

1 Metalinguistic conditionals and the role of explicit content

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3
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5 6 Abstract

7
8 This paper aims to bridge the relationship between metalinguistic 'if you like' as a non-
9 propositional discourse marker and its conditional counterparts. This paper claims that
10 metalinguistic 'if you like' is polysemous between a hedge that denotes the speaker's reduced
11 commitment to some aspect of the main clause, and an optional yet potential conditional
12 reading that interlocutors can legitimately draw on in interaction which is brought about due
13 to the 'if p , q ' sentence form. That is, although the metalinguistic reading is most likely
14 obtained automatically by default, it also carries an available conditional reading that is akin
15 to other metalinguistic conditional clauses such as 'if you see what I mean'. Next, a semantic
16 representation of metalinguistic 'if you like' is developed that takes on board a
17 characterization of conditionality that departs from lexico-grammatical conventions, such that
18 conditionals of the form 'if p , q ' no longer bear a one-to-one correspondence with 'conditional'
19 truth conditions. Employing a radical contextualist semantic framework in which the unit of
20 truth-conditional analysis is not constrained to the sentence form, utterances employing
21 metalinguistic 'if you like' are given a semantic representation such that the *if*-clause does not
22 contribute propositional content, yet they also maintain their status as conditionals as the
23 sentence form gives rise to a potential conditional secondary meaning.

24
25 *Keywords: if you like, metalinguistic conditionals, explicit content, conceptual conditionals,*
26 *radical contextualism*

27 28 1 Introduction

29
30 Metalinguistic uses of 'if you like', as in (1), differ from 'standard' hypothetical conditional
31 uses of 'if you like', as in (2).¹

32
33 (1) So I went in with a bone of complaint, if you like. (ICE-GB S1A-064 142)

34 (2) We can have a competition if you like later on. (ICE-GB S2A-049 052)

35
36 The two uses differ as follows: in its hypothetical use, 'if you like' provides a condition on the
37 truth or actualization of the proposition described in the consequent; in its metalinguistic use,
38 'if you like' hedges some aspect of the main clause as a metalinguistic comment.

39 Metalinguistic 'if you like' presents a puzzle for the semantics of conditionals insofar
40 as it is typically viewed as a 'discourse marker' in linguistic analyses and, as such, does not
41 contribute to the semantic (propositional) content of the utterance in which it occurs. As
42 quoted in Heine (2013: 1206),

¹ Examples in the paper are predominantly taken from the Great British component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-GB). These are referenced using the standard notation from the spoken portion of that corpus, namely of the form (S00-000 000).

43

44 [...] the status of discourse markers remains uncertain (see, for example, Fischer 2006).
45 There is little consensus on whether they are a syntactic or a pragmatic category, on
46 which types of expressions the category includes, *on the relationship of discourse*
47 *markers to other posited categories such as connectives* [...] (Lewis 2011: 419-420, my
48 emphasis)

49

50 This paper bridges the relationship between metalinguistic 'if you like' as a discourse marker
51 and its conditional counterparts by addressing two questions. The first is whether
52 metalinguistic uses of 'if you like' are, in fact, licensed in the category of 'conditionals' given
53 that their primary function is to hedge some aspect of the main clause. I defend the view that
54 while metalinguistic 'if you like' *primarily* functions as a non-propositional discourse marker,
55 it gives rise to an optional yet potential conditional reading that interlocutors can legitimately
56 draw on in interaction which is brought about due to the 'if *p*, *q*' sentence form. In other
57 words, the meaning of 'if you like' is polysemous between its role as a hedge and its
58 conditional meaning, and although the metalinguistic reading is most likely obtained
59 automatically by default, it also carries an available conditional reading that is akin to other
60 metalinguistic conditional clauses such as 'if you see what I mean'.

61 The second question that follows is how to semantically represent metalinguistic 'if
62 you like' such that a unified analysis of metalinguistic conditionals and their hypothetical
63 counterparts is possible. The polysemy account defended here departs from both 'semantic'
64 approaches that postulate distinct lexical semantics for different uses of metalinguistic
65 phenomena, and 'pragmatic' accounts that treat non-propositional readings of otherwise
66 propositional phenomena as secondary inferences. It is the latter approach that is typically
67 pursued for conditional utterances of the form 'if *p*, *q*'. However, the challenge for including
68 metalinguistic 'if you like' in the category of conditionals is that since its metalinguistic
69 meaning is so well-entrenched, upholding the conditional reading as semantically prior to the
70 metalinguistic reading is cognitively implausible.

71 To overcome this problem, I depart from the view that conditionals of the form 'if *p*,
72 *q*' bear a one-to-one correspondence with 'conditional' truth conditions. To get the desired
73 truth-conditional results for 'if you like', viz of *q* simpliciter, I adopt the view from the radical
74 contextualist theory of Default Semantics that the object of semantic, truth-conditional study
75 is the primary intended meaning of the speaker (e.g. Jaszczolt 2010), where primary
76 meanings are not necessarily informed by explicit linguistic content. Such a unit of semantic
77 analysis draws on the conceptual structure of the primary intended speech act, rather than on
78 the syntactic structure of the uttered sentence. By making this move, we can get the results
79 that we want with respect to metalinguistic 'if you like': namely, utterances employing 'if you
80 like' can retain their intuitive truth conditions where the *if*-clause does not contribute
81 propositional content, yet they can also maintain their status as conditionals as the sentence
82 form gives rise to a (potential) conditional secondary meaning. In other words, the
83 metalinguistic meaning is arrived at directly, yet there is a potential conditional reading
84 derived from the sentence form that can be drawn on by interlocutors.

85 With this overview in place, the structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2
86 describes the uses of functions of 'if you like', relating it to conditionals of the standard type.
87 Section 3 discusses options for semantically representing metalinguistic 'if you like', before
88 motivating metalinguistic 'if you like' as polysemous in Section 4. Section 5 introduces the

89 pragmatic criteria for conditionality (withdrawn references) that allow 'if you like' to take on
90 a conditional reading as a secondary inference, and Section 6 shows how it is possible to
91 represent both the primary and secondary meanings of 'if you like' in the framework of
92 Default Semantics. Section 7 summarizes the research and points to future directions.

93

94 **2 Motivating 'if you like' as conditional**

95

96 Uses of 'if you like' can broadly be divided into two categories based on their functions in
97 English discourse: 'if you like' can function as a conditional clause proper, as in (2), or it can
98 function as a metalinguistic comment, as in (1), repeated below.

99

100 (2) We can have a competition if you like later on.

101 (1) So I went in with a bone of complaint, if you like.

102

103 In (2), the truth or realization of q is dependent on the truth of p . This use contrasts with that
104 in (1), where the use of 'if you like' puts some aspect of q into metalinguistic focus – in this
105 case the phrase 'bone of complaint' – serving the function of commenting on the
106 appropriateness or accuracy of the words uttered.

107 Uses of 'if you like' of the metalinguistic type can be further differentiated according to
108 what is being hedged. Three hedging roles of 'if you like' are identified here. The first is as in
109 (1), where 'if you like' comments on specific linguistic aspects of q . In this role, 'if you like'
110 typically occurs with metaphors or figures of speech, such as the phrase 'bone of complaint' in
111 (1); it also occurs when the speaker searches for a particular word as in (3), when qualifying
112 the use of words that may not be familiar to the hearer, such as in (4) – which draws attention
113 to terminology specific to an academic field – or when the speaker is not themselves
114 comfortable with a particular expression or to acknowledge that the hearer may not accept its
115 use, as in (5) with the word 'forced'.²

116

117 (3) The caricaturist [...] presents a kind of unrelenting, uh, sort of repetition of a particular
118 way of looking at them, um, a particular image of them if you like. (ICE-GB S2A-057
119 072)

120 (4) And that is the prosodic effect, if you like, of the liquids in these words. (ICE-GB S2A-
121 030 034)

122 (5) More and more people are being, if you like, forced into the private sector. (ICE-GB
123 S1B-039 102)

124

125 In all of these cases, the metalinguistic aspect can be emphasized by putting the target
126 expression in quotation marks to indicate that something non-propositional is being hedged.

