

Insubordinated Conditionals in spoken and non-spoken Italian

Edoardo Lombardi Vallauri - Università Roma Tre

The aim of this presentation is to locate Italian free conditionals (Lombardi Vallauri 2004, 2009, 2010) within the general framework of what Evans (2007) has called "Insubordination". The talk will be structured as a series of questions and subquestions, which we will try to answer by means of the data contained in two corpora: the LIP corpus of spoken Italian (500.000 words) and the corpus of chats, newsgroups and emails used by Lombardi Vallauri (2009) (about 1.000.000 words). The questions will be the following:

1. Is it really insubordination?

Evans (2007:367) defines insubordination as "the conventionalized main clause use of what, on prima facie grounds, appear to be formally subordinate clauses." As for Italian free conditionals, the key question appears to be:

1.1. To what extent can their use be considered *conventionalized*?

We will try to answer this question by taking into account parameters such as:

1.1.1. The frequency of the construction as compared to the general frequency of *if*-clauses.

1.1.2. Its different diffusion in spoken and written uses and, among them, dialogic vs. non-dialogic situations.

1.1.3. Intonation patterns, conveying a series of pragmatic functions and characterizing *if*-clauses without an (overt) main clause as specific speech acts;

1.1.4. Conventionalization of meaning and function, which will be seen as intermediate between total absence of semantic specialization and full grammaticization, due to the degree of recoverability of the ellipsed main clause, and to the only partial specialization of the construction for specific meanings (such as positive outcome, etc.).

Widely attested "half-way" cases will also be taken into account, such as shifts in discourse planning by the speaker, which leave conditionals without a main clause partly unexpectedly, and cases of turntaking by the addressee that are "invited" by the speaker, which also have the effect of allowing no main clause to be produced after a conditional.

2. Is there in language a permanent pressure in favour of the creation of insubordinated conditionals?

Free conditionals are attested in many languages (cf. Buscha 1976 for German; Almela Pérez 1985, Schwenter 1996, 1999, Montolío Durán for Spanish; Ohori 1996 for Japanese; Stirling 1998 for Australian English; Lombardi Vallauri 2004, 2005 for Italian, Swedish, Finnish, Latin and Ancient Greek). This raises the question whether there is a general, universal drift towards this exploitation of conditional clauses. We will examine the role of pressures such as the following:

2.1. Economy proper (phonetical): avoiding unnecessary syllables.

2.2. Communicative economy/ergonomy (semantic): vagueness means saying more things in one production, allowing more interpretations than just a strictly codified single one.

2.3. Politeness: complying with the instruction to "be incomplete" (Brown & Levinson 1987), to "leave the way open" to different goals of the message, thus protecting the addressee's negative face.

2.4. Preference for the iconic order "cause-consequence", and preference for extracting unknown consequences from known premises, over extracting unknown premises from known consequences.

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