Conditionally interpreted declaratives in Spanish*

Laia Mayol
Universitat Pompeu Fabra

This paper provides a description and an analysis of what I call “conditionally interpreted declaratives” in Spanish: a coordination of two declarative clauses which receive a conditional interpretation. Conditionally interpreted declaratives in Spanish may even receive a counterfactual reading, which is something very rare cross-linguistically. I propose that such conditionally interpreted declaratives contain a left-subordinating conjunction ‘and’, which (i) conveys a causal modal, and (ii) turns the first conjunct into the restrictor of the modal and the second one into the scope. The fact that the first conjunct acts as a restrictor explains its peculiar prosody, which acts as a strong cue towards the relevant interpretation. Finally, the counterfactual interpretation is a pragmatic effect (i.e. it is defeasible) which is obtained when it is common ground that the first conjunct does not hold.

1. Introduction

The goal of this paper is to provide a description and an analysis of the Spanish construction illustrated in (1).

(1) Yo soy la Merkel y no doy un duro por España.
    I am the Merkel and not give a cent for Spain.
    ‘I am Merkel and I don’t give a cent for Spain.’
    ‘If I were Merkel, I would not give a cent for Spain.’

* I thank the audience of Going Romance 2013 and the members of Composing (UAB) and Glif (UPF) for useful questions and comments. I also thank Núria Esteve and Maria del Mar Vanrell for their help with Praat. This research has been partly funded by projects FFI2011-23046 and FFI2011-23356 of the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (MINECO), and by the Juan de la Cierva program (JDC-2009-3922).
The sentence in (1) may have two different interpretations: (i) it may have a regular interpretation by which the speaker conveys that she is Merkel and that she does not give a cent for Spain, or (ii) it may have a conditional interpretation by which the speaker conveys that if s/he were Merkel, s/he would not give a cent for Spain.

Example (2) shows another instance of the same construction. Such a sentence could have a literal reading (the speaker claims s/he is a student and that s/he will start a revolution) or a conditional reading: the speaker claims that if s/he were a student, s/he would start a revolution.

(2) *Yo soy estudiante y monto una revolución.*

I am student and assemble a revolution.

'I am a student and I start a revolution.'

'If I were a student, I would start a revolution.'

This construction, which I will call “conditionally interpreted declarative”, or “C-declarative”, has not been previously described or analyzed in the literature to the best of my knowledge. In contrast, it is well-known that a conditional interpretation may emerge even if there is no explicit conditional marking in many languages (see Russell, 2007; Jayez and Dargnat, 2009; von Fintel and Iatridou, 2009; Kaufmann, 2012, and references therein), as the examples in (3) and (4) show for English.

(3) a. Drink another beer and you'll win the game.
   b. Drink another beer and you'll puke.
   c. Drink another beer or you'll lose the game.

(4) John drinks one more can of beer and he'll be too drunk to drive home.

The examples in (3) are different from C-declaratives, in that while C-declaratives are clearly a coordination of declarative sentences, the examples in (3) are a coordination of an imperative and a declarative sentence. In contrast, the sentence in (4) is closer to a C-declarative, given that it is a coordination of declaratives. As it will be shown in the next section, the type of construction illustrated in (4), which is sometimes called “P-declarative”, and C-declaratives share some properties, but also present important differences.

---

1. In fact, not all accounts the type of construction in (3) agree that the first conjunct is an imperative. For instance, see Russell (2007) for arguments in favor of treating the first conjunct as a bare VP. In contrast, Kaufmann (2012) argues that the first conjunct is best analyzed as an imperative and uses the semantics of imperatives to derive the conditional reading of the construction.
The structure of the paper is the following: Section 2 exposes the main properties of C-declaratives; Section 3 presents its analysis and Section 4 concludes pointing out venues for future work.

2. Main properties

The main properties of C-declaratives in Spanish are the following:

1. C-declaratives are only compatible with present tense. If one of the two conjuncts appears in past tense, the conditional interpretation disappears. That is (5), minimally changed from (2), only receives the literal interpretation.