127 The second use of metalinguistic 'if you like' is where it hedges the overall
128 illocutionary act of assertion, as in (6).

129

130 (6) So if you like, that is the definitive statement for the time being. (ICE-GB S1B-007
131 205)

132

² See Brinton (2008: 164-166) for analogous uses of metalinguistic 'if you will'.

133 While in (1) we can put 'bone of complaint' in quotation marks to make manifest the exact
134 word or phrase being hedged, in (6) there is no specific phrase that 'if you like' attaches to.
135 Instead, 'if you like' hedges the assertion of the entire main clause, thereby signalling the
136 speaker's awareness of the impropriety or controversy of making the assertion expressed in *q*.

137 The third use is that 'if you like' can hedge the *propositional content* of *q*. That is,
138 rather than commenting on either the propriety of the words used or the speech act of
139 assertion, it is the *content* of the assertion itself that is being hedged. Note that in (6), 'if you
140 like' could plausibly function as *both* a hedge of the illocutionary act of asserting *q*, and of the
141 propositional content of *q*, depending on the speaker's intended use. While this third use of 'if
142 you like' does not concern linguistic characteristics such as form, pronunciation or choice of
143 words, it can still be considered 'metalinguistic' on the basis that its primary function is to
144 reduce the speaker's commitment to *q* as opposed to contributing propositional content.³

145 Note that these three metalinguistic functions of 'if you like' can also be found in
146 fully-fledged conditional sentence structures in which the *if*-clause makes those hedging roles
147 explicit, exemplified in (7)-(9) respectively.

148

149 (7) It is still peanuts if you'll pardon the expression. (ICE-GB S2B-021 017)

150 (8) Very short skirt on if you don't mind me saying. (ICE-GB S1A-040 089)

151 (9) He came to you seeking to expand, if you agree with me. (ICE-GB S1B-064 132)

152

153 In (7), the *if*-clause comments on an aspect of the linguistic form of the consequent – the
154 word 'peanuts' – thereby explicitly acknowledging that the choice of expression may not be
155 accepted by the hearer. In (8), the *if*-clause acknowledges the potential impropriety of the
156 speech act of asserting *q*. And finally, in (9), the *if*-clause hedges the propositional content of
157 *q*, calling for the hearer's agreement on the content of the assertion.

158 These three uses of 'if you like', and by extension other metalinguistic *if*-clauses that
159 overtly perform the same discursive function, appear to fall under Csipak's (2016) class of
160 'discourse-structuring conditionals' which satisfy the two defining features that (i) *p* refers to
161 a feature of the present discourse situation, as opposed to facts outside of the discourse
162 situation, and (ii) *p* cannot occur with past temporal reference. The latter feature is shown in
163 the comparison between (10)-(12): while the past tense for both the hypothetical (10) and
164 biscuit (11) conditionals are acceptable, in (12) it is not (examples from Csipak 2016).

165

166 (10) If Alex is in San Francisco right now, she is having iced coffee.

167 (10a) If Alex was in San Francisco yesterday, she was having iced coffee.

168

169 (11) If you are hungry right now, there are biscuits on the sideboard.

170 (11a) If you were hungry yesterday, there were biscuits on the sideboard.

171

172 (12) Alex is a little odd, if you know what I mean.

173 (12a) # Alex was a little odd, if you knew what I meant yesterday.

174

175 It appears that all three of the metalinguistic uses of 'if you like' considered here fall under
176 Csipak's definition of a discourse-structuring conditional – including those that hedge the

³ Thank you to an anonymous referee for making me clarify this terminology.

177 propositional content of q – insofar as p refers to some aspect of the present discourse
178 situation, and likewise cannot occur with past temporal reference:

179

180 (6) So if you like, that is the definitive statement for the time being.

181 (6a) # That was the definitive statement, if you liked yesterday.

182

183 (9) He came to you seeking to expand, if you agree with me.

184 (9a) # He came to you seeking to expand, if you agreed with me yesterday.

185

186 However, where my category of metalinguistic conditionals comes apart from Csipak's
187 'discourse-structuring conditionals' is that she posits the additional defining feature that
188 'discourse-structuring conditionals' are 'biscuit conditionals' such as (14), to the extent that q
189 is considered true regardless of the truth of p , as opposed to hypothetical conditionals such as
190 (13), in which the truth of q is dependent on the truth of p .

191

192 (13) If John went shopping today, there are biscuits on the sideboard.

193 (14) There are biscuits on the sideboard if you want them. (Austin 1961)

194

195 However, as I show below, metalinguistic conditionals do not always satisfy the criteria for
196 biscuithood.

197 Two standard tests (e.g. DeRose and Grandy 1999) to distinguish hypothetical
198 conditionals from biscuit conditionals are the question (what if not- p ?) and contraposition (if
199 not- q then not- p) tests, exemplified for (13) and (14) below—where (14a) and (14b) are
200 infelicitous.

201

202 (13a) What if John didn't go shopping today? (There are no biscuits on the sideboard.)

203 (13b) If there are no biscuits on the sideboard, John didn't go shopping today.

204

205 (14a) # And what if I don't want any? (There are no biscuits on the sideboard.)

206 (14b) # If there are no biscuits on the sideboard, you don't want any.

207

208 On first glance, metalinguistic 'if you like' also appears to fail the tests for dependence
209 between p and q .

210

211 (1) So I went in with a bone of complaint, if you like.

212 (1a) # And what if I don't like? (I didn't go in with a bone of complaint.)

213 (1b) # If I didn't go in with a bone of complaint, then you don't like (it).

214

215 Such tests appear to license putting utterances using metalinguistic 'if you like' in the class of
216 biscuit conditionals: p and q express independent propositions at the compositional level of
217 the sentence. However, when 'if you like' hedges the *propositional* content of q , we get a
218 different result.

219

220 (6) So if you like, that is the definitive statement for the time being.

221 (6b) And what if I don't like? (That is not the definitive statement.)

222 (6c) If that is not the definitive statement, you don't like (it).

223

224 In this case, the truth of *q* is dependent on the truth of *p*, and 'if you like' acts as a conditional
225 clause with a hypothetical relationship between *p* and *q*. So while metalinguistic conditionals
226 share the features that *p* refers to some aspect of the discourse situation and that *p* cannot
227 occur with past temporal reference, they are not uniquely a species of biscuit conditional as
228 they can also take hypothetical readings.

229 We could posit a difference between the uses of 'if you like' that hedge the form or
230 style of *q* and those uses that hedge the content of *q*: in the former, if the antecedent is denied
231 by the hearer (however unnatural it may be to do so), the speaker can only retract the
232 *acceptability* of the assertion, not the assertion itself. By contrast, in the propositional
233 hedging uses, any denial of the antecedent would require the speaker to deny the truth of the
234 consequent as well. Such a distinction would correspond to Declerck and Reed's (2001)
235 difference between 'metalinguistic P-conditionals', in which the *if*-clause comments "on the
236 choice of words in [*q*] or on the pronunciation of a word" (2001: 353) and their 'content-
237 evaluating-P conditionals', in which the *if*-clause comments on the *content* of *q* (2001: 347).

238 However, the motivation for such a distinction is refuted by the fact that it is possible
239 for a metalinguistic *if*-clause to target *both* linguistic aspects of *q* and the propositional
240 content of *q*, as in (7).

