

Review of Lastres-López, Cristina. 2021. *From Subordination to Insubordination: A Functional-pragmatic Approach to If/si-constructions in English, French and Spanish Spoken Discourse*. Bern: Peter Lang. ISBN: 978-3-034-34220-9. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3726/b18393>

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Lastres-López's (2021) monograph presents a corpus-based contrastive study of conditional constructions used in spoken discourse in English, French and Spanish. It adopts a semasiological perspective, focusing on clauses introduced by *if* or *si* ('if' in French and Spanish), and takes a functional-pragmatic approach. Based on a detailed study of 3,558 *if/si*-constructions, it proposes classifications of both full-fledged conditional constructions (consisting of a protasis and an apodosis) and insubordinate conditional constructions (*viz.* subclauses without an accompanying main clause, see Evans 2007), and reflects on the diachronic relation between these two types. The book consists of 6 chapters, each of which I will discuss in turn.

Chapter 1 presents a brief introduction to the study. It delineates the object of investigation, namely structures introduced by *if* in English and *si* in French and Spanish spoken discourse in contexts of subordination and insubordination; constructions where these conjunctions introduce indirect polar questions are excluded from analysis. It contextualizes the study by indicating how it fills gaps in the existing literature on the topic. In doing so, however, Lastres-López merely posits claims about studies on related topics being abundant or scarce; she fails to cite references in support (she only does so in Chapter 2). The chapter concludes with a brief outline of the book and with a short presentation of the research questions that will be tackled.

Chapter 2 sketches the theoretical background to the study. Its first part presents a literature review of earlier work on conditionals on the one hand, and of previous research



on insubordination on the other. The former is an adequate synthesis that starts with classical approaches to conditionals, based on degrees of hypotheticality and linked up with tense and mood patterns, and works towards research on conditionals from a functional-pragmatic perspective. Lastres-López thus arrives at a fairly comprehensive classification, in which she carefully points to correspondences between proposals by distinct authors. Incidentally, the distinction between predictive and non-predictive conditionals central to Dancygier (1993, 1998) is missing. Consistent with the set-up of her monograph, Lastres-López also presents earlier work on conditionals from a contrastive and a corpus-based perspective. She hence waits until Chapter 2 to motivate her claims made in Chapter 1 about her study filling gaps in the literature. Her discussion of research on insubordination introduces the phenomenon adequately and presents various proposals about the diachrony of insubordinate structures across languages, meticulously laying out how these relate to each other. Lastres-López then homes in on previous work on insubordination in English, French and Spanish. With respect to English, I was struck by the omission of D’Hertefelt’s (2018) classification of conditional insubordination. The latter’s work is rightly mentioned in the context of the distinction between insubordination and dependency shift, but discussion of D’Hertefelt’s taxonomy of conditional insubordination arrived at for English (and other Germanic languages) is starkly absent from this monograph, while it did receive attention in Lastres-López (2018: 46-47), that is, D’Hertefelt’s (2015) dissertation, reworked into D’Hertefelt (2018). The second part of Chapter 2, in turn, presents the theoretical framework adopted in the monograph, which is couched in Hallidayan thought. Lastres-López’s classification of full-fledged conditionals into ideational, interpersonal, and textual ones is convincing, including her critical appraisal of Kaltenböck’s (2016) work. However, she fails to suggest how this Hallidayan framework would apply to insubordinate structures and brings the chapter to an abrupt end.

Chapter 3 presents the methodological background to the corpus-based study. Lastres-López starts off by justifying her choice for comparable corpora rather than parallel (or translation) corpora and compares, on the basis of Biber’s (1988) multi-dimensional model of register analysis, the two spoken registers selected: conversation and parliamentary discourse. Although the selected registers are generally considered to occupy opposite ends on the formal-informal continuum, she concludes that they differ along only two out of five dimensions in Biber’s (1988) model, namely with respect to

