

ISSA Proceedings 2002 - On The Pragmatics Of Argumentative Discourse



The aim of the paper is to analyse a specific kind of argumentative discourse - conditionals - from the point of view of revealing pragmatic meanings. Conditionals (Brutian 1991, 1992) express reasoning, inference, implication, therefore they, alongside with causal utterances, are one of the main and important types of argumentation. It should be also noted that by conditionals I understand not only traditionally accepted constructions of the "If P, then Q" type but also those which can be transformed into the mentioned type. The semantic meanings of argumentative conditional utterances, including various subtle shades of meanings, have been thoroughly described, while the pragmatic aspect until quite recently has received little attention, whereas only the simultaneous consideration of both levels of meanings will lead to the adequate interpretation of such utterances. Thus, it is obvious why the pragmatic meanings of argumentative conditional discourse should be revealed and analysed.

There can be no doubt that to interpret any text (utterance, discourse) adequately, not only explicit, but also implicit, deep, non-explicit meanings must be taken into consideration. Within the last few decades many scholars have come to understand this fact. Paducheva (1985), for example, states that every text contains not only explicit, but also implicit information - meanings generated by the speaker and understood by the listener. T. van Dijk (van Dijk 1978: 331) speaks about the "deep orientation of the speaker". Hintikka (1979: 119-150) speaks about the "hidden meaning" in a language. Many texts have been written from this perspective - highlighting the concept of "hidden grammar" by the use of terms such as "additional hidden meaning", "shady utterance" and "additional semantic lines" (Nikolaeva 1985: 80), "substantial - subtextual information" (Galperin 1981: 40), "double-text" (Viezicka 1978: 404), "additional implied meaning" (Arnold 1982: 34), etc.

In speaking about the importance of revealing of implicit meanings, it is

necessary to stress that a text can be adequately understood only when both implicit and explicit elements are taken into consideration. To give preference to either could lead to undesirable consequences. According to Viezbicka (Viezbicka 1981), giving preference to implicit (hidden) elements is the most paradoxical result in rather interesting searches of hidden linguistic categories.

It is important to differentiate between two different types of implicitness: on the one hand, categorical meanings, that is, meanings connected with expressing proposition (some facts), and on the other hand, meanings connected with subjective assessment of these facts on the part of the speaker, that is, pragmatic meanings.

The paper aims at revealing and analysing the implicit meanings of the second type in conditionals. These meanings, in turn, can be divided into two groups: a) those based on modal meanings and b) other kinds of meanings. It should be noted that this division is to some extent conventional, as the pragmatic meanings belonging to the second group necessarily include the first ones. And, generally speaking, we cannot speak about "pure" pragmatic meanings (Brutian 1996).

Now let us discuss the above-mentioned types of pragmatic meanings of conditionals more in detail.

It is common knowledge that one of the most important peculiarities of conditionals is their modality. This phenomenon is thoroughly studied in different languages. From this viewpoint conditionals are divided into 2 large groups:

1. sentences of real condition (*conditio realis*) and
2. sentences of unreal condition.

The latter, in its turn, consists of

1. sentences of potential condition (*conditio potentialis*) and
2. sentences of unreal condition (*conditio irrealis*).

This classification lies at the heart of classifications suggested by different authors, though it should be mentioned that in some cases they are presented in a slightly different, more differentiated form.

The modality of conditionals, which is studied in traditional grammar, can, in my opinion, be considered as the pragmatics of these utterances, as in this case we deal with the attitude of the speaker towards the expressed facts from the point of view of their reality or irreality. Compare Akatsuka's (1985) statement that *realis* and *irrealis* represent the speaker's subjective assessment of a situation. Close to

it is Gorja's (Gorja 1985) statement that while classifying conditionals, a very important factor is the pragmatic factor, that is the reality or irreality of the condition from the point of view of the speaker. Ilyenko (1961) considers the modality in conditionals as a subjective-objective category, which implies not only the attitude of the speaker towards the reality, but also the attitude of the addressee to the reality from the point of view of the speaker.

In case of *real conditionals* the speaker means that the situation is real: "If it snows, we'll stay at home".

In case of *irreal conditionals* (counterfactuals) the speaker implicitly negates the explicitly expressed facts, he speaks of the falsity of the proposition in the real world. Saying "If P, then Q", the speaker at the same time means "Neither P, nor Q". In other words, the facts expressed explicitly by both the main and subordinate clauses of such sentences are implicitly (at a deep level) negated by the speaker. Conditionals of the mentioned type are thoroughly examined in linguistic, as well as logical literature, and it is natural that the researchers could not have ignored their hidden, implicit, and at the same time, very important meaning of negation-the meaning of unfeasible or unrealized condition. Thus, for example, Ljapon (1979) speaks of the Russian subjunctive particle, which is a very important constituent in counterfactuals, as an equivalent of a negative particle. Znamenskaya (1984), with reference to various English dictionaries that give definitions containing negation words, speaks of the implicit sense of negation in the semantic structure of conditional sentences with the conjunction *if*. Panfilov (1971: 191), characterizing verbs in subjunctive mood, uses the expression "unrealized opportunity". To denote sentences of irreal condition, some Spanish scholars, alongside the traditional term ("irreal condition"), use the terms "conditional sentences of implicit negation", "ideal or implicit negation".