241

242 (7) Chris managed to solve the problem, if "manage" is the right word. (Dancygier 1999:
243 104)

244

245 First, the tests for hypotheticality are able to target the relevant linguistic aspect of *q*, namely
246 the conventional implicature associated with 'manage' that solving the problem was in some
247 way difficult for Chris. This is exemplified in (7a)-(7b).

248

249 (7a) What if "manage" is not the right word? (Chris did not "manage" to solve the
250 problem.)

251 (7b) If Chris didn't "manage" to solve the problem, "manage" is not the right word.

252

253 This reading is made manifest by putting 'manage' in scare quotes—a case of metalinguistic
254 negation. But equally, the tests can also target the entailed content of 'manage', namely that
255 Chris solved the problem, as in (7c)-(7d).⁴

256

257 (7c) What if "manage" is not the right word? (Chris did not solve the problem.)

258 (7d) If Chris didn't solve the problem, "manage" is not the right word.

259

260 In either case, (7) passes the test for hypotheticality, refuting the hypothesis that hedges of
261 form/style versus propositional content correspond to the categories of biscuit and
262 hypothetical conditionals respectively.⁵ In other words, given that metalinguistic 'if you like'

⁴ Dancygier's (1999) class of 'metatextual conditionals' also includes cases where the *if*-clause targets implicatures of *q*, such as in 'Chris managed to solve the problem, if solving it was at all difficult for him' (1999: 104). Discussion of such examples goes beyond the scope of this paper, where the focus is on the metalinguistic discourse marker 'if you like' and its status as conditional, although the semantic analysis offered in Section 6 is expected to be able to handle such cases.

⁵ Substituting 'if you like' for the full phrase 'if "manage" is the right word' yields the same results.

263 can satisfy a dependency relation between p and q when 'if you like' targets the propositional
264 content of q , or even a conventional implicature available in q , suggests that the question of
265 what is being hedged in a metalinguistic conditional cross-cuts the hypothetical-biscuit
266 distinction. In turn, this throws caution to the view that metalinguistic 'if you like' is
267 semantically distinct from its conditional, hypothetical use, thus lending credence to the aim
268 of giving a uniform semantics of metalinguistic conditionals and hypothetical conditionals of
269 the standard type.

270

271 3 Semantics versus pragmatic accounts of metalinguistic markers

272

273 While metalinguistic 'if you like' shares characteristics with both 'regular' conditionals of the
274 hypothetical type, as well as fully-fledged *if*-clauses that make explicit their metalinguistic
275 use, there is an outstanding question of whether 'if you like' as a *discourse marker* belongs to
276 the realm of grammar in the first place. Metalinguistic 'if you like' fits in the category of
277 discourse markers insofar as it fulfills a non-propositional, metadiscursive function (cf.
278 Hansen 1998).⁶ But just because a given word or structure does not typically contribute to the
279 propositional content of the utterance in which it occurs, does not automatically write it off as
280 *potentially* fulfilling a propositional role, and hence the question of what kind of semantic
281 analysis they can, or should, be given remains open.

282 The semantics of a number of other metalinguistic markers has been given recent
283 attention, including of metalinguistic comparatives (e.g. Giannakidou and Yoon 2010,
284 Morzycki 2011), metalinguistic '...ish' (Bochnak and Csipak 2014), and metalinguistic
285 intensifiers (Morzycki 2012, Beltrama 2016), exemplified in (15)-(17) respectively.⁷

286

287 (15) Your problems are *more* financial than legal.

288 (16) They won the match...*ish*.

289 (17) Your shoes are *downright* huge.

290

291 These varying but related phenomena mirror metalinguistic 'if you like' insofar as they all
292 signal an attitude toward some linguistic expression. Moreover, accounts of these phenomena
293 cited above each aim to relate the metalinguistic uses of the respective markers to their
294 'ordinary' counterparts, showing how they share a common 'semantic core'. While the
295 proposals differ in the details of their semantic treatments, what brings these accounts
296 together is to treat the relevant metalinguistic marker as grammaticalized, and hence as a
297 separate lexical item to their propositional counterparts. These accounts thereby favor what I
298 term a semantic approach to the representation of meaning, in which different uses of the
299 same word or structure give rise to independent readings which are determined pre-
300 semantically. One item is thus ascribed several senses in the lexicon—one per meaning
301 variation. The benefit of the semantic approach is that different readings can be derived
302 without assuming one as 'semantically prior' to another. The parallels between the readings
303 can be captured in the different lexical semantics while at the same time differentiating the

⁶ As Heine (2013) points out, how to define a 'discourse marker' is not uniformly agreed; e.g. Siepmann (2005: 52) classes metalinguistic comments as 'second-level discourse markers'. I opt out of this debate and retain 'discourse marker' as a general term that indicates the non-propositional status of 'if you like'.

⁷ Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to these references.

304 circumstances under which the metalinguistic reading occurs.⁸ This approach is best pursued
305 when a metalinguistic phenomenon is considered grammatical, as opposed to pragmatic.

306 It may be tempting to consider 'if you like' grammaticalized on a par with the other
307 metalinguistic markers described above given both its distinct distributional properties and
308 pragmatic function to hypothetical conditionals. This would not be a surprising move given
309 the diachronic evidence for 'if you like' as a metalinguistic marker, with the conditional use of
310 'if you like' dating from the mid-fifteenth century, and the non-conditional metalinguistic
311 version coming in later at the end of the sixteenth century (Chen 1996). Indeed, Chen
312 describes such *if*-clauses as 'deconditionalized', observing them as somehow resistant to
313 formal reduction (Chen 1996). However, note the following passage from Fretheim et al
314 (2003):

315
316 Parenthetical expressions like 'if you like' [...] constrain the speaker's ostensibly
317 communicated propositional attitude [...]. Their extra-clausal syntactic position and
318 the lack of stress that goes with that position are indicative of a *grammaticalization*
319 *process* involving the loss of truth-conditional meaning. (Fretheim et al 2003: 59, my
320 emphasis)

321
322 Note that Fretheim et al refer to a *process* of grammaticalization; they do not state that 'if you
323 like' is fully grammaticalized. In fact, as Hansen (1998) argues, discourse markers are
324 *necessarily* not fully grammaticalized exactly because they are extra-clausal and do not make
325 predictions about the syntax of their host units, and thus cannot constitute end points of the
326 grammaticalization process. Hansen also reports a correlation between the 'semantic
327 transparency' of discourse markers and their grammaticalization, to the extent that particle-
328 like markers (such as 'well' and 'anyway') are opaquer in meaning and are closer to
329 grammaticalization, while multi-word constructions (such as 'in other words') tend to retain
330 compositionality and productivity in a way that is closer to their propositional uses, and
331 hence are further from grammaticalization. This latter observation aligns with those made so
332 far for the multi-word construction 'if you like' to the extent that its different uses can be
333 considered more or less 'conditional' depending on what is being hedged, indicating a
334 retention of compositionality that mirrors the canonical conditional use. It is therefore too
335 strong a move to consider 'if you like' as grammaticalized, and hence the move to treat 'if you
336 like' as syntactically and semantically distinct from other conditionals should be avoided.

