) - which explain their discourse effects and distinguish them from ordinary modalized sentences and standard conditionals [3].

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the distinction between indicative and subjunctive conditionals reflects both semantic and pragmatic differences in English. Indicative conditionals primarily convey real or likely situations and are closely tied to factual or probable scenarios, whereas subjunctive conditionals express hypothetical, counterfactual, or uncertain situations, often signaling a departure from reality. Understanding these distinctions is crucial not only for accurate interpretation of meaning but also for effective communication, as the choice of mood can affect truth conditions, inference patterns, and the speaker's attitude toward possibility, necessity, or obligation. Furthermore, examining these distinctions provides insight into broader theoretical issues in linguistics, including the interplay of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics in conditional constructions. Ultimately, mastering the use of indicative and subjunctive conditionals enhances both comprehension and expressive precision in academic and everyday discourse.

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