

MEANING CONSTRUCTION THROUGH CONDITIONAL SENTENCES IN ENGLISH: CONCEPTUAL BLENDING THEORY**Juraeva Iklima Mahmud kizi**

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Annotation: This article applies conceptual blending theory to the analysis of conditional sentences in English, arguing that the cognitive complexity of conditional meaning construction can be best explained by the framework of mental space integration developed by Fauconnier and Turner. The study analyzes zero, first, second, third, and mixed conditionals, as well as pragmatic conditionals, demonstrating how each type involves a distinct configuration of input spaces and produces characteristic emergent meaning in the blended space.

Key words: conditional sentences, conceptual blending, English, mental spaces, cognitive linguistics, counterfactual, zero conditional, first conditional, second conditional, third conditional.

INTRODUCTION.

English conditional sentences have long been a central topic in linguistics, philosophy of language, and logic. From the perspective of formal semantics, conditionals are analyzed as material or strict implications, expressing relationships between propositions across possible worlds. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, however, conditionals are not merely logical operators but cognitive constructions that require speakers and hearers to build and integrate multiple mental representations simultaneously.

The English conditional system is typically organized around four main types, distinguished by their tense-modal configurations: the zero conditional (present/present), the first conditional (present/will + infinitive), the second conditional (past/would + infinitive), and the third conditional (past perfect/would have + past participle). Each type encodes a different relationship between the conditional antecedent and the actual world, ranging from universal truth (zero) through real possibility (first), unreal present hypothesis (second), and unreal past hypothesis (third). Mixed conditionals add a further layer of complexity by combining elements from different types.

Conceptual blending theory provides a uniquely powerful framework for analyzing this typological diversity, because it treats the variety of conditional meanings not as a list of distinct constructions but as the product of a flexible cognitive architecture capable of constructing diverse blending configurations from the same fundamental mechanism. This article applies the blending framework to each major type of English conditional, demonstrating how the theory captures both the systematic regularities and the creative flexibility of conditional meaning.

MAIN BODY.

Zero conditionals in English express universal or habitual truths, as in 'If you heat ice, it melts.' The blending network for this type involves two input spaces: one representing the action of applying heat to ice, and the other representing the process of melting. The generic space captures an abstract causal schema. The blended space integrates these inputs into a generalized causal law that holds across all instances and all times. The present tense in both clauses signals

the timeless character of the blend, compressing the vital relation of time into an atemporal generalization [1: 47].

First conditionals express real or realistic conditions about the future: 'If it rains tomorrow, the match will be cancelled.' The blending operation here sets up a future-possibility input space in which rain is a genuine option, and an outcome input space in which the match is cancelled. The blended space integrates these into a forward-looking scenario that encodes the speaker's epistemic openness to the conditional's fulfillment. The modal 'will' in the apodosis marks the consequent as a reliable inference within the blended space, grounded in the speaker's knowledge of the relevant causal relationships.

Second conditionals introduce a deliberate departure from present reality. 'If I spoke Chinese, I could read those signs' constructs a hypothetical input space in which the speaker possesses the ability to speak Chinese—an ability they currently lack. The blended space contains a version of the speaker who inhabits this counterfactual scenario and can be cognitively simulated: what would this person do, see, understand? The past tense morphology ('spoke') is a conventional signal that the factual input space is being set aside, a phenomenon that Dancygier and Sweetser describe as 'backshifting' [4: 10]. The modal 'could' in the apodosis projects the outcome as a possibility within the blended space rather than a certainty.

Third conditionals operate in the past counterfactual domain. 'If she had told the truth, the situation would have been resolved' constructs a hypothetical past in which the protagonist's behavior was different from what it actually was. The blending operation must integrate the factual input space—she did not tell the truth, the situation was not resolved—with the counterfactual input space—she told the truth, the situation was resolved. The blended space contains an alternative past event line that can be mentally simulated, allowing the speaker to reason about what would have followed from the counterfactual premise. This type of conditional is pragmatically rich: it can express regret, criticism, or retrospective analysis, depending on context.

Mixed conditionals, combining a past counterfactual antecedent with a present counterfactual consequent, demonstrate the cognitive flexibility of the blending architecture. 'If he had taken better care of his health, he would be alive today' integrates a past hypothetical event with a present hypothetical state, requiring the blend to bridge two temporal frames. The vital relation of time is compressed in a way that connects the past counterfactual to its imagined present consequences, producing an emergent meaning that is simultaneously retrospective and present-oriented.

Pragmatic conditionals in English illustrate the social and interactional dimensions of conditional meaning construction. Requests such as 'If you could pass the salt, that would be great' do not express a genuine epistemic uncertainty about the hearer's ability to pass the salt; rather, they deploy the conditional frame to project the hearer's compliance into a hypothetical space, softening the illocutionary force of the request and observing norms of politeness. The blended space integrates the social roles of requester and requestee, the face-threatening nature of directives, and the cooperative norms of polite interaction, producing an emergent meaning that is simultaneously a request, a social act of deference, and an implicit negotiation of face.

The interaction of conditionals with epistemic modal verbs such as 'might,' 'could,' 'should,' and 'would' produces particularly complex multi-space blending networks. When a speaker says 'If she might have been mistaken, we should reconsider,' the layering of epistemic modality onto the conditional frame creates a chain of nested mental spaces, each qualified by a different degree of epistemic commitment. Blending theory handles this complexity naturally by allowing for recursive and nested integration of mental spaces within a single blending network.

CONCLUSION.

The application of conceptual blending theory to English conditional sentences demonstrates that the theory provides a cognitively adequate and empirically revealing account of conditional meaning construction. Each conditional type—zero, first, second, third, mixed, and pragmatic—involves a distinct configuration of mental spaces and produces characteristic emergent meaning in the blended space. The theory explains not only the systematic regularities of the English conditional system but also its creative flexibility, its pragmatic dimensions, and its interaction with epistemic modality. Future research should examine the frequency and distribution of different blending configurations in naturally occurring English discourse and explore how the blending of conditionals interacts with prosodic and gestural dimensions of meaning.

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