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## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CONDITIONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN LINGUISTICS: A COGNITIVE AND FUNCTIONAL APPROACH

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### Abstract

Conditional relationships represent one of the most fundamental logical and linguistic mechanisms that connect propositions and reflect the structure of human reasoning. Over the centuries, scholars have explored how humans conceptualize and linguistically encode dependence between events, actions, and outcomes. This article investigates the theoretical and functional foundations of conditional relationships in linguistics, drawing from traditional logic, semantics, pragmatics, and cognitive linguistics. The research discusses the historical background of conditionals from Aristotle's syllogistic logic to contemporary cognitive approaches proposed by scholars such as Sweetser (1990) and Fauconnier (1994). Moreover, the study addresses cross-linguistic variation in expressing conditionality, focusing on structural and semantic differences between English and Turkic languages, particularly Uzbek. Through a synthesis of functional-semantic field theory and cognitive frameworks, the paper highlights the integral role of conditional constructions in linking grammar, logic, and cognition. The study concludes that conditional relationships serve as a linguistic embodiment of human hypothetical reasoning and cognitive mapping of causality and possibility.

**Keywords:** Conditional relationships, cognitive linguistics, semantic field, cross-linguistic comparison, functional grammar, hypothetical reasoning.



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## 1. Introduction

Language is not only a means of communication but also a complex cognitive tool that reflects the structure of human thought. Within this cognitive framework, *conditional relationships* hold a central position, as they express hypothetical, causal, and inferential connections between events or states. The study of conditional constructions has been a subject of considerable interest in linguistics because they reveal how speakers conceptualize possibilities, probabilities, and causal reasoning through grammatical structures. A conditional sentence such as “*If it rains, the ground will get wet*” embodies more than a syntactic pattern; it reflects a fundamental cognitive mechanism for reasoning about cause and effect, prediction, and dependency. Thus, exploring conditional relationships offers valuable insights into the intersection between linguistic form and human cognition.

The concept of conditionality, in its broadest sense, concerns how one situation depends upon another. From a traditional grammatical perspective, conditionals have been classified according to tense and modality — such as real, unreal, and hypothetical conditions — to describe how speakers perceive the likelihood or reality of an event. However, with the emergence of **cognitive linguistics**, the understanding of conditional relationships has expanded beyond surface grammatical distinctions to include mental representations and conceptual mappings. Cognitive linguistics views language as a reflection of human conceptual structures rather than a set of arbitrary syntactic rules. This approach allows scholars to interpret conditional sentences not merely as formal constructs but as dynamic expressions of mental reasoning and experiential knowledge (Langacker, 2008; Evans & Green, 2006).

In cognitive and functional linguistics, conditionals are studied as manifestations of human reasoning patterns that mirror real-world cause-and-effect relationships. Unlike structuralist approaches, which prioritize grammatical accuracy and logical truth conditions, cognitive linguistics emphasizes the speaker’s conceptualization of reality, probability, and intention. For example, “*If I had studied harder, I would have passed the exam*” does not only describe an unreal situation but also reveals a mental simulation of alternative outcomes. Such interpretations align with the **mental spaces theory** proposed by



Fauconnier (1994), where conditional clauses open hypothetical cognitive spaces connected through conceptual links. This framework suggests that conditional constructions serve as linguistic evidence of how humans mentally navigate potential scenarios.

Furthermore, the analysis of conditionality within the cognitive paradigm offers a bridge between semantics and pragmatics. Conditional sentences are not only semantic structures but also pragmatic tools for persuasion, reasoning, and argumentation. Speakers use them to express uncertainty, politeness, or hypothetical reasoning, adapting their communicative goals to social contexts. For instance, expressions like *“If you could help me, I’d appreciate it”* demonstrate how conditionality functions as a pragmatic softener, integrating both social cognition and linguistic form. Therefore, conditional relationships should be regarded as multi-dimensional phenomena involving syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and cognition.

The present study aims to explore the **theoretical and functional aspects of conditional relationships** within the framework of cognitive linguistics. It seeks to analyze how conditional constructions reflect human reasoning, conceptual dependency, and cognitive mapping across linguistic structures. By synthesizing insights from both classical and modern linguistic theories, this research emphasizes that conditionality is not merely a grammatical category but a fundamental expression of human thought and conceptual organization. This theoretical overview lays the foundation for understanding the cognitive mechanisms underlying conditional sentences and their cross-linguistic variations.

## **2. Literature Review and Theoretical Background**

The study of conditional relationships has evolved significantly throughout the history of linguistic inquiry. Traditionally, conditionals were analyzed primarily through the lens of grammar and logic, focusing on the formal relationship between antecedent and consequent clauses. However, with the rise of **functional** and **cognitive linguistics**, scholars have begun to reinterpret conditional constructions as reflections of mental processes, conceptual organization, and communicative intent. This shift from purely syntactic analysis to cognitive-



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functional interpretation has broadened the understanding of conditionality from a grammatical mechanism to a conceptual and pragmatic phenomenon.