Analysing the sentence "If Brutus hadn't persuaded Caesar to go to the senate, the conspiracy would have failed", Paducheva comes to the following conclusion: "The person who understands the meaning of the sentence... obtains the information that Brutus had persuaded Caesar to go to the senate" (Paducheva 1985: 71). In the following two dialogues the implicit meaning of negation is in the centre of attention: "I remember a fellow once said to me: "What would you do if you had Lord Moneybag's income? - He implied that you hadn't an income as big as Lord Moneybag's". "When I say: "If Hob worked hard, he would learn grammar", what do I imply?... - You imply that he doesn't work hard. It's an

“implied negative” (Eckersley 1967: 82-84). Sometimes the implicit meaning of negation in argumentative conditional discourse is explicated in a wider context, e.g.: “If I were there, with him and he wasn’t so terribly stubborn, I could have saved him. But, unfortunately, I wasn’t there, with him and he was so terribly stubborn... I couldn’t save him”.

In connection with what has been said above, the following important idea should be stressed. The concept expressed by the terms “implied negation” and the like, only being linked with the concepts of the speaker (addresser) and the listener (addressee), can imply some pragmatic meaning. For example, the pragmatic meaning of “If I were the President of Armenia, I would support academics” can be revealed as a result of the following analysis: “I know that I am not the President of Armenia (it is excluded, it is impossible), and I am sure that everybody knows that it isn’t so, therefore the idea that I can (will) support academics expressed by me is false, which the addressee is well aware of”. In this respect, the analysis “I am not the President of Armenia and I don’t support academics” cannot be considered complete.

Let us consider now the pragmatics of *potential conditionals*, i.e. where the speaker does not know whether the situation is real or not. The implicit alternative version is of equal value to the given one from the point of view of correspondence to reality. For example, “If she is at home, she will make the dinner” = “If she isn’t at home, she won’t make the dinner”. The speaker states that both variants are possible, though he doesn’t actually know which one. It should be added that the subordinate clauses of this type of utterances can express a potential, possible situation (realizable or not-realizable from the speaker’s point of view) not only in the past, but also in the present and future.

Now let us analyse pragmatic meanings of the second group. Here the following meanings determined by context can be singled out: of advice, suggestion, wish, necessity, obligation, warning, order, disapproval, reproach, doubt, positive/negative evaluation, etc.

Let us first consider conditionals beginning with “If I were you...”. Besides expressing non-correspondence to reality, they express some advice, reproach, like in “If I were you, I would help him”.

In conditionals where both components express actions referring to the future, with the subject of the principal clause (sometimes, both clauses) expressed by the I person pronoun, the implicit pragmatic meaning of the speaker’s intention

can be revealed. Thus, in “If we have time tomorrow, we’ll visit Leiden”, not only are the relations of condition and consequence expressed, but also the idea that the speaker has the intention, is planning to go, together with some other people, to Leiden tomorrow. From the viewpoint of assessing the truth values, and hence, the nature of *if* and the whole utterance, a special approach is suggested by Strawson (1952). In analysing the utterance “If it rains, I’ll stay at home”, he states that there is a preliminary statement about intention, which, like any other non-conditional statement about intention, must be called neither true nor false and must be described in another way. Strawson gives the following explanation: if the person who has pronounced the given sentence goes out in spite of the rain, one can’t say that what he has said is false, but it should be concluded that he has lied, that, in fact, he wasn’t going to stay at home in case of rain, or that he has changed his decision.

Of great interest are utterances containing parentheses. Such utterances can be transformed into two-level conditionals which consist of metatextual and textual components. Generally speaking, from the point of view of constructing and adequately interpreting a text, parentheses, being functionally close to modal words, are important and interesting phenomena. Their presence in a text makes it many-layered, at least, semantically two-level, so that it expresses the main, factual information and additional, pragmatic (in the wide sense of this word) information. This has been mentioned by various scholars. Thus, for example, Nahapetova (1986) links the idea of parenthetical constructions with a special phenomenon – the parenthetical perspective of the text which is very close to the speaker’s pragmatic intention. She differentiates two layers of information in utterances containing parenthetical constructions – the main and accompanying utterances, which leads to a more adequate interpretation of a text. The function of parenthetical constructions in organizing a text is, in the author’s opinion, not only in linking the parts of the utterance, but also in expressing various relations between them, such as causal, alternative, etc. Speaking about “two projections of communicative functioning”, Sljusareva (1981: 178-180) states that dividing the sentence and introducing modal elements into it, they not only represent rather economically the statement itself, but also its assessment on the part of the speaker.

In the light of what has been said above, the following meanings can be differentiated:

1. The meaning expressing the attitude of the speaker to the utterance which

determines an objective assessment of the discussed subject. The meaning of such constructions is very close to the meaning of the subordinate clause of condition, e.g. "*If being exact*, it is not the best solution of the problem".

