Bulletin of the *Transilvania* University of Braşov
Series IV: Philology and Cultural Studies • Vol. 10 (59) No. 2 – 2017

Paratactic conditionals. A Romance perspective

Raluca ALEXE[1]

The main focus of the present article is to show how conditional meaning can arise in constructions other than the prototypical clauses introduced by 'if' or other conditional conjunctions, namely in coordinate constructions. We discuss the properties of these constructions against all the main elements of prototypical conditionality. In order to illustrate how these constructions invite a conditional interpretation we use examples from some Romance languages (Romanian, Spanish, French) attempting to see if our observations have cross-linguistic value.

Keywords: *conditionality, paratactic structures, Romance languages.*

1. Introduction

A great number of languages with a rich conditional morphology have the possibility of expressing conditionality (*If S1, then S2*) as a coordinate structure (*S1 (and) S2*) (cf. Haiman, 1983), which isn't, in fact, surprising if we think that the Latin conjunction SI 'if' has the same etymological origin as SIC 'thus', having developed its conditional value while used in originally paratactic structures (Harris 1986, 266).

These paratactic if-clauses, also known as pseudo-coordinate (Montolío 1999) or non-marked conditionals (Corminboeuf 2008), may appear as a coordinate structure with conjunctive coordinators (1)-(2), disjunctive coordinators (3) or even as a juxtaposed structure (4)-(5), in which case the conditional relationship is marked by the use of prosodic elements.

Examples (1) through (5) below may be paraphrased as conditional constructions introduced with *if*.

In what follows, I shall discuss how conditional meanings can arise in this type of constructions relying on examples from Romance languages such as Romanian (Alexe, 2015), Spanish (Montolío 1999) and French (Corminboeuf 2008):

[1] Transilvania University of Braşov, raluca.alexe@unitbv.ro

BDD-A28069 © 2017 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 22:09:55 UTC)

(1) a. *Promovează toate examenele **și** îți voi cumpăra mașină.*
'Pass all your exams **and** I'll buy you a car.'
b. *Aprueba todo el curso en junio **y** te compraré la moto.*
'Graduate in june **and** I'll buy you a motorbike.'
c. *Obéis **et** tout ira très bien.*
'Obey **and** everything will be all right.'

(2) a. *Atinge-te de familia mea **și** va fi vai de tine.*
'Touch my family **and** you'll be lost.'
b. *Toca a mi hermano **y** te parto la cara.*
'Touch my brother **and** I'll smash you face'
c. *Touche-moi encore petit **et** je te casse la tête.*
'Touch me again **and** I'll break your head.'

(3) a. *Termină de mâncat **sau** nu vei primi surpriza.*
'Finish eating **or** you won't get the surprise.'
b. *Cómete la cena **o** no verás la tele.*
'Eat your dinner **or** you shall not watch TV'
c. *Dégagez **ou** je vous envoie dans une autre galaxie.*
'Go away **or** I'll send you to another galaxy.'

(4) a. *Nu înveți, nu treci examenul.*
'You don't study, you don't pass the exam.'
b. *Pagas, tienes.*
'You pay, you get it.'
c. *J'entends un truc, je vous descends.*
'I see any tricks, I'll make you get off.'

(5) a. *Vrei scandal? Îl vei avea.*
'Do you want scandal? You'll get it.'
b. *¿Quieres pelea? Pues la tendrás.*
'Do you want a fight? You'll get it'
c. *Vous aimez Berlusconi? Vous allez adorer Blocher.*
'Do you like Berlusconi? You'll love Blocher.'

2. Analysis

The conditional interpretation of these paratactic constructions is sustained by the fact that they are basically compatible with all the main properties of prototypical conditionality: (i) potentiality/non-assertiveness ("the fact that the first conjunct is not put forward as a statement of truth" cf. Elder 2012, 195); (ii) a causal relation between the contents of the two members of the construction, associated to fixed word order, reflecting the protasis-apodosis sequence typically associated with the conditional relationship which presents the situation described in the second member as dependent on that in the first member; (iii) a mood-tense pattern appropriate for

BDD-A28069 © 2017 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 22:09:55 UTC)

the expression of the cause-consequence sequence defining the relation between the two members of a conditional construction (present or imperative in the first member and present or future in the second member of the construction) (Montolío 1999, 3697-3698; Dancygier 1998, 189-190; Elder 2012, 195).

The semantic similarity with the conditional relationship is equally sustained by the fact that these paratactic constructions are compatible with the biconditional interpretation: *if A, B = if not A, not B* (Montolío 1999, 3699).

