

This poster:

- Studies of biscuit conditionals (BCs) mention questions in passing, but rarely focus on them, leaving them comparatively underexplored.
- Here, a proposal that English biscuit conditional questions (BCQs) come in two types: relevance BCQs (1) and strict BCQs (2).
 - (1) If I get hungry later, where are the biscuits?
 - (2) If you've got time before your train, what's the secret to your flaky pastry?
- Each type has a previous analysis especially well-suited to account for it.
- A sketch of a unified syntactic implementation of both accounts.

Setting the stage

- Biscuit conditionals (BCs) like (3) differ from hypothetical conditionals like (4).
- An utterance of (3) is a lot like an assertion of the bare consequent, with the *if*-clause providing the relevance conditions for the assertion.
- Similarly, a BCQ like (5) is just asking the consequent, and the *if*-clause provides the relevance conditions for any answer.

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| (3) If you're hungry, there are biscuits on the counter. | [BC] |
| (4) If it rains tomorrow, the party will be cancelled. | [HC] |
| (5) If I get hungry later, where are the biscuits? | [BCQ] |

- Two broad families of account:

1. BCs have the same semantics as regular conditionals, but interpreted differently due to extra pragmatic reasoning (e.g. Biezma & Goebel, 2023; Franke, 2009).
2. Regular conditionals and BCs have a different semantics, often some variant of a conditionally performed speech act (e.g. Krifka, 2014, 2017).
 - Previous authors have hinted at variation in the intuitive feel of *if*-clauses in various BCs (Rawlins, 2020; Sweetser, 1990). But, tacit assumption that they should all receive the same kind of analysis.
 - Here I propose a unified syntactic implementation of both types of analysis for BCQs to account for two newly distinguished types.

Two types of BCQ

- Call BCQs like (5) *relevance BCQs*, where the *if*-clause communicates when the answer to the question will be relevant.
- Claim: in addition, we have *strict BCQs* like (6) with a politeness feel to them.
- The speaker in (6) is using the *if*-clause to give the hearer a reason to not answer the consequent question.

Context: H is packing up to leave the office. Their coworker S wants to ask H something, but doesn't want them to miss their train. S asks:

- (6) If you've got time before you leave, what's the secret to your flaky pastry?

- We end up with two different intuitive paraphrases for (5) and (6):

- (7) **Relevance BCQ:** Where are the biscuits? The answer will be relevant to me if I get hungry.
- (8) **Strict BCQ:** What's the secret to your flaky pastry? Only feel like you need to answer if you have time before you leave.

Relevance BCQs as pragmatically enriched HCQs

- A pragmatic account like Biezma and Goebel (2023) works for relevance BCQs, but struggles with strict BCQs
- Biezma and Goebel (2023): the interpretation of BCs depends on QUD relevance.
- More concretely, any *if*-clause of the form 'if ϕ ' by default implicitly updates the QUD stack with a broad question of the form 'what if ϕ '?
- In BCs the hearer reasons to a more specific question, supplementing it with a goal specific to the ϕ -worlds, and the consequent is understood as relevant for achieving the reconstructed goal.

- (9) a. If you're hungry, there are biscuits on the counter.
b. Enriched QUD: what if you're hungry and want to resolve that hunger?

- No explicit discussion of questions, but clear implication: the consequent question is a subquestion to the broad QUD imposed by the *if*-clause.
- This relationship surfaces in felicitous answers to the question. Only answers that address the reconstructed goal are felicitous (see (10))

- (10) a. If it rains, what's in the hallway?
b. Enriched QUD: What if it rains and I want to avoid getting wet?
c. Answers: An umbrella./A raincoat./#A grandfather clock.

- The Biezma and Goebel (2023) approach predicts that when it's impossible to reconstruct the more specific QUD, the BC can't be interpreted and is infelicitous.

- (11) # If France is hexagonal, there's a beer in the fridge. (Sano & Hara, 2014)

- Strict BCQs: consequent can't be interpreted as a subquestion to a wider QUD.
- Here, the speaker's goal is to receive an answer to the consequent question.
- This difference can once again be seen in felicitous answers to the BCQ: no restriction is imposed by the *if*-clause itself.

- (12) a. If you've got a minute, what's in the hallway?
Potential answers: An umbrella./A raincoat./A grandfather clock.

- Moreover, the fact that no goal can be reconstructed should predict that strict BCQs are infelicitous, contrary to fact.

