Philosophy of Language and Logic

Wester, T.I.

Autumn 2023

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction to conditionals

Conditionals in the English language exist in various constructions and operate in equally various ways. Categorizing these constructions and unifying them under one theory is a seemingly transparent question, though it turns out more complicated than one might anticipate. Given a number of conditional statements, one might conclude the connecting factor to be the word *"if"*, or an equivalent term in other languages. This word will turn out to play a major part in the analysis of conditionals, though it is not a proper indicator, as it is neither necessary nor necessarily indicative.

While the topic of conditionals is not simple, it is definitely worthwhile studying, as conditionals are used in much of our thinking, argumentation, and by-extension: philosophising. Within philosophy, conditionals are used to express various concepts such as dispositions and causation as well as being used for basic philosophical Logic. Due to this wide use, it is nearly impossible to study philosophy of language without encountering the problem of conditionals.

1.1 Kinds of conditionals

We can divide conditionals broadly into at least two categories. There are those sentences that indicate a state of affairs and those that indicate a possibility. These are respectively called *indicative* and *subjunctive*[1].

Indicative conditionals relate to the material conditional ($\supset$) of classical logic. Whereas the subjunctive conditionals do not. In fact – they do not

---

[1]These are also occasionally called *counterfactual*

relate to any concept in classical logic, and therefore lack a straightforward method of analysis, they are not truth-functional.

Despite the obvious connection between the indicative conditional and material conditional, they are not necessarily the same, and a large body of literature is written on the topic. For this reason, we cannot express the material conditional in English by using the typical construction "if ... then", as it would confuse the material conditional with the indicative. Therefore, we express the material conditional instead using a different operator, namely *or* ($\vee$). Thus, $A \supset C$ becomes $\neg A \vee C$.

Subjunctive conditionals can further be separated into *would subjunctives* and *might subjunctives*. These indicate the words used in the respective sentences which relate to whether they express a possible consequent or a definitive one, though in either case the antecedent in negated (thus the term "counterfactual").