   (5) *Yo fui estudiante y monté una revolución.*
   I was student and assembled a revolution
   ‘I was a student and I started a revolution.’

2. C-declaratives tend to occur with a marked prosody. That is, sentences like (1) and (2) are only ambiguous in written form, but not in oral speech. A C-declarative is pronounced in two tonal units, without a low boundary tone before the conjunction (which does appear in the literal interpretation) but with a rising phrase accent.

   The contrast between the two prosodic contours may be observed in Figures 1 and 2 for sentences (6) and (7), respectively. In Figure (1), which corresponds to the prosody which marks the conditional interpretation, we observe a rising continuation accent just before the conjunction. In contrast, in Figure 2, corresponding to the prosody which marks the literal interpretation, we don’t see such a rising accent, but instead we find a low boundary tone before the conjunction.

   (6) *Presionas lo suficiente a Juan y lo puedes corromper.*
   Pressure enough to John and him can corrupt
   ‘If you pressure John enough, you can corrupt him.’

   (7) *Has presionado lo suficiente a Juan y lo has podido corromper.*
   Have pressured enough to John and him have been able to corrupt
   ‘You have pressured John enough and you have been able to corrupt him.’

2. Note that while the tenses in (6) are compatible with a conditional interpretation, the ones in (7) are not.
3. As mentioned in the introduction, C-declaratives are similar in some respects to P(seudo)-declaratives in English and French, illustrated in (8) and (4).³

(8) a. You come near and I show you.
   b. *Tu viens et je te montre.*

You come and I you show.

3. English and French also have a similar construction without the conjunction, as shown in (i) and (ii).

   (i) *Tu viens, je te montre.*

   (ii) You come, I show you.

I will mostly ignore these paratactic constructions in this paper, given that they are not possible in Spanish, which always requires the conjunction.
According to Jayez et al. (2009), P-declaratives of the shape “P and Q” are not fully equivalent to the conditional “If P then Q” because the former have an automaticity condition: it is conveyed that Q is an automatic consequence of the eventuality described by P with respect to the addressee. A similar idea is expressed by von Fintel and Iatridou (2009) by saying that in a “P and Q” conditional there must be a causal relationship involved. That is, it must be the case that P inevitably causes Q.

Thus, P-declaratives are more restricted and subject to more conditions than plain conditionals. This automaticity condition/causal relationship explains why, while (8) is a good paraphrase of (9), (10-a) is not a good paraphrase of (10-b).

(9) If you come near, I’ll show you.

(10) a. # You own this property and I’ll buy it from you.  
b. If you own this property, I’ll buy it from you.

Example (9) presents a tight causal relationship between P and Q and conveys that you coming near will automatically cause that I’ll show up. In consequence, this meaning can be expressed through a P-declarative. In contrast, in (10b) such causal relationship is not present and, in most contexts, it will not convey that you owning this property will have the automatic result and I’ll buy it from you. To the extent that (10a) might acceptable, it is because we are imposing a causal relationship between the two conjuncts. That is, if we interpret (10a) as meaning that if you own this property, this will have the automatic consequence that I will buy it, then it becomes acceptable.

C-declaratives in Spanish must obey the same restriction as P-declaratives in English: that is, they also convey that there is a causal relationship between the two conjuncts. While the two sentences in (11) may share the same interpretation, (12-a) cannot be interpreted as (12-b). Note that it is plausible to imagine that there is a causal relationship between owning some particular land and becoming rich, while it is less plausible imagining that there is such relationship between owning some land and selling it to you. This is why the C-declarative in (11a) is better than the one in (12a).

4. Note that the unacceptability of (10a) is not related to the fact that there is a stative verb in the first conjunct. Sentence (i) contains the same verb and it is fully acceptable with a conditional interpretation.

(i) Own a Chihuahua and you’ll never sleep well again.
4. C-declaratives can be interpreted counterfactually, as shown by the paraphrases of (1), (2) and (11). Example (1) can, and most likely will, be uttered by a speaker who is not Merkel; (2) can be uttered even if this speaker is not a student; and (11) conveys that the speaker does not own the land under discussion.