‘involved versus informational production’ on the one hand, and ‘explicit versus situation-dependent reference’ on the other. The chapter then details the corpora chosen and the data retrieval process, including screenshots of the corpus interfaces used. From the three corpora of parliamentary discourse selected, Lastres-López extracted random 500-hit samples for the period 2000–2010, targeting the conditional conjunction *if/si*. The same queries were used for the corpora with the selected conversational data, from which exhaustive samples were retrieved of no more than 940 hits per language. Although the description is detailed enough to ensure replicability, the reader gets no information about the overall word count of the Spanish corpus of parliamentary discourse used, nor of the 2000–2010 selected time frame, for any language. For the conversational data, we do not get to know the size of the sub-corpora consulted for French and Spanish (the monologue data still need to be subtracted from the totals given in Table 5 on p. 66). It would have been nice if the chapter had concluded with a table summarizing the various samples extracted for the studies reported on in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 indeed presents the ‘meat’ of the monograph, arranged into three contrastive case-studies. The first two concern conditional subordination and differ in terms of register, with the first case-study concentrating on parliamentary discourse and the second focusing on face-to-face informal conversation. They are organized in the same way, which adds consistency to the volume and allows for an interesting cross-register comparison (in Section 4.1.3). Both case-studies start off with an overview of the types of structures introduced by *if/si* in the corpus data, illustrating also the discarded cases.¹ Then the data are analyzed for the same five analytical parameters, namely the Hallidayan metafunction of the conditional, the degree of likelihood of the conditional, the position of the protasis, the markedness of the apodosis (with a linking device like *then*) and the modal auxiliary in the apodosis. For parliamentary discourse, Lastres-López finds that ideational conditionals prevail in all three languages, although Spanish stands out in showing significantly larger portions of interpersonal conditionals than English and French. Another interesting cross-linguistic difference is that, when the metafunction of the construction is cross-classified with degree of likelihood, French and Spanish interpersonal conditionals are predominantly real conditionals, while the English ones

¹ In explaining the small share of *if*-complement clauses in English parliamentary discourse (0.60%) compared to French (14.40%) and Spanish (21.80%), Lastres-López overlooks the availability of a contender for introducing indirect polar questions in English, namely *whether*, which French and Spanish lack (pp. 70–71).

show more variation between real and potential conditionals. A last cross-linguistic difference observed is not surprising: English shows a much higher ratio of modal verbs in the apodosis (67.45 %) than French (21.09%) and Spanish (12.78%) as, in the latter languages, meanings equivalent to *will* and *would* are coded by verbal endings (mood-tense combinations) on the finite lexical verb (p. 91). Unfortunately, the modals found in English have not been classified into semantic subtypes (e.g., epistemic, deontic, and dynamic modality), nor have the attested Romance auxiliaries. Such an analysis would have allowed more fine-grained conclusions with respect to this last parameter.

The second case-study has the same set-up as the first one, but involves two additional analytical parameters, both pertaining to interpersonal conditionals, which chalk up much higher shares in the conversational data studied than in parliamentary discourse. Again, relevant corpus hits are separated from irrelevant ones, and the latter are categorized into several subtypes and aptly illustrated with examples for each language. Here, while I see why repetitions and false starts are excluded from further analysis, I do not understand why discontinuous conditionals are (see note 41 on p. 95). Although these are either co-constructed or interrupted, as is not unexpected in spontaneous conversation, they nevertheless form complete conditionals.

The interpersonal conditionals receive special treatment. Firstly, they are further analyzed for an interpersonal subfunction according to Warchal's (2010) classification (epistemic, opinion/evaluation, politeness, relevance, reservation, and metalinguistic); Lastres-López here takes great care in explaining how the examples proffered instantiate the interpersonal subfunction in question. However, chances are missed to establish links with the literature review in Chapter 2. For instance, conditionals serving the politeness subfunction (pp. 105–106) could have been categorized as speech act conditionals as defined on p. 30, where the protasis in example (20) indeed mitigates the speaker's evaluation expressed in the apodosis. Likewise, relevance conditionals could have been classified as speech act conditionals as well: in example (126) on p. 107, the protasis justifies why the speaker utters the statement in the apodosis. Secondly, interpersonal conditionals are additionally coded for whether they convey stance (and are hence speaker-oriented) or engagement (and are hence addressee-oriented). Interestingly, Lastres-López cross-classifies this parameter with that of interpersonal subfunction, which shows that these are truly independent parameters. Even more interesting are the correlations revealed between the metafunction of the conditional and the position of the