337 An alternative, then, is to take a pragmatic approach to the problem, akin to Horn's
338 (1989) seminal treatment of metalinguistic negation. On this kind of approach, a canonical,
339 semantic, reading of a given phenomenon is assumed, while divergences from this reading

⁸ We could go so far as to describe these accounts as positing lexical *ambiguity* between the metalinguistic and ordinary readings. But note that describing the lexical items as 'ambiguous' does not presuppose complete conceptual distinctness between the senses in the same way as for ambiguous nouns such as BANK₁ (financial institution) and BANK₂ (riverside). In fact, the parallels between the metalinguistic and propositional versions are inevitable and expected given the diachronic relation between them; equally, because the metalinguistic markers are often in complementary distribution to their propositional counterparts – an indication of their grammaticalization – motivates postulating the different readings as due to their distinct lexical semantics. Rather, I use the term 'ambiguity' to refer to the level of representation at which the meaning variations occur. It is because meaning variations are accounted for at the semantic level that the same word/structure can be considered ambiguous, as multiple senses are not expected to co-occur in a given context of utterance. Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for making me clarify this point.

340 are derived pragmatically. While Austin (1961) favored an ambiguity account to separate
341 hypothetical from biscuit conditionals, the pragmatic account is generally preferred in the
342 treatment of biscuit conditionals. The formal details differ between accounts, but the main
343 idea is that the biscuit reading is derived as a pragmatic inference: since q is independent
344 from p , the speaker must have independent contextual reasons for asserting the conditional.
345 Franke (2009) is a strong proponent of this pragmatic view, which has been followed and
346 refined by Francez (2015) and Lauer (2014), among others. A Franke-style pragmatic
347 analysis is also followed by Csipak (2016) for her category of discourse-structuring
348 conditionals that are closely related to the class of metalinguistic conditionals as discussed in
349 the previous section.

350 There are convincing arguments for this kind of unified position wherein different
351 readings retain the same semantics, including the facts that both hypothetical and biscuit
352 conditionals can be expressed using the same 'if p , q ' sentence form, and that biscuit
353 conditionals are well-attested across languages, indicating a systematic relationship between
354 the two uses. Furthermore, given the prevalence of conditionals of the hypothetical type both
355 in the literature on conditionals but also attested in language⁹, it is natural to posit non-
356 canonical readings as deriving from the hypothetical type. However, treating the
357 metalinguistic reading as a secondary inference has undesirable consequences for a semantic
358 account that strives for cognitive reality. This is because – following the tradition in
359 philosophical semantics and pragmatics (e.g. Recanati 2010, Carston 2002) – semantic, truth-
360 conditional content is assumed to be derived by automatic cognitive processes that stem from
361 the logical form of the utterance, while pragmatic 'implicatures' are derived through
362 secondary pragmatic processes. Taking the hypothetical reading to inform the semantics of 'if
363 you like' would therefore come with the theoretical commitment that interlocutors entertain
364 the hypothetical conditional reading first, and then override the mismatch with the
365 metalinguistic reading. In other words, it would make the metalinguistic reading of 'if you
366 like' a secondary inference that is obtained via an explicit-to-implicit, two-stage cognitive
367 process. So even when Gricean implicatures are considered the main, intended meaning of a
368 speaker (cf. Jaszczolt 2010), the pragmatic account assumes them to be recovered by the
369 hearer due to the mismatch in the assumed intended content and the explicit content of what
370 is said.¹⁰

371 What we want is to retain an element of both the semantic account – which would
372 allow the metalinguistic reading primacy in the semantics of 'if you like' – and the pragmatic
373 account, which would avoid 'multiplying senses beyond necessity' (Grice 1989: 47) and give
374 a uniform semantics across uses. However, the struggle to do so seems to stem from the
375 puzzle that 'if you like' presents in the determination of what counts as 'explicit meaning'.
376 That is, while the conditional meaning is available due to the sentence form of the utterance
377 in which it occurs and so appears the most likely candidate for explicit meaning, 'if you like'
378 as a discourse marker makes the metalinguistic meaning no less explicit and certainly more
379 automatic. What we seem to have is 'if you like' as a case of 'standardization', wherein
380

⁹ (Withdrawn reference) finds 76% of *if*-conditionals in the ICE-GB to be hypothetical conditionals of the resultative or inferential type.

¹⁰ This is the case even when a speaker only 'makes as if to say p ', as Grice (1989: 30-31) purported for verbal irony. In this case, the speaker does not, in essence, *say* anything; yet the ironic message is still computed as a conversational implicature. Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out as a comparison case.

381 the hearer can reason directly, thanks to standardization, from the utterance to the
382 indirect force, but the direct statement (in indicative cases) is always recoverable.
383 (Bach 1995: 682)

384

385 In other words, the standardized metalinguistic meaning is the default, automatic meaning
386 that a hearer is likely to recover, although the equally explicit, but conversationally
387 dispreferred, hypothetical interpretation is nevertheless recoverable should the interlocutors
388 choose to draw upon it. Indeed, the default interpretation of 'if you like' isn't even one that
389 requires postulating 'unarticulated meanings' or a 'developed logical form' as on standard
390 contextualist accounts (e.g. Recanati 2010, Carston 2002): the metalinguistic reading falls
391 straight out of the use of 'if you like' as a discourse marker. The fact that we essentially have
392 two options competing for the status of 'what is said', that is, the truth-conditional semantic
393 meaning, both of which stem from the logical form, means that the dual-processing view of
394 conditionals – and the explicit-implicit processing view of standard post-Gricean analyses –
395 falls down.

396 What I offer here instead is a third option: to treat 'if you like' as polysemous between
397 its metalinguistic discourse marking function and its role as a conditional clause proper. This
398 approach is motivated by the fact that one and the same utterance using 'if you like' can
399 potentially give rise to both readings *in the same context*, warning against postulating
400 separate lexical items for 'if'. Equally, it also avoids treating one reading as semantically prior
401 to another: both readings are accessible, although given the salience of the metalinguistic
402 reading, it is expected to be more consciously accessible.

403

404 **4 'If you like' as polysemous**

405

406 To treat 'if you like' as polysemous is to retain multiple senses of the *if*-clause as *potentially*
407 *present*, allowing that more than one reading can be instantiated in a given context. This is
408 different to treating the clause as structurally ambiguous with two distinct readings and then
409 disambiguating the readings in context in virtue of the speaker's intended meaning. Rather, I
410 use the term 'polysemous' to refer to the idea that both readings are accessible at the level of
411 explicit meaning, and while one can be viewed as 'primary' (and hence 'semantic' – see
412 Section 6) and the other as 'secondary', one can legitimately 'sentence-mean' both meanings in
413 the same context.^{11, 12} To be sure, the first sense is the metalinguistic one: the reading that is
414 expected to arise automatically by default, and that has led others to treat 'if you like' as a
415 discourse marker without propositional import. The second sense is the conditional one,
416 which requires greater justification as constituting part of the explicit meaning of 'if you like'.

417 From a discursive point of view, we have seen that 'if you like' shares a discourse
418 function with other fully-fledged conditional structures such as 'if you don't mind me saying'.
419 But a brief diachronic story will elucidate that the relationship runs deeper than simply a
420 pragmatic similarity. Looking at the analogous clause 'if you will', Brinton (2008) conjectures
421 that 'if you will' arose as a shortened version of the overtly conditional 'if you are willing to

¹¹ The practice of keeping polysemous readings 'live' is what Nerlich and Clarke (2001) call 'ambiguating' in context—as opposed to 'disambiguating' in context.

¹² Note that availability of the metalinguistic reading is only applicable to metalinguistic conditionals in virtue of their pragmatic and distributional features described in Section 2 and is not expected to extend to *all* conditionals of the form 'if *p*, *q*'. Thank to you an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this clarification.

422 do so' that occurs in directive contexts, where both *if*-clauses play the same discursive role of
423 hedging the illocutionary force of the directive issued in *q*. Specifically, she suggests that
424 these directive contexts included verbs of 'saying' and 'calling' as in (18) (quoted after the
425 OED), thereby extending the role of 'if you will' beyond that of a hedge of directive speech
426 acts, to that of a metalinguistic hedge.