This is, in fact, the main difference between C-declaratives in Spanish and P-declaratives in other languages: P-declaratives cannot get such a counterfactual interpretation, and the counterparts of (1) and (2) in, for instance, English and French are not acceptable.5

3. Ingredients for an analysis

3.1 Left subordinating ‘and’

I adopt the idea in Culicover and Jackendoff (1997) that the conjunction that appears in C-declaratives is not a regular conjunction, but an instance of a left subordinating ‘and’ (LS_and, henceforth). In contrast to LS_and, the regular conjunction is a coordinating ‘and’.

LS_and and coordinating ‘and’ present several differences: for example, only the latter can appear in a CP coordination. That is, in (13), where we have a coordination of IPs, the sentence may have a regular or a conditional interpretation. In contrast, example (14), which shows a coordination of two CPs, is not ambiguous anymore: the conditional interpretation disappears even with the appropriate verb tenses and prosody, and only the regular interpretation remains.

5. An anonymous reviewer points out that, in fact, the counterfactual reading is possible in French if it refers to past events, as in (i):

(i) Tu venais et tout était réglé.
    You came and everything was fixed
    ‘If you had come, everything would have been fixed’

As far as I know, this type of sentence has not been analyzed in the literature. Further research should clarify the relationship between past tense and counterfactual interpretation in French.
(13)  *Tengo clarísimo que soy estudiante y monto una revolución.
     ‘I am convinced that if I were a student I would start a revolution.’

(14)  Tengo clarísimo que soy estudiante y que monto una revolución.
     ‘I am convinced that I am a student and that I start a revolution.’

Sentences with LS and pattern with regular conditionals in many respects. For instance, as shown by Culicover and Jackendoff (1997), while gapping is grammatical in a regular coordination, it is not possible both when LS and is present and in a regular conditional construction. Example (15) illustrates this contrast: (15a) appears in past tense to rule out the conditional interpretation, while the tense in (15b) is compatible with a P-declarative. Gapping is possible in the former but unacceptable in the latter and in conditionals (15c).

(15)  a. Big Louie stole another car radio and Little Louie the hubcaps.
     b. *Bill Louie steals one more car radio and Little Louie the hubcaps.
     c. *If Big Louie steals one more car radio, then Little Louie the hubcaps.

In (15) LS and patterns with a conditional in being ungrammatical in a particular structure. Example (16) shows the opposite situation. It is not possible for a free choice item appearing in the second conjunct of a coordination to be bound by some element in the first conjunct: cualquier (‘any’) may not be bound by the clitic lo in (16a). In contrast, such configuration is possible when there is a LS and (16b) or an overt conditional (16c).

(16)  a. *Lo has presionado lo suficiente y has podido corromper a cualquier político.
     ‘You have pressured him enough and you have been able to corrupt any politician.’
     b. Lo presionas lo suficiente y puedes corromper a cualquier político.
     ‘You pressure him enough and you can corrupt any politician.’
     c. Si lo presionas lo suficiente, puedes corromper a cualquier político.
     ‘If you pressure him enough, you can corrupt any politician.’

3.2 A causal modal

Following much of the literature about similar constructions (Culicover and Jackendoff 1997; Kaufmann 2012; von Fintel and Iatridou 2009), I assume that LS and, unlike coordinating ‘and’, can have a conditional interpretation.

---

6. As in (15), the tenses in (16a) rule out the conditional interpretation, while they are compatible with it in (16b).
In order to obtain the conditional interpretation, we will need to find in a C-declarative the same elements we find in a plain conditional. Plain conditionals are modal constructions, in which the antecedent restricts a modal, and the consequent is the scope of that modal. The proposal I put forward in this paper is that, in a C-declarative, LS and conveys a causal modal, which is restricted by the first conjunct of the coordination, while the second one becomes the scope.

The fact that LS and conveys a causal modal explains the automaticity condition between P and Q, which restricts the distribution of C-declaratives. In contrast, in plain conditionals the modal does not need to be one of causality, which explains their wider distribution and the fact that the conditional in (12b) cannot be turned into a C-declarative (see (12a)) in most contexts.