protasis, and —among interpersonal conditionals— the correlations between the interpersonal subfunction of the conditional and again the position of the protasis. Across the three metafunctions, the protasis occurs predominantly in sentence-initial position across the three languages. Homing in on interpersonal conditionals, it becomes clear that this preference is mainly due to what is observed in epistemic conditionals. Unlike the latter, relevance, reservation, and metalinguistic conditionals prefer non-initial protases in English and French.² With respect to markedness of the apodosis, almost absent in parliamentary discourse, the detailed analysis of interpersonal conditionals in the conversational data uncovers noteworthy correlations. That is, marked apodoses are restricted to (interpersonal) epistemic conditionals in English and French. In Spanish, by contrast, this use accounts for only 54.55 percent of the marked apodoses in conversation, “with the remaining proportion distributed across a wide range of metafunctions and subfunctions” (p. 128). For the last parameter of modal auxiliaries in the apodosis, the conversational data show overall lower shares of modals than in parliamentary discourse. Regrettably, the conversational data were not further analyzed for semantic subtype of modal meaning either.

These first two case-studies reveal very interesting results, and hence significantly add to our knowledge about conditionals in English, French and Spanish, as set out above, but they also show some shortcomings, some of which I have already mentioned in the above paragraphs. First, I beg to disagree with Lastres-López’s analysis of the corpus examples in (1) and (2) further below.

- (1) So, if we want to increase the current 3,000 adoptees by at least 50 per cent, as we all do, there is plenty of scope in the existing material, and we need to concentrate on why more such people are not coming forward or being approved as adopters (Hansard Corpus – British Parliament) (Ex. (72), p. 78).

Example (1) is categorized as an ideational conditional, in spite of the comment that the conditional is used to render the message less assertive and that in similar examples “*if* can be paraphrased by *since*” (p. 78). These are exactly two features of what Dancygier (1993, 1998) calls non-predictive conditionals, that is, conditionals that lack a causal relation between protasis and apodosis, under which Dancygier (1993: 422–424) subsumes both Sweetser’s (1990) epistemic and speech act conditionals, which Lastres-López in turn correctly classifies as interpersonal conditionals. In my view, in (1) the

² Spanish is the odd one out in showing a preference for sentence-initial protases in relevance conditionals (66.67 %), and in showing no reservation or metalinguistic conditionals at all (p. 119, note 43).

protasis expresses an assumption that is manifest to both speaker and hearer ('if it is really the case that we want to ...') on the basis of which the speaker arrives at an inference with a deontic flavor in the apodosis, which pragmatically serves as a call for action ('let's concentrate on ...'). To me, then, (1) is an interpersonal conditional rather than an ideational one. The reverse goes for example (2).

- (2) If you are born in the Gorbals and there's absolutely no chance of your having money well then you grow up as a normal Gorbals-born person (ICE-GB: S1A – 075 #090: 1: B) (Ex. (117), p. 104).

Example (2) is analyzed as an interpersonal conditional, more specifically an epistemic conditional, which can be "paraphrased as 'If *I assume* [protasis], then *I conclude* [apodosis]'" (p. 104). However, without further co-text, I would analyze (2) as a predictive conditional, that is, a conditional in which the protasis expresses an assumption on the basis of which the speaker arrives at a prediction in the apodosis (Dancygier 1993: 405–406). To my mind, there is a sequential and causal relation between the protasis and apodosis in (2), and the example hence serves the ideational metafunction rather than the interpersonal one. Needless to say, my reservations about Lastres-López's analyses of (1) and (2) impinge on my appraisal of these first two case-studies.

A second weakness relates to the absence of the notion of 'backshift', and the way it interacts with the metafunction of conditionals. Again, I turn to Dancygier (1993: 405–406) here, who shows that, in English, in predictive conditionals the interpretation of verb forms involves back-shifting: "the time reference intended by the speaker is systematically *later* than the time referred to by the verb form in its prototypical (non-conditional) uses" (emphasis original). This should have been discussed in the sections on degrees of likelihood of the two case-studies. Dancygier's (1993) observation that there is no back-shift in epistemic and speech act conditionals in English raises questions about the potential and unreal conditions serving the interpersonal metafunction in the English datasets of the two case-studies. In Dancygier's (1993: 417) terms:

the verb forms in non-predictive conditionals refer to the time they indicate. In other words, they are not backshifted and can be used according to the rules governing non-conditional constructions.

