

snippets

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Exclusivity in unconditionals

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Under Rawlins’s (2008, 2013) analysis of unconditionals, alternative (1a) and constituent (1b) unconditionals involve a question-denoting adjunct that gives rise to two presuppositions. The *exhaustivity* presupposition requires that the alternatives of the adjunct (e.g., *that Taylor brings beer* and *that Max brings beer* for (1a)) exhaust the context set, ensuring that at least one of these alternatives is true. The *exclusivity* presupposition requires that the alternatives mutually exclude each other. Thus, for Rawlins, the unconditionals in (1) presuppose that at least one of the relevant people will bring beer (exhaustivity), but not more than one will (exclusivity).

- (1) a. Whether Taylor or Max brings beer, the party will be a success.
- b. Whoever brings beer, the party will be a success.

The claim that alternative unconditionals come with an exclusivity presupposition is based on example (2), to be evaluated in Context 1 (Rawlins 2013:137). In this context, it is possible that both Alfonso and Joanna will bring a salad (#exclusivity). For Rawlins, the fact that the exclusivity presupposition is not satisfied leads to the infelicitousness of (2). Although not explicitly shown in Rawlins (2008, 2013), constituent unconditionals are expected to be infelicitous in Context 1 as well, given that they come with the same presupposition.

Context 1: [Planning a potluck, discussing food needs.] Suppose that one more salad would not be enough food, but two would. We know that either Alfonso or Joanna might bring a salad, and that possibly both will (#exclusivity), and this fact has just been under discussion.

- (2) #Whether Alfonso or Joanna brings a salad, we will not have enough food.

We claim that (2) is degraded in Context 1 due to two issues, neither of which is exclusivity per se. First, due to “might”, it is not certain that someone will bring a salad (#exhaustivity), which on its own should lead to infelicitousness. Second, given that exclusivity is explicitly allowed not to hold, the truth of the consequent is not entailed, which results in the falsity of the unconditional. To disentangle these effects from exclusivity, we presented 9 speakers with the unconditionals in (1) in the modified context given below. Eight speakers judged them to be both felicitous and true. This is evidence that unconditionals do not come with an exclusivity presupposition.

Context 2: [At a party, discussing beer needs.] Suppose we need just one more person to bring beer for the party to be a success (✓consequent entailment). We know that either Taylor or Max will bring beer (✓exhaustivity), and it is possible that both of them will (#exclusivity).

Thus, we show that out of the two presuppositions previously associated with unconditionals — exhaustivity and exclusivity — only exhaustivity should be retained. This finding is important for

the current debate on the semantic nature of unconditionals. It directly challenges the analysis of unconditionals in Rawlins 2008, 2013, where a question operator triggers an exclusivity presupposition in unconditionals just like it does in questions, and more generally, any question-based analysis that would require that the relevant alternatives mutually exclude each other. The lack of exclusivity effects we observe is particularly problematic for alternative unconditionals, given that alternative questions are widely assumed to denote a set of mutually exclusive propositions (Biezma and Rawlins 2012). Our paper therefore lends indirect support to recent non-question-based approaches to unconditionals that do not predict general exclusivity effects in unconditionals (Balusu to appear, Lohiniva 2019, Szabolcsi 2019, Gonzalez and Lohiniva 2020).

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