Strict BCQs as conditionally performed questions

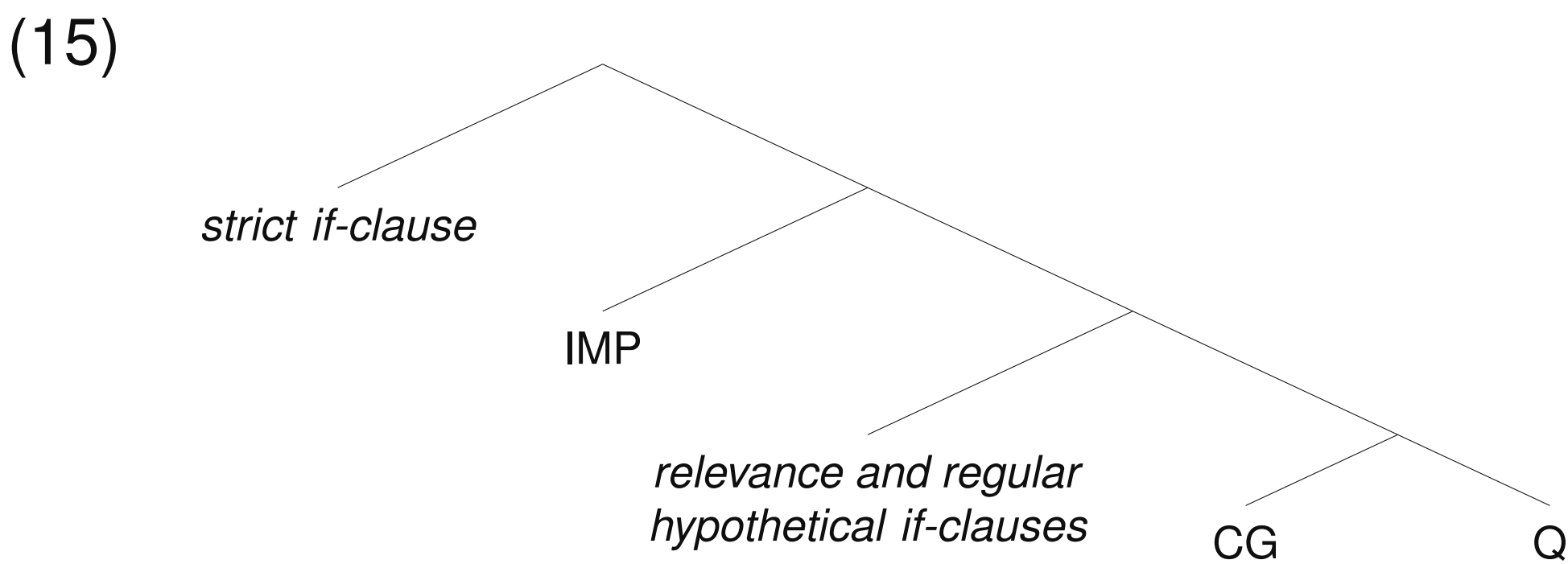
- Conditional speech act accounts align well with the strict BCQ paraphrase, but extra work is needed to account for relevance BCQs.
- On these accounts, BCs are conditionals at the speech act level: the consequent speech act is performed if the antecedent is true.
- Krifka (2014, 2017) implements this idea syntactically, where a BC *if*-clause is placed high up in the left periphery.
- As Krifka (2017) acknowledges, this account still needs to appeal to some additional pragmatic reasoning to explain how the *if*-clause establishes relevance.
- In strict BCQs, this isn't an issue: in the previous section we saw that strict BCQs don't establish relevance. It is needed, however, for relevance BCQs.

Unified account: a sketch

- Unified account based on the question decomposition in Sauerland and Yatsushiro (2017), heavily adapted:

- (13) $\llbracket \text{IMP} \rrbracket (f)(g)(w)(p_{\langle s,t \rangle}) = 1$ iff $\forall w' \in \text{BEST}(f(w), g(w))$ [Ad. causes p to hold in w'] where f is an epistemic modal base, g is a deontic ordering source
- (14) $\llbracket \text{CG} \rrbracket (q_{\langle s, \langle s,t \rangle \rangle}) = 1$ iff the complete answer to q is part of the interlocutors' common ground

- Proposal: strict and relevance BCQ *if*-clauses each target a different operator.
- Strict BCQ *if*-clauses sit highest (like BC *if*-clauses in Krifka (2017)) and target IMP, restricting when an obligation holds of the addressee.
- Relevance BCQ and HCQ *if*-clauses restrict which worlds in the common ground a question is asked of (cf. Isaacs and Rawlins (2008)), and the BCQ reading is recovered via the pragmatic reasoning in Biezma and Goebel (2023)



- This syntactic difference gives rise to the contrast in (16): strict BCQ *if*-clauses precede relevance *if*-clauses when stacked (some speaker variation).

- (16) a. [_{strict} If you've got time before your train], [_{rel} if John gets hungry later], where can I find the biscuits?
b. % [_{rel} If John gets hungry later], [_{strict} if you've got time before your train], where can I find the biscuits?

Summing up

- This account relies on a syntactic interaction between *if*-clauses and speech act operators, supporting a syntactic representation of these operators.
- Cross-linguistic research on BCs in general is scarce (Rawlins, 2020). An open question is how language specific these mechanisms are.
- What is the relationship between strict BCQs and discourse-structuring conditionals like (17) (from Csipak, 2019, p. 304)?
- Clearly there are also declarative BCs where the antecedent isn't establishing relevance, such as (18). Could this account be extended to those?

- (17) If we're discussing people's teeth, have you noticed Alex's new crown?
(18) If I'm being frank, your make-up is terrible.

Selected References

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Acknowledgements

I am indebted to much patient input from my MA supervisors, Sigrid Beck and Paula Menéndez Benito, as well as conversations with Katie Taub. Any errors are my own.