Incidentally, Lastres-López restricts unreal conditions to "past time event(s) which cannot be changed" (p. 82), and hence seems to overlook the class of unreal conditions with

present-time reference, such as “counterfactual-P conditionals” (e.g., *If I were you*), described by Declerck and Reed (2001: 100).

I now turn to the third case-study in chapter 4, which focuses on conditional insubordination in the conversational data studied. Interestingly, it reveals stark cross-linguistic differences. For one, Spanish shows a much larger portion of insubordinate conditionals (20.85%) than English (4.18%) and French (2.24%) (p. 131). A second difference pertains to the type of discourse function served: whereas English insubordinate *if*-clauses mainly serve directive functions (requests, suggestions and offers), their French and Spanish counterparts are predominantly used to express assertions and exclamations. Unfortunately, adding to the fact that the typology of directive subfunctions presented in Table 28 (p. 133) lacks parameters that together uniquely define the five types distinguished, the case-study does not go in much detail regarding the results mentioned above. For instance, if the presence of modal auxiliaries is mentioned at all (e.g., for requests, but not for offers), there is no discussion of their semantic subtype, and no attention is given to back-shift or tense-mood marking of finite verbs more generally, or to polarity reversal in examples like (182) on p. 142. Incidentally, I wonder whether the prosodic mark-up in example (179) on p. 141 does not suggest that French *si* functions as a positive polarity item here rather than a conditional conjunction. Also, I am in doubt as to whether the *si*-clause in (181) on p. 142 is not a postposed epistemic conditional rather than an insubordinate one: that is, I would accept an analysis of (181) as a bridging context supporting both an interpersonal (epistemic) conditional reading and an insubordinate reading.

For the three case-studies, Lastres-López nicely combines qualitative and quantitative analyses, and the figures in the latter always add up. She also presents the results of statistical tests in graphs, plotting 95 percent Wilson confidence intervals, but here I was often confused as what these graphs do and do not show. While it is stated in note 38 on p. 76 that “[w]hen the confidence intervals (in the form of I-shaped bars) do not overlap at any point, the results are statistically significant,” in multiple graphs the bars do not overlap but yet only some differences are said to be statistically significant and other (also without overlap) are not, and the reader is supposed to see this in the respective graphs (e.g. for Figures 10, 17, and 21). I was puzzled by the discussion of these graphs.

Chapter 5, then, reflects on the developmental relations between the constructions studied, and feeds the synchronic findings of Chapter 4 into a diachronic hypothesis. Specifically, it puts forward a pathway of pragmaticalization, along which ideational conditionals acquire interpersonal and textual functions in full conditional constructions, which in turn develop into in subordinate constructions and pragmatic markers like *if you choose/ like/ prefer/ want/ wish*. Although this pathway is intuitively appealing and in line with numerous proposals posited for similar phenomena, it remains sterile in that Lastres-López does not specify which interpersonal subtypes would develop into which in subordinate subtypes. Nor does she point to bridging contexts to motivate the pathway and, hence, seems to underexploit her dataset (see my comment above relating to ex. (181) on p. 142).

Chapter 5 rounds off with a detailed summary, strangely marked for present tense, and Chapter 6 offers some avenues for further research.

Overall, Lastres-López uses an engaging writing style, and her monograph contains only a handful of typos or infelicities (e.g., *smallest* for *smaller* in “The smallest the confidence intervals, the greater the level of certainty on the observed values” on p. 76). However, in terms of local text organization, I often felt that examples were given too late. The long distance between the introduction of an example in the running text and the presentation of the example itself puts a strain on the reader, and often also affects indentation (I bet that in relation to the latter it is the publisher’s typesetting rules that are to blame, not the author). At a higher level of text organization, I regret the use of sections that only have one subsection. For instance, no separate subsection had to be assigned to Section 4.1.2.2.1, as there is no Section 4.1.2.2.2 to differentiate it from. The level of Section 4.2.1 is likewise redundant, as there is no Section 4.2.2.

In conclusion, while there is certainly room for improvement, I think Lastres-López put together a very interesting monograph, substantially contributing to the domain of contrastive corpus linguistics and significantly advancing our understanding of conditionals, whether in full-fledged complex sentences or used independently, in English, French and Spanish spoken discourse.

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