427

428 (18) Call them if you will, Popish fooles, and addleheads. (1641 'Smectymnuus', *An*
429 *Answer to a Booke entituled An Humble Remonstrance*)

430

431 Brinton suggests that such utterances using verbs related to 'calling' provided a 'bridging
432 context' that facilitated 'if you will' to undergo a semantic shift from the directive hedge 'if
433 you are willing to *do* so' to the metalinguistic hedge 'if you are willing to *say* so'. As she says,
434 while the illocutionary force of such utterances would be directive and would thus lead to the
435 interpretation 'if you are willing to do so', the verb 'call' "invites the inference that supplies
436 the metalinguistic sense 'if you are willing to say so'" (Brinton 2008: 178). This
437 metalinguistic reading then applied beyond verbs that explicitly invoked the acts of calling or
438 saying, and hence the metalinguistic use of 'if you will' extended beyond directive contexts.

439 Brinton's analysis suggests that metalinguistic 'if you will' arose directly from its
440 conditional use. An analogous development of metalinguistic 'if you like' stemming from its
441 conditional counterparts can plausibly be conjectured by the fact that we can find
442 metalinguistic *if*-clauses using 'like' that explicitly specify the metalinguistic sense, as in (19)
443 and (20) (quoted after the OED).

444

445 (19) "But why did he leave the half-million to his son, in his will?" "*Gaga*, my dear
446 Binkie. Just *gaga*. Senile, if you'd like it better." (1929 W. J. Locke *Ancestor Jorico*
447 xviii)

448 (20) A steady blasting of the ship's whistle sounded abandon ship that afternoon shortly
449 before six bells, if you like nautical parlance. (1966 H. Brean *Traces of Merrilee* viii.
450 85)

451

452 These examples increase the plausibility that 'if you like' is related to fully-fledged *if*-clauses
453 such as 'if you like what I'm saying' or 'if you like to call it that' that use 'like' as a verb of
454 appreciation, and hence that the metalinguistic conditional reading of 'if you like' can be
455 obtained compositionally from an interaction of its derivative parts. To treat 'if you like'
456 solely as a discourse marker does not provide any explanation for how intuitively close in
457 both form and content 'if you like' is with the *if*-clauses in (19) and (20).¹³

458 Acknowledging that metalinguistic 'if you like' retains a conditional meaning would
459 allow for, and explain, the potential activation of dual readings when uttered in context. First,
460 it is not only that bridging contexts with verbs of calling and saying support a diachronic
461 relationship between 'if you will' and 'if you like' with their fully-fledged counterparts, but
462 such contexts also highlight that the *if*-clauses can potentially take on both metalinguistic and
463 hypothetical readings.

464

465 (21) You could call it ingenuity if you like. (*BNC*, G4N 406)

¹³ Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

466

467 In (21), both a metalinguistic and a hypothetical reading of 'if you like' is available: putting
468 the target content in quotation marks – 'ingenuity' – makes salient the metalinguistic reading,
469 while the verb 'to call' provides the directive force on which 'if you like' can operate as a
470 hypothetical condition akin to 'if you like to call it that'.

471 Note that it is not only in contexts of calling and saying that a dual reading is possible.
472 It is the theoretical move to treat 'if you like' as polysemous and to posit the availability of a
473 conditional reading that can explain how interlocutors are able to capitalize on the difference
474 between its hypothetical and metalinguistic uses, as in the following extract from Michael
475 Frayne's (2014) comic *Matchbox Theatre*:

476

477 So what I'm proposing to attempt in this talk is, if you like, an *investigation* into why
478 anyone who makes any kind of, if you like, *comment* on anything these days has to
479 stress so many of the words as if they were in a foreign language, and then put 'if you
480 like' in front of them. I suspect that it's intended to suggest some kind of...

481 - Hold on a moment. If I like? (Frayne 2014: 201)

482

483 While the comic value of the opening prose arises by the speaker using 'if you like' as a
484 metalinguistic comment while also commenting on others' use of 'if you like' in ordinary
485 discourse, the addressee's clarificatory question 'if I like?' draws on the hypothetical use of 'if
486 you like', thereby highlighting the two possible readings. Admittedly, the fact that certain
487 constructions can be used as the source of linguistic jokes cannot be taken as evidence for
488 how speakers use constructions in everyday conversation, nor as a test for positing different
489 levels of representation (cf. Jaszczolt 2016: 24). But the fact that a certain construction has
490 the *potential* to be exploited for its linguistic properties can be taken as evidence of the tacit
491 knowledge that speakers have in their linguistic arsenal (e.g. Aarons 2012).

492 Finally, the availability of the conditional reading is perhaps more convincing when
493 we see that a speaker can felicitously make reference to the audience's uptake, as in (22).

494

495 (22) We all know the feeling of walking round thinking something's missing. Sometimes
496 it's our trousers, that's rectifiable. But sometimes it is, if you will, the trousers of
497 meaning. Well, <laugh> I accept some of you won't. (BBC Radio 4 2016)¹⁴

498

499 Here, the speaker capitalizes on the use of 'if you will' to make it explicit that the target
500 expression departs from certain conventions, and moreover, that a hearer may not accept its
501 use. Although any elicited response is expected to be rhetorical at best, the 'if *p*, *q*' form
502 nevertheless allows the hearer the *potential* to reject the phrase. That is, it is the form given
503 by the *if*-clause that gives rise to a potential conditional reading that treating 'if you will' and
504 'if you like' solely as discourse markers would not allow.

505 To repeat, taking 'if you like' as polysemous is not to say that it requires
506 disambiguating pre-semantically, but it is to retain both readings as 'live' options that can
507 legitimately be drawn upon in interaction. To clarify, the two readings that are available are:
508 (i) 'if you like' as a metalinguistic hedge, that indicates the speaker's reduced commitment to

¹⁴ Mark Watson talks a bit about life. 2016. *BBC Radio 4* 13 September.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07v0fv4> (accessed 14 September 2016).

509 *q* in some way, and (ii) the metalinguistic *conditional* reading, which allows the hearer to
510 draw on the use of 'if' to refute the legitimacy of the assertion of *q*. While the metalinguistic
511 meaning is arguably the most likely, primary meaning of 'if you like', the conditional reading
512 is an *optional* secondary meaning that may or may not be activated by interlocutors.

513

514 **5 The semantic 'core' of conditionals**

515

516 The upshot of viewing 'if you like' as polysemous with a potential conditional meaning
517 invites the question of what the semantic 'core' of conditionals is that unites conditional
518 metalinguistic 'if you like' with hypothetical and biscuit conditionals. This section draws on
519 previous work (e.g. withdrawn references), outlining two pragmatic criteria for delimiting the
520 class of conditional utterances that places the notion of conditionality at a conceptual level.
521 Such a view on conditionals avoids an ambiguity account of conditionals, while also desisting
522 the conditional-first pragmatic view. The case of 'if you like' also provides additional
523 justification for seeking such a pragmatic construal of conditionals in order that the
524 conditional meaning can be viewed as a secondary, optional, meaning that is derived
525 pragmatically, rather than as an underlying semantic meaning that needs overriding to obtain
526 the metalinguistic reading. But the benefit of adopting pragmatic criteria is not only that they
527 will admit *if*-clauses that are used to express either conditional or non-conditional meanings
528 as primary, but they have the added explanatory power of showing how expressions without
529 'if', such as those in (23) to (25), express the intuitive conditionality that they do (cf.
530 withdrawn references).

531

532 (23) Take one more step and I'll shoot.

533 (24) Your money or your life.

534 (25) You like it? It's yours.

