

Experimental approaches to the semantics and pragmatics of conditionals

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In this talk I present theoretical and experimental work on the meaning and use of conditionals focusing on two case studies. The first study (Liu, Rotter & Giannakidou, 2021) deals with bias, i.e., reduced or higher speaker commitment towards a proposition p . Assuming “nonveridical equilibrium” (implying that p and $\neg p$ as equal possibilities) as the default for epistemic modals, questions and conditionals (Giannakidou & Mari 2021), we argue that the equilibrium of conditionals, as that of questions, can be manipulated to produce bias, relying on experimental work in German on various modal elements (e.g., adverbs *wirklich* ‘really’, modal verbs *sollte* ‘should’ and conditional connectives *wenn/falls* ‘if’) in conditionals. The second study (Rotter & Liu, accepted) deals with an interdisciplinary topic on counterfactual conditionals and emotions. We report two experiments conducted in Germany and the UK in January and February 2021, when both countries were in lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Using a Covid-19-themed sentence completion task (e.g., *If the pandemic had not happened, I would have/the people would have...*), we tested the direction of counterfactual thoughts in relation to egocentric (self-focused) vs. non-egocentric (other-focused) perspective-taking. Results show emotions as expressed in counterfactual language are perspective dependent.