If a coordinate structure does not exhibit these formal properties, the conditional interpretation is impossible. As a matter of fact, there are plenty of coordinate sentences which do not invite a conditional interpretation. Such is the case with coordinate structures like *It doesn't make sense. You buy an expensive lighter and you can't afford to smoke* which can be read in terms of contrast rather than a cause-consequence sequence (Dancygier 1998, 190).

Paratactic conditionals are generally used in dialogues, their interactive features being reflected by the fact that the first and second grammatical persons constantly appear in the two members of the construction. They are consequently linked to the expression of certain speech acts frequent in colloquial register. Thus, coordinate structures with *and* are most often used to express promises (1), although they may also appear in contexts expressing threats (2). Paraphrasing these structures as conditional sentences introduced with the connective 'on condition that' (pragmatically specialized for expressing favourable speech acts) helps distinguishing between the two values (Montolío 1999, 3709):

(6) a. *Dame un besito **y** te daré un caramelo.*
'Give me a kiss **and** I'll give you candy.'
b. *A condición de que me des un besito te daré un caramelo.*
'On condition that you give me a kiss I'll give you candy.'
(7) a. *Toca a mi hermano **y** te parto la cara.*
'Touch my brother **and** I'll smash your face'
b. *# A condición de que toques a mi hermano te partiré la cara.*
'# On condition that you touch my brother I'll smash your face.'

Disjunctive structures (3), however, are always associated to pragmatic values specific to speech acts expressing threats. Obviously, the use of the third grammatical person in such constructions results in a loss of the communicative values of threat or promise as well as the mood-tense restrictions previously referred to (8)-(9) (Montolío 1999, 3699):

(8) *Pepe es un lerdo. Le das un libro y se le cae de las manos.*
'Pepe is very clumsy. You give him a book and he drops it.'
(9) *O llega pronto, o se ha perdido.*
'He should be here soon or he's got lost.'

BDD-A28069 © 2017 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 22:09:55 UTC)

Examples such as (1) and (3) are characterized by a 'positive' reading (the speaker wants the hearer to fulfil the order expressed in the first member of the construction) whereas, in examples such as (2), we can identify a 'negative' reading (the speaker doesn't want the hearer to fulfil the order expressed in the first member of the construction) (Clark, apud Corminboeuf 2008, 198). Moreover, constructions of the type [A and B] with 'negative' reading are additionally compatible with a wide range of pragmatic values including dissuasion, warning, defiance, sarcasm (10) (Corminboeuf 2008, 205):

(10) *Soyez malade **et** je viendrai.*
'Get sick **and** I'll come.'

The elements which favor the conditional reading can be identified in both members of the construction. Similar to prototypical conditionals, the content of the first member of the construction is processed on the basis of an instruction of the type 'supposing that', which constitutes the communicative framework for the interpretation of the second member of the construction. Therefore, the first member of the construction as well as the content of the second member describe a process that does not correspond to the reality of the situation of communication.

In the case of some paratactic constructions, the similarity with the conditional relationship is conceptual as well as etymological (*if* conditionals and indirect interrogatives). Such is the case of pseudo-interrogatives (5) (i.e. paratactic conditionals with a polar interrogative as a first member, cf. Corminboeuf 2008) which resemble conditional protases in terms of the possible but non-assertable state of affairs which they put forward and on which the fulfillment of the utterance contained in the following sentence is dependable (Montolío 1999, 3698; Fillmore apud Elder 2012,196).

In paratactic constructions with an imperative first member (Corminboeuf 2008, 203-208), the conditional reading is encouraged by the fact that the imperative may function as "a space builder" (cf. Dancygier 1998, 23). The order expressed by the imperative form in the first member is thus interpreted as "insincere", allowing the creation of a fictitious universe in which the order would be executed.

In addition to the properties already discussed, the conditional interpretation of these paratactic constructions can arise through the contribution of other morphological elements which we shall discuss further on.

In the first member, a major contribution to the hypothetical interpretation is represented by the presence of deictics with generic value such as personal pronouns, especially of second person singular (Corminboeuf 2008, 187-190) (11)-(12) or by the use of indefinite (13) or reflexive pronouns (14):

BDD-A28069 © 2017 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 22:09:55 UTC)

(11) ***Tu** pui tabla aici și microbu'ocolește prin spate.*
'**You** put the metal piece here and the germ makes a detour.'
(12) ***Tu** les bats, tu leur passes devant.*
'**You** win the game, you pass ahead of them.'
(13) *Vi se adresează **cineva** cu domnișoară și (...) toți burlacii (...) vor năvăli aici.*
'**Someone** calls you miss and (...) all bachelors (...) will rush in here'
(14) *Există o căsuță ... **se** apasă pe ea și apare.*
'There's a small space ... you click on it and it comes up'