535

536 Thus, not only do we move away from a semantic view of conditionals delineated by their
537 truth conditions, but also from any definition that relies on specific lexical items or
538 grammatical structures.

539 To capture conditionality as a concept at the level of thought, I class an utterance as
540 conditional as long as

541

542 (a) the antecedent *p* indicates remoteness; and

543 (b) *p* restricts the situations in which *q* holds.

544

545 The criteria are 'pragmatic' insofar as satisfying them is not a matter of structural or
546 propositional constraints, but requires recourse to pragmatic processing and extra-linguistic
547 information. Note that these criteria do not override more familiar syntactic or semantic
548 criteria, insofar as utterances adhering to form-based definitions will also be admitted in the
549 pragmatic category. The difference is that the pragmatic category is broader in scope, as it

550 admits conditional thoughts that are expressed without using 'if' which would typically be
551 excluded from structural definitions.¹⁵

552

553 5.1 Remoteness

554

555 The first criterion of remoteness stems from Grice (1967), who proposed a pragmatic solution
556 to the fact that speakers do not always treat natural language conditionals as material
557 conditionals.¹⁶ He maintained that:

558

559 [...] in standard cases to say 'if p then q ' is to be conventionally committed to (to
560 assert or imply in virtue of the meaning of 'if') both the proposition that $p \rightarrow q$ and the
561 Indirectness Condition. (Grice 1967: 58)

562

563 In other words, an utterance of 'if p , q ' adheres to the truth conditions as defined by the truth
564 function of material implication and, in addition, there is a Generalized Conversational
565 Implicature that there are non-truth-functional grounds for making the assertion (the
566 Indirectness Condition). To put it another way, an utterance of 'if p , q ' is expected to be
567 uttered in accordance with the Cooperative Principle, and thus if the speaker had evidence for
568 a stronger statement, for example using 'since' in place of 'if', he/she should have said so.

569 Without taking on the view that natural language conditionals behave as material
570 conditionals, we can generalize Grice's proposal to the extent that use of the word 'if' signifies
571 that the speaker does not present the antecedent as certainly true. Of course, not all
572 conditionals are expressed using 'if', so to take the burden off any single lexical item, we can
573 offer the more general statement that this uncertainty – what I call 'remoteness' – is a feature
574 of the antecedent p in general.

575 Conditional metalinguistic 'if you like', both following the 'if p , q ' sentence form and
576 using the canonical conditional marker 'if', satisfies the requirement of remoteness
577 automatically in virtue of its form. That is, the conditional reading is obtained
578 compositionally from its constituent parts, and so 'if you like' presupposes that the speaker
579 does not expect the hearer to automatically accept q , and hence does not presume that p is
580 true.

581 It may be noted at this point that some antecedents, such as that in (26) appear to
582 violate the remoteness requirement in virtue of being objectively true.

583

584 (26) If Jones had taken arsenic, he would have shown just exactly those symptoms which
585 he does in fact show. (from Anderson 1951: 37)

586

587 On this I maintain that, regardless of whether p is true in the actual world, by putting p in a
588 conditional structure, it is *presented* as unknown and thereby suspends the speaker's own

¹⁵ The criteria are inclusive of syntactic or grammatical definitions of conditionals insofar as if, in the future, some *if*-clause were to become grammaticalized with no conditional import, those *if*-clauses would not satisfy the syntactic definition of conditionality in virtue of being separate grammatical markers. Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for making me clarify this point.

¹⁶ There are ample studies showing that speakers do not process natural language conditionals as material conditionals (see e.g. Evans and Over 2004).

589 assessment on the actual state of affairs. Even if the truth of p is made explicit, for example
590 by adding 'and he has' after the antecedent in (26),¹⁷ it is by couching the true state of affairs
591 in an *if*-clause that allows the speaker to construct a convincing argument: p is presented as
592 remote precisely in order to argue that p is true. So regardless of whether the speaker is
593 *actually committed to the truth of p* , by presenting it in a conditional utterance, the speaker
594 signals that it is not, at least for the purpose of the utterance at hand, presupposed. In the case
595 of 'if you like', remoteness is satisfied through the positive politeness strategy of not assuming
596 the hearer will accept the assertion of q , regardless of whether the speaker believes that q will
597 actually be accepted.

598

599 5.2 Restriction

600

601 Next, the possible worlds account of conditionals finds its roots in Stalnaker (1975), and it is
602 from here that the second criterion of restriction stems. Motivated by the pitfalls of the
603 material conditional as an analogue to natural language conditionals, Stalnaker proposed the
604 following:

605

606 [...] a conditional statement, if A, then B, is an assertion that the consequent is true,
607 not necessarily in the world as it is, but in the world as it would be if the antecedent
608 were true. (Stalnaker 1975: 68)

609

610 Clearly, many conditional utterances do not lend themselves to a truth-conditional account of
611 this sort, and these truth conditions will not adequately extend to biscuit conditionals where p
612 does not restrict the truth of q . But what this truth-conditional theory provides us with is a
613 way of thinking about conditional utterances that relies on restricting our attention to those
614 situations where p obtains. This is the second criterion for inclusion in the class of conditional
615 utterances: that the consideration of q is restricted to those situations that are specified by p .

616

617 It should not be unsurprising then that, unlike Stalnaker's truth conditions for
618 conditional assertions, this criterion need not be satisfied in terms of truth and falsity but may
619 be satisfied in terms of p narrowing the field of discourse such that q is felicitously uttered.
619 This more pragmatic notion of restriction gives rise to the familiar view of biscuit
620 conditionals in which p clearly does not restrict the worlds in which q is true, but rather,
621 indicates the situations where uttering q is *relevant*. In the case of metalinguistic conditionals,
622 p specifies the condition on which uttering q is *appropriate*.

623

624 'If you like' satisfies the criterion of restriction in different ways depending on what is
625 being hedged. When 'if you like' hedges some aspect of the form of q , as in (1) repeated
626 below, it satisfies the criterion in the same way as other metalinguistic *if*-clauses by providing
627 a restriction on the situations where q is felicitously uttered—and specifically to those
628 situations where the hearer accepts q .

628

629 (1) So I went in with a bone of complaint, if you like.

630

631 That is, 'if you like' restricts the acceptance of q to those situations where the hearer does, in
632 fact, like (or accept) what is being uttered in q .

¹⁷ Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this possibility.

633 On the other hand, when 'if you like' hedges the propositional content of q as in (6), 'if
634 you like' satisfies the restriction criterion in the same way as regular, hypothetical
635 conditionals.

636

637 (6) So if you like, that is the definitive statement for the time being.

638

639 That is, the truth of q is restricted to exactly those situations where p obtains—again, namely
640 where the hearer accepts the content of q . This comes directly from the content of the *if*-
641 clause, where 'if you like' targets the hearer's acceptance of q via the verb of desire. In this
642 case, it is possible to refute the truth of q by refuting the truth of p (cf. (6b) and (6c) in
643 Section 2).

644 Locating conditionality at the level of thought is a move away from requiring an
645 underlying conditional semantics of 'if you like', allowing the *if*-clause to retain its status as a
646 discourse marker, while making available conditionality as a potential secondary meaning for
647 interlocutors to draw upon. The final task is to show how we can semantically represent
648 utterances using 'if you like' such that they retain conditionality as a potential meaning,
649 without the consequence that the *if*-clause must contribute to the propositional content of the
650 utterance. In the following section, I propose a solution that departs from the explicit-to-
651 implicit processing route of conditional utterances, in favor of one that prioritizes the
652 automatic, default meaning for the status of 'what is said' – namely, the metalinguistic reading
653 – and hence informing the truth-conditional content of the utterance.