2. The meaning of doubt as to the reliability of the information: "He has asked his parents what advice, *if any*, they could give him".

3. The meaning of doubt as to the reasonableness of the choice of this or that expression: "He got furious, *if this was the right word to express what he felt*".

Let us now consider argumentative conditional discourse in which implicit meaning of purpose can be revealed. As examples can serve, in particular, sentences expressing theorems, hypotheses, axioms. For example, in "If 3 sides of one triangle are accordingly equal to the sides of another one, then these triangles are equal" the following deep meaning can be explicated by means of transformation: "In order for 2 triangles to be equal it is necessary that 3 sides of one triangle accordingly be equal to 3 sides of another one". Compare an analogous example given by Suppes (1957: 9): "If a triangle is equivalent, then it is isosceles". According to him, this example can be transformed into: "In order for a triangle to be isosceles it is sufficient that it be equilateral" or "It is necessary that an equilateral triangle be isosceles".

Let us analyse the following examples:

1. "If you are *planning to participate* in the conference, you must send to the planning committee interesting abstracts". = "In order to participate in the conference you must send to the planning committee interesting abstracts".

2. "If you *wanted to marry* her, you *had to find* a proper job". = "In order to marry her you had to find a proper job".

In the given examples, the subordinate clauses contain verbs expressing intention and desire, whereas the principal clauses - the modal operator of obligation. In addition to the implicit meaning of purpose the indirect illocutionary function of advice, wish (1) and reproach (2) is expressed.

Of interest are also such 2-component explicit constructions with *if* which are semantically identical to implicit 3-component conditionals, such as, for example, "If you are cold, the coat is over there". Here the conditional relation is expressed not between the explicit components (the fact that the coat is over there does not follow from the fact that the addressee is cold), but between the first component and the implicit, verbally unexpressed link, which should be explicated, so that the utterance can assume the following form: "If you are cold (mind, I am telling

you, etc.) that the coat is over there". The explicated link, as it can be seen from the given example, expresses the pragmatic attitude of the speaker, his communicative intention connected with the illocutionary function, which is in informing us that the coat is over there.

Now, let us consider the following cases. The combination of the utterances "Tell him to stop. Because I'll kill him now" should be interpreted the following way: "Tell him to stop. I am saying (warning about) it because if he doesn't stop immediately, I'll kill him right now". "You smoke endlessly. It can cause cancer of the lungs" implicitly contains the following conditional warning: "You must not smoke (I am warning you against it), because if you do so (smoke endlessly), it'll cause cancer of the lungs".

Of great interest are propositions expressed by the formula "Not P and Q". The meaning of the negative particle in such constructions leads to the interexclusion of its components, that is, the existence of one of them excludes the other one, which can be denoted by the formulae "If P, then not Q", "If not P, then Q". Let us analyse in this connection the following sentence taken from Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea": "You can't fish and not eat". Its transformation into a sentence of deep level according to the formula "If P, then not Q" leads to "If you fish, do not/not eat (you must eat it)". In this case the conjunction *and* alongside with conditional meaning, expresses also the implicit illocutionary meaning of order (advice). Compare the similar example given by Rundle (1983): "Don't drink and drive". He speaks about the semantic synonymy of the given utterance to "If you drive, don't drink".

The conjunction *or* (*either...or*), the formal indicator of disjunction, expresses conditional meaning in contexts containing interexclusive words. In other words, in such contexts the deep meaning of utterances with *or* can be revealed when they are transformed into utterances with *if*. In addition, if the first part of the utterance is positive, the conjunction *if* is used with a negative particle and vice versa, in case of the negative first component *if* is used without a negative particle (see also Lakoff 1971, Strawson 1952, Pierce 1983). In the first part of such utterances the meaning of obligation and necessity is often expressed. The utterance "Either you find a job or I'll divorce" is identical in meaning to "If you don't find a job (and you must do it), I'll divorce", where the part "you must do it" is the pragmatic meaning of the utterance. Speaking about "the idea of choice" functioning as invariant basic seme, in the conjunction *either...or* which corresponds to strong disjunction, Ljapon (1987) singles out also the seme of

“ignorance” which has pragmatic character. In her opinion, *either...or* not only informs that out of two versions only one takes place in reality, but also that *the speaker doesn't know* which one, in particular.

In sentences denoted by the formula “A, or else B” the meaning of special opposition with some shade of conditionality is expressed. In other words, the possible consequences of non-fulfilment of what is being spoken about in the first part are implied in such sentences. In the first part, which often is in the imperative form, the meaning of obligation, necessity is expressed by the speaker, as a rule. The following utterance can serve as an example: “Study hard, *or else* you won't enter the University” ® “Study hard (you must study hard, I am ordering you to study hard, etc.) because if you don't study hard, you won't enter the University”.

Such are the cases of pragmatics in conditional argumentative discourse. In the end it should be stressed that the explication of implicit, mainly pragmatic meanings is not an end in itself.; it is a necessary and a very important step towards revealing the whole diversity of thought and adequately interpreting the given discourse which, in its turn, can add to the theory of argumentation.

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