

Shifty *if*'s iffy shifts

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Conditional constructions create special environments for the interpretation of their constituents. The semantic contribution of temporal, aspectual and modal expressions in conditionals can differ in puzzling ways from their “ordinary” meaning in simple matrix clauses. Formal semanticists did not pay much attention to this phenomenon until around the turn of the millennium, but by now we have a good understanding of some basic patterns and the beginnings of a cross-linguistic perspective. However, there is still much debate on how these expressions take on their special meanings in conditionals, and how (or indeed whether) those special meanings are related to the meanings they have outside of conditionals. An additional question from a cross-linguistic perspective is whether these processes are invariant, thus presumably reflecting extra-linguistic cognitive tendencies, or disparate, language-specific results of accidental conventionalization. I do not have the answers to these questions, but in this talk I will present a framework for addressing them, developed for English *if*-sentences and tested against a range of other languages and constructions. One of its hallmarks is an integrated analysis of “indicative” and “subjunctive” conditionals, capturing the peculiarities of temporal interpretation in both. Another hallmark is a novel approach to the role of “fake Past” in conditionals.