PA10.2 – Questions and Conditionals

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I.   The form-meaning mismatch

Conditionals and questions share similar or identical morphology in many different languages, 60+ identified, from 6 different families. This results in 1:many form-meaning mismatch.

(1) Tatíček se ptá, oral-**li**   jsi.
daddy refl ask   ploughed-PTCL aux.2sg
"Daddy asks if you have ploughed."

(2) Jest**li** jsi   oral,   můžeš jít   domů.
If   aux.2sg ploughed can.2sg go.inf home
"If you have ploughed, you can go home."

- Problem: The standard semantic treatments of questions and conditionals have little to do with each other
- Previous work tries to explain the phenomenon as conditionals being built from polar questions [1]
- Relative clauses of world variables [2] or propositions [3].
- *ABA syncretism patterns obtain with disjunction where the surface form of disjunctive element can be identical with conditional particle but only if it's also identical with the polar question particle. [4] Implying a containment pattern.

(3) John asked whether Mary is coming.
(4) Whether John is coming or not, Mary will join.

Research Questions
1. What is the underpinning behind this non-accidental ambiguity?
2. Does cross-linguistic data support a specific line of theories, which could then be unified?

II.   Methodology and hypotheses

- Methodology will consist of investigating various environments if-like particles occur cross-linguistically
- Empirical findings will be used to evaluate existing theories
- **Hidden operators:** *li* and *if* might have underspecified meanings compatible with both question and conditionals.
- **One built from the other:** Conditional meaning is built compositionally from question meaning (Conditional Jest**li** is morphologically more complex than polar question **li**)
- **One and the same:** Both forms could have the same meaning, which is interpreted differently depending on the surrounding environment.

III.   Expected results and discussion

- The cross linguistic systematicity could indicate a systematic connection between questions, conditionals, disjunctions and unconditionals.
- Conditionals as raising one alternative (p worlds) while unconditionals raising both alternatives (p worlds and ¬p worlds) [5]
- Recent work on unconditionals analyze them as a conjunction of conditionals, which echoes previous theories regarding free choice phenomenon in disjunctions [6], which has empirical support [7].
- The main components for these structures echo cross-linguistically: modality and alternatives.
- Modality in questions is visible in ignorance inference, in languages like Mandarin *shenme* ('what/something') [8]
- Analysis of conditionals and disjunctions should reveal information regarding questions, which is otherwise hard to directly compare due to speech act involvement.
- The diachronic pathway of such particles will be illuminated with the semantic insights.

IV.   Consequences and follow-up questions

- PA10.3 will extend the research question from PA10.2 to deal with a related cross-linguistically common affinity between questions and disjunctions.
- E.g. Ukrainian uses *čy* both as question particle and as a disjunction.
- The questions and hypotheses arising are similar to those investigated in PA10.2:
  o **Hidden operators hypothesis**: Disjunctions are often overtly accompanied by other, higher expressions (e.g. *either p or q*) to some extent disambiguating the sentence.
  o **One built from the other hypothesis**: the Russian question particle *li* forms part of the disjunction *ili*.
  o **One and the same hypothesis**: disjunctions are employed to raise alternatives. At the same time, uttering *Ann is American or Canadian* implicates that the speaker does not know which of the two, which in turn raises a question.
- There is also an arguably even more direct and mysterious relation to PA10.2 in the form of unconditionals, as in (4). Here conditional-like meanings are built from disjunctive forms with a question particle *whether*, which itself is built from *wh* plus *either.*

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