In addition, this approach also permits to explain the peculiar prosody found in C-declaratives. Such prosody can be explained taking into account that deaccented material is usually topical, and topical material tends to appear in the restriction of a quantifier. This correlation between prosody, information structure and quantificational structure is nicely illustrated by the classic example in Halliday (1967). Halliday’s observation is that a sign next to an elevator which reads “Dogs must be carried” is ambiguous. If ‘dogs’ is deaccented (as in (17a)), it will be interpreted as a topic and, therefore, will appear in the restriction of the quantifier, which will yield the sensible reading in (17b).

(17)  a. Dogs must be CARRIED
    b. In all the worlds compatible with the law in which there is an event involving this escalator and a dog, the dog is carried.

In contrast, if ‘dogs’ is accented (as in (18a)), it will not be interpreted as a topic and, as a consequence, it will not appear in the restrictor of the quantifier. This will yield the absurd reading in (18b), according to which one needs to carry a dog in order to use the escalator.

(18)  a. DOGS must be carried
    b. In all the worlds compatible with the law in which there is an event involving this escalator, there is a dog that is carried.

In a C-declarative, the deaccentuation of the first conjunct (signaled by the lack of a low boundary tone before the conjunction) indicates that this first conjunct has topical status, which in turns makes it possible for it to be placed in the restrictor of a quantificational structure.

3.3 A representation in Discourse Representation Theory (DRT)

The marked prosody of the first conjunct of a C-declarative can also be seen as a strong interpretative cue. That is, whenever the coordination is uttered without a
low boundary tone and with a high rising phrase accent instead, this will be a cue that the hearer needs to assign it a conditional interpretation.

Figure 3 shows a DRT representation of example (2), repeated below for convenience. The prosody of the first conjunct indicates the hearer that he needs to embed another DRS (Discourse Representation Structure) into the main DRS. As mentioned, the embedded DRS will be a modalised quantificational structure with a causal modal: if the speaker x is a student, this will cause x to start y, such that y is a revolution.

(2) Yo soy estudiante y monto una revolución.
    I am student and assemble a revolution
    ‘If I were a student, I would start a revolution’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>x</th>
<th>y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>speaker(x)</td>
<td>revolution(y)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student(x)</td>
<td>started(x,y)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. DRT representation of the conditional interpretation of (2)

In contrast, if the marked prosody is not present and the first conjunct is not deaccentuated, the coordination will not receive a conditional interpretation and, therefore, the hearer will interpret all the information in the main DRS, as shown in Figure (4): the speaker x is a student and he will start y, such that y is a revolution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>x, y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>speaker(x)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student(x)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>revolution(y)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>start(x,y)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. DRT representation of the literal interpretation of (2)

3.4 The pragmatic nature of the counterfactual interpretation

We now turn to the fact that it is possible for C-declaratives to receive a counterfactual interpretation (see examples (1) and (2), for instance). My proposal is that a C-conditional “p and q” can be pragmatically interpreted as a counterfactual if it is known that the negation of p is in the common ground.
I follow Iatridou (2000) in assuming that the meaning of a counterfactual conditional is exactly the same as the meaning of a non-counterfactual conditional augmented by an exclusion feature with the meaning of (19).

(19) The topics worlds (the worlds that we are talking about) exclude the actual world (the world that for all we know are the worlds of the speaker).

That is, if in the context it is clear that the antecedent is not compatible with the common ground, the conditional will be interpreted counterfactually. This is the case in examples (1) and (2), for instance. In (1), it will be obvious that the speaker is not Merkel; that is, the proposition “I am Merkel” will not be compatible with the common ground. In the case of (2), it would be pragmatically marked for the speaker to intend a non-counterfactual interpretation, given that it would strongly suggest that s/he is not sure whether s/he is a student or not. That is, a non-counterfactual conditional usually conveys ignorance about the antecedent. In most contexts, we can assume that the speaker will know whether or not s/he is a student and, thus, the inference is that s/he is not, which forces the hearer to interpret the conditional as a counterfactual.