As pointed out previously, in paratactic conditionals with an imperative first member, the verbal form in the imperative mood is not automatically associated to a directive value and, in fact, there are some morphological elements that contribute to the attenuation of the directive value of the imperative form, consequently allowing the conditional reading of these constructions. Such elements may be represented by quantitative information of lexical or verbal nature such as restrictive adverbs indicating a minimum quantity and verbs that function as precursors of a future process (15) or predicates containing state verbs (16):

(15) a. *Recalez-moi et vous en subirez les conséquences.*
b. ?*Recalez-moi*!
'Fail me and you'll pay the consequences'/ ?Fail me!
(16) a. *Fii tu numai / Numai fii tu prea autoritar **și** îți vei atrage antipatia tuturor.*
b. ?*Fii tu numai prea autoritar*!
'Be too bossy and everybody will hate you' / ?Be too bossy!'

Similarly, the feature of consequence or result of the second member may be reinforced by means of morphological elements such as adverbs (Corminboeuf 2008, 190) (17) or passivized verbal forms (18) or even by the presence of correlative elements specific to prototypical conditionality (19)-(20):

(17) *On leur prête les clés (..) et elles croient **aussitôt** en être les propriétaires*.
'We lend them the keys and they soon think they're the owners.'
(18) *Era de ajuns să-mi cumpăr un „innuendo" și totul **se rezolva***.
'It was enough to buy a „innuendo" and everything was solved.'
(19) *(...) e suficient să bei deodată o sticlă (...). **Atunci** devine posibil ca (...)*
'It's enough to drink a whole bottle (...). **Then** it's possible to (...)'
(20) *Dame un besito y **entonces** te daré un caramelo.*
'Give me a kiss and **then** I'll give you candy.'

Another element that favors the conditional reading of these paratactic constructions is represented by the fact that some of them correspond to non- prototypical /marginal conditional subtypes such as contrastive conditionals (21) or 'content-dependent' (22) (Alexe 2015):

BDD-A28069 © 2017 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 22:09:55 UTC)

(21) *O vezi azi cu ochi încercănați, mâine lilină și suavă.*
'Today you see her with ringed eyes, tomorrow she is calm and delicate.'
(22) *A: Nu pleacă. B: Atunci [dacă, după cum spui, nu pleacă] n-are importanță asta.*
'A: He's not leaving. B: Then [if, as you say, he's not leaving] it doesn't matter.'

Also, pseudo-interrogative constructions seem to remind us of the marginal conditional subtype of relevance (cf Corminbouf 2008, 217).

(23) *Désirez-vous entretenir votre forme? V. vous propose un éventail d'exercices.*
'Do you want to keep fit? √[Then it is relevant to tell you that] V. suggests a whole range of exercises.'

3. Conclusion

Conditional meaning can arise in constructions other than the prototypical clauses introduced with *if* or other conditional conjunctions. Coordinate structures with conjunctive coordinators or disjunctive coordinators and even juxtaposed structures may be compatible with all the main elements of prototypical conditionality.

Although the data we have managed may apply to a great number of unrelated languages (cf. Haiman, 1983), when illustrating the conditional interpretation of such constructions we have relied on examples from some Romance languages (Romanian, Spanish, French). Even if we have not used parallel examples, the analysis of the data suggests that all the elements that contribute to the conditional reading of paratactic structures may equally be observed in all these Romance languages and we strongly believe that these considerations can be generalized to encompass the entire category of Romance languages.

References

Alexe, Raluca. 2015. *Construcții condiționale în limba română*. Editura Universității Transilvania din Brașov.
Corminboeuf, Gilles. 2008. *L'expression de l'hypothèse en français contemporain, entre hypotaxe et parataxe*. PhD thesis, Université de Neuchâtel.
Dancygier, Barbara. 1998. *Conditionals and Prediction. Time, Knowledge and Causation in Conditional Constructions.* Cambridge University Press.
Elder, Chi-Hé. 2012. "The underlying conditionality of conditionals which do not use *if*". *Cambridge Occasional Papers in Linguistics* 6: 177-200.
Haiman, John. 1983. „Paratactic if-clauses". *Journal of Pragmatics* 7: 263-281.
Harris, Martin. 1986. "The historical development of *si* clauses in Romance". In *On conditionals*, ed. by Traugott et al., 265-284. C U P.
Montolío, Estrella. 1999. "Las construcciones condicionales". In *Gramática descriptiva de la lengua española*, vol. 3, coord. by Demonte V. & Bosque I., 3643-3737. Madrid: RAE, Espasa – Calpe.

BDD-A28069 © 2017 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 22:09:55 UTC)