Unifying “if”-conditionals and unconditionals

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UMass Amherst
(1) **“If”-conditional:**
If Alfonso comes to the party, it will be fun.
Introduction

(1) “If”-conditional:
If Alfonso comes to the party, it will be fun.

(2) Alternative unconditional:
Whether Alfonso comes to the party or not, it will be fun.

(3) Alternative unconditional:
Whether Alfonso or Joanna comes to the party, it will be fun.

(4) Constituent unconditional:
Whoever comes to the party, it will be fun.
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Goal: unified analysis of “if”-conditionals and unconditionals.
Unconditionals have paraphrases as conjunctions of “if”-conditionals. (Lin 1996)
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In terms of the Lewis/Kratzer/Heim theory of conditionals (LKH): domain (un)restriction.

(7) If Alfonso comes to the party, you should come.
(8) Whether or not Alfonso comes to the party, you should come.
Unconditionals and “if”-conditionals can interfere, and can also stack (un)restrictions.
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(9) # Whether or not Alfonso comes to the party, if Alfonso comes to the party, you should come.

(10) Whether or not Alfonso comes to the party, if the party is at Joanna’s house, you should come.
Similar distribution as an adjunct.
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Conditionals and unconditionals share some tense/aspect patterns. (Hasepelmah and König 1998, Gawron 2001)
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e.g. counterfactual “had...would”:

(11) (Suppose Alfonso didn’t end up going to Bard, and Harvard or Princeton was his other choice.) Whether he had gone to Harvard or to Princeton, he would have become a banker.

(12) Whatever John had chosen, Mary would have been pleased with it. (Gawron)

- Multiple “wh”, no correlated proform in main clause, pattern with interrogatives in echo contexts.
- See poster for details of arguments.
Unconditionals give rise to an “indifference” entailment.
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(13) Whether Alfonso or Joanna comes to the party, it will be fun.

“It doesn’t matter who comes to the party (w.r.t how fun it is).”
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“It doesn’t matter who comes to the party (w.r.t how fun it is).”

No indifference with “if”-conditionals

(14) # If Alfonso goes to the party or not, it will be fun.
(15) If Alfonso or Joanna goes to the party, it will be fun.
Unconditionals give rise to an “indifference” entailment.

(13) Whether Alfonso or Joanna comes to the party, it will be fun.

“It doesn’t matter who comes to the party (w.r.t how fun it is).”

No indifference with “if”-conditionals

(14) # If Alfonso goes to the party or not, it will be fun.
(15) If Alfonso or Joanna goes to the party, it will be fun.

Consequent entailment.
Discourse effects.

(16) A: Alfonso is really great at his job.
    B: Whether or not he’s great at his job, we have to fire him.
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(16) A: Alfonso is really great at his job.
    B: Whether or not he’s great at his job, we have to fire him.

In contrast:

(17) A: Alfonso is really great at his job.
    B: If he’s great at his job, we can’t fire him.
    B’: # If he’s not great at his job, we can fire him.
    B’’: # If he’s great at his job or not, we can fire him.
Similarities and differences follow from treating unconditional adjuncts as interrogative conditional adjuncts.

- Development of ideas by Zaefferer, Lin, Izvorski, and Gawron.
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- Allows for alternatives to participate in composition via Hamblin’s Pointwise Function Application.
- “If”-conditionals: singleton set containing a proposition.
- Unconditionals: exhaustive set of propositions.
Implementation in a Lewis/Kratzer/Heim style theory of conditionals.
  In particular, the binding/correlative version. (von Fintel 1994, Bhatt and Pancheva 2006)
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- Analysis similar to Alonso-Ovalle’s analysis of disjunction in “if”-conditional antecedents.
∀ CP

∀ CP

[Q] whether

OrP comes

Alfonso or Joanna

λ₁ CP

λ₁ CP

it will₁ be fun

PP to the party

Alfonso or Joanna

comes

to the party

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(i) Disjunction or interrogative pronoun introduces alternatives.
(ii) Question operator introduces exhaustivity presupposition, and lets alternatives through.
(iii) Main-clause modal presupposes non-triviality.
(iv) Conditional adjunct binds domain variable.
(v) **Key moment in composition:** conditional adjunct composes with main clause via Pointwise Function Application.
(vi) Default Hamblin $\forall$ operator collects alternatives.
Non-triviality presupposition projects once for each alternative – distribution presupposition.
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Discourse effect: distribution presupposition.

(18) A: Alfonso is really great at his job.
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B presupposes that both A’s claim and its negative are possible, and asserts something that is independent of the choice.
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What does it mean to be a conditional?

Any adjunct that restricts the domain of an operator.