

## Chinese Conditionals Revisited: On Modal Implication and Pronoun Distributions

Conditional sentences in Chinese such as examples (1) and (2) have puzzled researchers for displaying different distributions with regard to pronoun occurrence. Few have discussed their modal implications. Cheng and Huang (1996) term (1) *Ruguo* ‘if’-conditional and (2) Bare Conditional (BC) and declare the existence of two paradigms of conditionals. While (1) allows a consequent pronoun, (2) disallows it. Under their account, (1) and (2) have the same meaning. Contrary to Cheng and Huang’s claim, Lin (1996) observes that BCs may admit a pronoun if there exists a unique individual in the context satisfying the description of the two conjuncts (3) and proposed a condition for pronouns in CBCs that presupposes uniqueness and existence (4). Recently, Huang (2009) argues that the use of pronouns does not require uniqueness and existence since (5) has a generic reading. This makes (4) suspect. This paper examines the form and meaning of Chinese conditionals and argues that: (i) the dichotomy between Chinese conditionals cannot be reasonably posited with respect to pronoun occurrence but can be better characterized with reference to modal implications; (ii) pronoun occurrence in conditionals is constrained by the principle of *saliency* (Lewis 1979) not by uniqueness and existence which is contrary to Lin’s claim.

I show that conditionals with the leading element *ruguo* ‘if’ such as (1) differ from those without it such as (2) in that (2) but not (1) is associated with an additional modal implication similar to the contribution of the English morpheme *-ever*, i.e., the ignorance and indifference reading described in the works of Dayal (1997), and Von Stechow (2000). While the bare conditional in (6) cannot immediately precede an utterance which expresses Lisi’s strong preference for wanting to hit a specific person (entails indifference), the *ruguo* ‘if’-conditional in (7) can (no indifference entailment). Modal implications of ignorance and indifference accompanying conditionals without *ruguo* ‘if’ seen in (2), (3), and (5) can be achieved with the presence of a consequent pronoun rendering (8) their truth condition, a modification of Von Stechow’s analysis of *whatever*. Cheng and Huang’s dichotomy based on pronoun occurrence cannot tease apart the meaning difference between Chinese conditionals.

To resolve the problem of pronoun occurrence in Chinese conditionals, I take on an approach drastically different from previous accounts by analyzing the form of Chinese conditionals not as single isolated sentences but within a context as a part of a larger *discourse unit* or a *topic chain* (Li and Thompson 1981; Chu 1998). The use of a pronoun in a conditional cannot be felicitous if the pronoun and its *wh*-antecedent cannot form a *topic chain* with the discourse topic as shown in (9). In (9), the morpheme *ya* explicitly marks *John* as the discourse topic chained by the empty pronominal [*e*] to form a discourse unit. The use of pronoun is infelicitous in the bare conditional that modifies the relative clause headed by *ren* ‘person’.

This analysis presents a fuller spectrum of the form and meaning of conditionals. It respects the topic-prominent nature of the Chinese language and makes a better prediction than the existing accounts in being able to characterize the distribution of pronouns in conditionals as well as differentiate the meaning of *ruguo* ‘if’-conditionals from that of Bare Conditionals. Whenever the individuals denoted by *wh*-words are salient/identifiable to a speaker, a pronoun can be used, otherwise, it cannot. A single principle of *saliency* that governs the use of pronouns in conditionals is expected to cover the use of ordinary pronouns. This prediction is indeed born out—as we see that in (10), the use of a pronoun is infelicitous in a modal subordination context where its antecedent is not made salient in the global context in the sense of Roberts (1989).

## Examples

- (1) Ruguo you shei qiao men, ni jiu jiao \*shei/ta jin-lai  
 if have who knock door you then ask who/he/she come in  
 ‘If (for some x, (x a person) (you see x)), then tell him/her to come in.’
- (2) Shei xian lai, shei/\*ta (jiu) xian chi.  
 who first come, who/he/she then first eat  
 ‘If x comes first, x eats first.’  
 Unselective binding:  $\forall x$  (you like x  $\rightarrow$  x is lucky)
- (3) Shei shangxueqi na diyiming, shei/ta zhexueqi jiu keyi dang banzhang.  
 who last semester get top-one who/he/she this semester then can serve leader  
 ‘Whoever scored the best last semester can serve as the leader this semester.’
- (4) *Condition on Donkey Pronouns in Bare Conditionals:*  
 A donkey pronoun in a bare conditional is felicitous only if it picks out a unique referent.
- (5) Shei zhebeizi zuo hao shi, shei/ta xia beizi jiu keyi jixu zuo ren.  
 who this life do good deeds who/he/she next life then can continue be human  
 ‘Whoever does good deeds in this life can continue to be human in the next life.’
- (6) ?? Shei buguai Lisi jiu da shei/ta. Ta xiang da Zhangsan.  
 who not well-behaved Lisi then hit who/he/she he want hit Zhangsan.  
 ‘Lisi hit whoever was ill-behaved. He wanted to hit Zhangsan.’
- (7) Ruguo you shei buguai Lisi jiu da ta. Ta xiang da Zhangsan.  
 if there be who not well-behaved Lisi then hit he/she he want hit Zhangsan.  
 ‘If someone was ill-behaved, Lisi will hit him/her. He wanted to hit Zhangsan.’
- (8) *Bare Conditional (wh...wh/ta) (w) (F) (P) (Q) :*  
 $\exists!x.P(w)(x) \rightarrow \forall w' \in \min_w [F \cap (\lambda w'. \text{tx}. P(w')(x) \neq \text{tx}. P(w)(x))]$ :  
 $Q(w')(\text{tx}. P(w')(x)) = Q(w)(\text{tx}. P(w)(x))$  (where F is the modal base)
- (9) [John ya], <sub>topic = John</sub>  
 John YA  
 [[e] shi ge (shei jia ta, shei/\*ta/\*[e] daomei)]<sub>Bare Conditional</sub> de re ]<sub>topic = John</sub>  
 [e] be CL who marry he who/she/[e] unlucky DE person  
 ‘As for John, he is a person such that whoever marries him will be unlucky.’
- (10) \*Bushu zhejian fanzi mei cesuo, buran ta jiushi zai yige qiguaide difang.  
 either this-CL house no bathroom or it then at a-CL strange place  
 ‘Either there is no bathroom in this house or it’s in a funny place.’

## References

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