If it is not the case that the common ground contains the negation of p, then the C-declarative will not get a counterfactual interpretation. That is, the counterfactuality we observed in (1) and (2) is not part of the semantics of the construction, but a pragmatic meaning obtained because it is common knowledge that the first conjunct is not true. However, it is possible for C-declaratives to have a non-counterfactual interpretation, if the described pragmatic condition does not obtain. This was, for instance, the case of example (5), repeated below for convenience. In (5), it is plausible to assume that the common ground does not need to contain the proposition “You don’t pressure John enough” and, thus, no counterfactuality is present in the conditional interpretation of this sentence.

(5) Presionas lo suficiente a Juan y lo puedes corromper.
‘If you pressure John enough, you can corrupt him.’

The pair of examples in (20) and (21) illustrates that the same sentence may get a counterfactual or a non-counterfactual interpretation depending on the context.

(20) a. Context: I just had a bad breakup with my boyfriend. Tonight a mutual friend is throwing a party and it is possible that he is there. I say:

   b. Yo veo que está mi ex en la fiesta y me voy.
‘If I see that my ex is at the party, I will leave.’
In (20), it is not in the common ground that $p$ is false (that the speaker will not see his ex at the party). In fact, it is an open possibility and, thus, the sentence does not get a counterfactual reading. In contrast, in (21), the speaker is thinking about a hypothetical situation involving a party and an ex. Since it is common ground that it is not the case that she will see her ex at the party (because in fact there is no party), the interpretation we obtain is a counterfactual one.

4. Conclusion

In this paper I have provided a description and an analysis of conditionally interpreted declaratives in Spanish: a structure which consists in a coordination of declaratives which may get a conditional interpretation, including a counterfactual one.

I have shown that C-declaratives display a particular prosody and I have argued that they contain a left-subordinating conjunction ‘and’, which (i) conveys a causal modal, and (ii) turns the first conjunct into the restrictor of the modal and the second one into the scope. Thus, we find the same elements that are also found in plain overt conditionals. The presence of the causal modal explains why C-declaratives have a narrower distribution and interpretation than plain conditionals (whose modal does not need to be causal). Finally, the counterfactual interpretation is a pragmatic effect (i.e. it is defeasible) which is obtained when it is common ground that the first conjunct does not hold.

There remain several issues for future work. One issue is related to the ban on past tense in C-declaratives. This ban is somewhat puzzling because in fact regular counterfactual conditionals require past tense morphology (which is not interpreted as past tense, but as the exclusion feature referred to in (19)). Why should past tense be banned from C-declaratives?

Another issue for future work is related to the counterfactual interpretation and its availability cross-linguistically. C-declaratives in Spanish are interesting because they allow for such counterfactual interpretation. This interpretation is

7. I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this question.
not allowed in other languages, which do have similar constructions (see examples (4) and (8) for P-declaratives in English and French). That is, example (1) cannot be literally translated into English, French or even very closely related languages like Italian. Why should this be so?

The proposal in this paper is that the counterfactual meaning is a pragmatic inference triggered by the information present in the common ground. Evidence in favour of this idea is found in the fact that the same sentence may acquire or lack the counterfactual interpretation depending on the context, as shown by the minimal pair in (20) and (21). However, if the counterfactual meaning is a mere pragmatic inference, why should this inference be impossible in other languages? Why is the counterpart of (1) unacceptable in other languages, in a context in which it is perfectly clear that p cannot be true?

Non-conditional structures interpreted as conditionals present interesting similarities and differences across similar languages, such as French and Spanish. For instance, while in Spanish a conjunction is always required in a C-declarative, French has a similar construction without the conjunction (see Footnote 3); or while the counterfactual interpretation is easily available in Spanish, it is much more restricted in French (see Footnote 5). These are puzzling cross-linguistic differences, whose study I leave for future work and which could contribute to the growing body of research in the field of cross-linguistic variation in pragmatics.

References


8. I thank an anonymous reviewer for providing some valuable data and comments about French, which highlights the cross-linguistic differences between French and Spanish.