654

655 **6 Representing metalinguistic conditionals in Default Semantics**

656

657 The option I pursue here as an alternative to the semantic and pragmatic approaches to
658 metalinguistic markers described in Section 3 is that offered by the radical contextualist
659 theory of Default Semantics (e.g. Jaszczolt 2010). There are many varieties of semantic
660 contextualism, but generally speaking, they are guided by the overarching principles that
661 truth conditions are not constrained by the sentence form, and that context is allowed to play
662 a significant role in determining the truth-conditional unit. However, while on 'standard'
663 contextualist analyses both 'bottom up' and 'top down' processes are allowed to operate on the
664 words uttered to produce an enriched, 'developed' (e.g. Carston 2002) or 'modulated' (e.g.
665 Recanati 2010) logical form, the downside to these proposals is that 'what is said' (truth-
666 conditional content) is mandated by the output of grammar and is logically prior to 'what is
667 implicated'. The problem of taking this approach for 'if you like' stems from the question of
668 what counts as its explicit meaning, and whether the metalinguistic reading or the
669 hypothetical reading should take precedence as constituting the 'output of grammar'.

670

671 In contrast to these approaches, in Default Semantics the logical form of the utterance
672 is allowed to be *overridden* to align with the primary, intended meaning of that utterance. The
673 upshot of this move is that truth conditions may be predicated of a unit which corresponds to
674 the syntactic form of the uttered sentence to varying degrees. In the case of 'if you like', it is
675 not that the logical form needs overriding per se, but simply that the *if*-clause should not
676 contribute to truth-conditional content. But the benefit of *potentially* overriding the logical
677 form as is admitted by Default Semantics is that the traditional two-tiered theory consisting of
678 'what is said' (including developments of the logical form, modulated senses, or free
679 pragmatic enrichment, depending on one's contextualist theory) and 'what is implicated'

679 (meanings expressed that go beyond the scope of the syntactic form of the utterance) is
680 collapsed to a one-tiered theory. The logical form of the sentence is not given any preferential
681 status in the model of meaning but is treated as just one source of information that contributes
682 towards generating the primary meaning, and hence unit of truth-conditional analysis.

683 Note that on such a one-tiered theory, conditional sentences (of the form 'if p , q ') with
684 a *non*-conditional primary meaning, as in the case of 'if you like', will still retain a *potential*
685 conditional meaning that is borne out of the sentence form. However, the explicit conditional
686 meaning that pertains to the 'if p , q ' sentence retains the status of a *secondary meaning*,
687 roughly corresponding to an 'implicature' in Gricean pragmatics, which may or may not be
688 activated by interlocutors in conversation. However, the difference between the post-Gricean
689 contextualist accounts briefly mentioned above and the one-tiered version of Default
690 Semantics, is that in the latter, the statuses of propositional content (primary meanings) and
691 implicatures (secondary meanings) are no longer tied to a distinction between explicit, uttered
692 content, and implicit, recovered content. Rather, the explicit/implicit distinction cuts across
693 the primary/secondary distinction: the explicit content from a conditional sentence may take
694 the role of a secondary meaning, while an implicitly recovered conditional meaning may
695 constitute the primary meaning, and vice versa. And in the case of 'if you like', we don't even
696 have to commit to there being *one* explicit meaning: the primary function of 'if you like' in a
697 given context is likely to be as a discourse marker that hedges some aspect of q , while the
698 form of 'if you like' also makes available a potential secondary meaning of conditionality that
699 may or may not be activated in different contexts.

700 Treating the metalinguistic reading as primary and the hypothetical reading as
701 secondary is a controversial move that counters much of the extant philosophical and
702 linguistic literature on conditionals. As such, it is worth expanding on its theoretical
703 implications. First, it has to be emphasized that the account defended here prioritizes *primary*,
704 *intended meanings* in the construction of semantic representations. This means that, in line
705 with the more familiar view on the semantics of conditionals, for 'ordinary' conditionals of
706 the hypothetical type for which the hypothetical meaning is the primary one, the hypothetical
707 meaning will take precedence in the semantic truth-conditional representation. But this is in
708 virtue of equating primary meanings with truth-conditionals meaning, and not because the
709 explicit sentence meaning is solely responsible for deriving semantic content. As discussed
710 by (withdrawn references), conditional sentences displaying a hypothetical relationship
711 between p and q at the level of the logical form are not always used to communicate
712 hypothetical conditional primary meanings, nor are all biscuit conditionals used to
713 communicate non-conditional primary meanings. As such, a major benefit of taking primary
714 meanings as the object of truth-conditional study is that we can offer a uniform semantic
715 account of the conditional and non-conditional meanings that are expressed using the same 'if
716 p , q ' sentence form – as well as conditional meanings expressed using non-canonical forms,
717 as hinted in Section 6 – that is faithful to the cognitive processing of meanings as they are
718 automatically used and recovered in context irrespective of the sentence form by which they
719 are carried.

720 To finish, I briefly outline the key principles of Default Semantics (henceforth DS)
721 that will be sufficient for demonstrating how we can represent the relevant meanings of 'if
722 you like'. Note that DS is not the only framework available for such an analysis, and full
723 explication of the details of the theory would take us beyond the scope of this paper. What I
724 detail below is an illustration of how interlocutors are presumed to arrive at the potential

725 primary and secondary meanings inferred from utterances using 'if you like', as DS offers
 726 conceptual representations pertaining to speakers' general cognitive mechanisms.¹⁸

727 First, DS takes compositionality as a methodological assumption, but rather than
 728 applying it at the level of sentence meaning, uses it at a higher level of representation at
 729 which different sources of information contribute to the composition of meaning. DS
 730 identifies five different sources of information pertaining to both linguistic and extra-
 731 linguistic information, namely: (i) word meaning and sentence structure, (ii) world
 732 knowledge, (iii) situation of discourse, (iv) stereotypes and presumptions about society and
 733 culture, and (v) properties of the human inferential system. Next, DS identifies four potential
 734 processes that can operate on the material taken from these sources of information: of
 735 relevance to us here are (i) word meaning and sentence structure (WS: note that this is both a
 736 source of information and a process), and (ii) social, cultural and world knowledge defaults
 737 (SCWD). Finally, these processes culminate in a *merger of information* (Σ for 'summation')
 738 that in turn outputs the primary meaning of a given utterance. It is important to note that for
 739 different utterances and in different contexts, the sources (and processes operating on them)
 740 will contribute to the merger of information in greater or lesser degrees. WS is the source that
 741 pertains to the logical form of the sentence, including word meanings and sentence structure,
 742 but, crucially, is regarded as just one of several sources of information and can be overridden
 743 by the output of other sources if the context requires it. So to summarize, both primary
 744 meanings and secondary meanings are modeled as the output resulting from the merger of
 745 information coming from the different sources of information.

746 With this brief overview in place, we can now move to represent conditional
 747 utterances using these tools. For the standard cases of conditional sentences with a
 748 conditional primary meaning, the content of that primary meaning comes directly from the
 749 logical form of the sentence, that is, the source WS. Figure 1 represents the conditional
 750 meaning stemming from the literal use of 'if you like' in (2).
 751

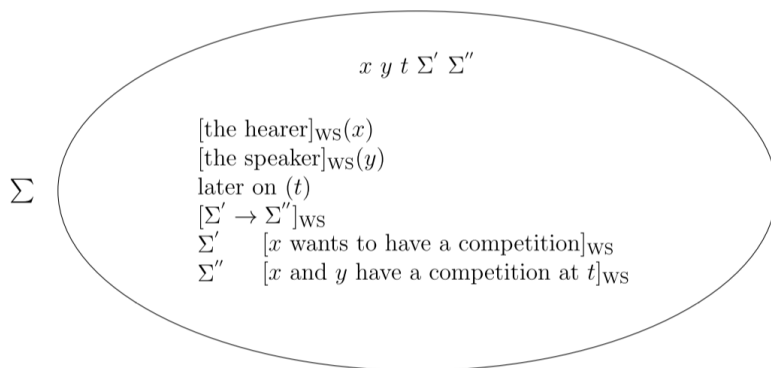


Figure 1: Σ for conditional primary meaning of (2): 'We can have a competition if you like later on'

752
 753
 754 The discourse referents are denoted by x , y , Σ' and Σ'' , and the discourse conditions follow
 755 underneath in square brackets. The subscript after the square brackets refers to the type of
 756 process operating on the content inside the brackets. And as we can see from the

¹⁸ Interested readers are directed to Jaszczolt (2010) for a more detailed overview of the theory, as well as (withdrawn reference) on representing conditional utterances both with and without 'if'.

757 representation, it is only WS that plays a role in generating the required meaning, and the
 758 'standard' conditional truth conditions can be applied to this unit of analysis.

759 Crucially, what the composition of processes allows us to do is to represent the *non-*
 760 conditional meaning that is the primary, intended content of a conditional using
 761 metalinguistic 'if you like' such as (1), as in Figure 2.

762

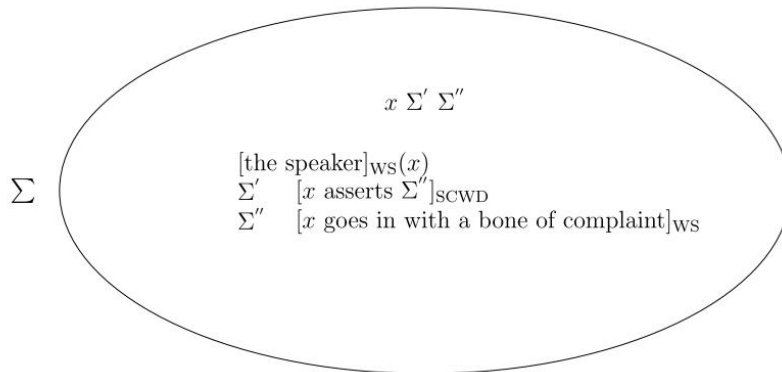


Figure 2: Σ for metalinguistic primary meaning of (1): 'I went in with a bone of complaint, if you like'

763

764

765 The primary meaning pertaining to *q* comes about due to an interaction of the logical form,
 766 the source WS, with the fact that speakers know how 'if you like' is intended to be
 767 understood; in other words, it is due to the hedging role of *p* that the hearer is able to recover
 768 that the main message pertains to *q* alone. This tacit knowledge is attributed as a default of
 769 the SCWD (social, cultural and world knowledge) type.

770 Finally, the conditional *secondary meaning* can be represented as in Figure 3,
 771 highlighting that the speaker's assertion is only accepted when it is deemed felicitous by the
 772 addressee.

773

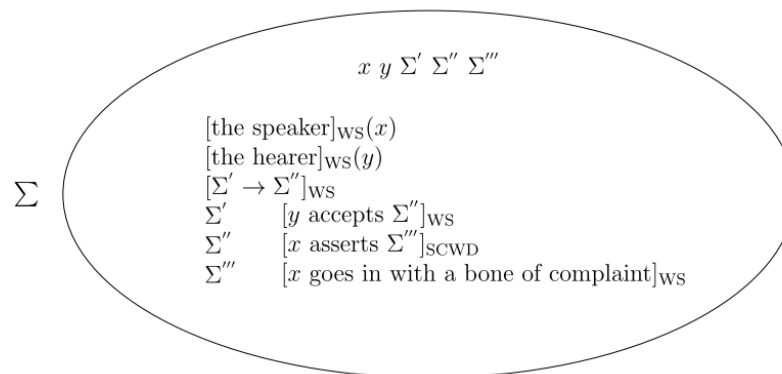


Figure 3: Σ for conditional secondary meaning of (1): 'I went in with a bone of complaint, if you like'

774

775

776 Here, the logical form is again responsible for generating this secondary meaning, but we add
 777 in an extra processing step, namely the one in which *q* is only accepted into the discourse on
 778 the acceptance of the hearer. The conditional readings of other metalinguistic conditionals

779 such as (8) (repeated below) would be represented analogously, where q is deemed to be
780 conditional on the felicity of its utterance.

781

782 (8) Very short skirt on if you don't mind me saying.

783

784 However, other biscuit conditionals would differ in the details, depending on what exactly is
785 conditional: whether that be the relevance of an assertion, a condition for an offer, and so
786 forth. Giving the exact representations for such conditional meanings is a task for another
787 day.

788 To sum up, by taking on board a truth-conditional unit that pertains to a higher level
789 of representation than that of the uttered sentence form, we are able to represent the main,
790 intuitive content that is communicated via 'if you like'. Such representations are easily
791 extendable to other utterances whose conditional meaning may be either primary or
792 secondary. But in addition, we are also able to obtain the desired result that conditional
793 meanings communicated by non-standard conditionals such as 'if you like' retain their
794 conditionality as secondary meanings without the consequence that p has to contribute to the
795 truth-conditional, semantic content of the utterance. This is because although conditionality is
796 intrinsically linked to the sentence structure, it plays a dual role of a discourse marker that
797 gives rise to the non-conditional truth-conditional unit.

798

799 **7 Concluding remarks**

800

801 This paper has analyzed utterances using metalinguistic 'if you like' in light of their apparent
802 mismatch in conditionality and truth conditions, and in doing so I hope to have shown that
803 the status of 'if you like' as a discourse marker and its conditionality need not be mutually
804 exclusive. This has been achieved by first viewing 'if you like' as polysemous, with a
805 dominant metalinguistic hedging reading, and an additional, optional, conditional meaning
806 that can legitimately be activated by interlocutors in discourse. 'If you like' is thus co-opted in
807 the conceptual category of conditionals at large that takes pragmatic criteria for its
808 delineation. This category encompasses conditionality either expressed as the primary,
809 intended meaning of the speaker, or as a secondary meaning that is derived via pragmatic
810 processing. While this is admittedly still a two-step processing view of metalinguistic
811 conditionals, it is a move away from the 'explicit-first' view. This is because the primary *non-*
812 conditional meaning of a hedge is obtained automatically by default, while the conditional
813 meaning would only likely be recovered as a secondary 'implicature'. The upshot is that by
814 taking the primary meaning as the truth-conditional unit, 'if you like' need not contribute to
815 the truth conditions of the utterance in which it features, but it *does* contribute to
816 conditionality.

817

818 It is not a far step away to apply this analysis to other metalinguistic conditionals
819 which perform the same pragmatic function in discourse. While *if*-clauses such as 'if I may
819 say so', 'if you see what I mean', and so forth are less clear-cut as belonging to the class of
820 discourse markers in the strict sense, they are nevertheless used to communicate the same
821 metalinguistic meaning. In this sense, they also have the same duality of explicit meaning,
822 where the metalinguistic hedge is the default, automatic reading, yet the more overtly
823 conditional reading is still recoverable. Note that when we move away from the specific case
824 of metalinguistic conditionals, there is the added consideration that both hypothetical and

825 biscuit conditionals can be used to communicate speech acts other than straightforward
826 assertion (hence the term 'speech-act conditional'), in which case the explicit meaning would
827 require overriding altogether to obtain the desired primary meaning. This is only possible on
828 an account that breaks away from the view that conditional meanings are equated with
829 conditional truth conditions. What I have proposed instead is a reconceptualization of what it
830 is to be conditional which is not tied to truth-conditional content, which allows us to target
831 the primary speech-act as the semantic content.

832

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