## **2.1 Traditional and Structural Approaches**

In classical and structural linguistics, conditionals were treated mainly as logical propositions that encode dependency between two clauses — an “if–then” relationship. Early grammarians such as Jespersen (1924) and later structuralists emphasized the syntactic and morphological characteristics of conditional sentences, categorizing them according to verb tense and mood. For instance, English grammars commonly distinguish between *real*, *unreal*, and *hypothetical* conditionals based on the temporal reference and likelihood of the condition being fulfilled (Quirk et al., 1985).

These classifications correspond roughly to *zero*, *first*, *second*, and *third* conditional forms, each expressing different degrees of factuality or hypotheticality. From this perspective, the meaning of a conditional sentence is seen as the logical relation between the truth of two propositions.

While this approach provided a clear grammatical framework, it was limited by its focus on surface structure and logical truth conditions. Structuralist models did not adequately explain how speakers interpret, conceptualize, or use conditionals in real discourse. For example, sentences like “*If you should need help, call me*” and “*If you need help, call me*” are nearly identical syntactically but differ in their pragmatic and modal implications. Such nuances highlighted the need for more context-sensitive approaches that integrate meaning, intention, and cognition.

## **2.2 Functional Linguistics and the Communicative Dimension**

Functional linguistics, which emerged as a reaction to formalist traditions, introduced a more contextually grounded view of conditionality. Scholars like Halliday (1994) and Thompson (1994) emphasized that grammatical forms serve communicative purposes within discourse, and therefore, conditionals should be analyzed in terms of their **functions**, not just their forms. From this viewpoint, conditionals perform several discourse functions: expressing cause and consequence, hypothesis and prediction, politeness and mitigation, or argumentation and persuasion.



For example, in spoken discourse, conditionals are often used to structure reasoning (“If we compare the two models, we find...”), negotiate meaning (“If I understand you correctly, you mean that...”), or express social politeness (“If you don’t mind, could you help me?”).

Functionalists argue that the choice of a conditional structure is guided by **communicative intention** rather than strict grammatical rules. Hence, the relationship between antecedent and consequent is interpreted not only as a logical connection but also as a pragmatic negotiation between speaker and listener. As a result, the study of conditionals within functional linguistics helped shift attention from abstract grammatical rules to their **use in real communicative contexts**, providing a crucial bridge toward cognitive explanations.

### 2.3 Cognitive Linguistics and Conceptualization of Conditionality

The emergence of cognitive linguistics in the late 20th century marked a turning point in how conditional sentences were interpreted. Scholars such as Langacker (1987, 1991, 2008), Fauconnier (1994), and Sweetser (1990) proposed that linguistic structures, including conditional constructions, are grounded in **human conceptual systems**. According to this view, language reflects the way people perceive, categorize, and reason about their experiences. Consequently, conditional sentences are not mere formal patterns but **conceptual tools** for modeling hypothetical, causal, and inferential relationships.

One of the key contributions of cognitive linguistics is the **Mental Spaces Theory** (Fauconnier, 1994), which posits that conditional clauses create mental spaces—temporary conceptual domains where hypothetical situations can be imagined and evaluated. For example, in the sentence “*If John were taller, he could reach the shelf,*” the speaker constructs an alternate mental space in which John’s height differs from reality. This mental space is then linked to the main clause by a conceptual connection, illustrating how conditionals serve as linguistic mechanisms for cognitive simulation.

Additionally, Sweetser’s (1990) analysis of **domain-based conditionality** showed that conditionals operate across multiple conceptual domains: content (real-world causation), epistemic (reasoning and inference), and speech-act





(interactional and communicative). This model underscores that conditionality extends beyond factual relations—it encompasses reasoning processes, beliefs, and communicative strategies. Thus, the meaning of a conditional depends on the mental domain in which it is interpreted.

Langacker's (2008) **Cognitive Grammar** further supports this idea by suggesting that conditionality reflects a speaker's *conceptual construal* of relationships between events. Rather than encoding objective reality, conditional constructions express how a speaker mentally links situations as dependent or hypothetical. For instance, "*If it were not raining, we would go out*" represents an alternative construal of reality shaped by conceptual contrast.

## 2.4 Integrative Perspectives

Recent scholarship has sought to integrate insights from functional and cognitive linguistics, emphasizing that conditional relationships should be viewed as **multi-layered phenomena** encompassing syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and cognition (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2005; Evans, 2009). This integrative approach acknowledges that conditional constructions are both **formally constrained** and **conceptually motivated**. They follow grammatical conventions while simultaneously reflecting how speakers mentally construct causal and hypothetical scenarios.

In sum, the literature reveals an evolution from formal and structural interpretations of conditionals toward more dynamic, meaning-oriented models. The cognitive-functional paradigm has expanded the understanding of conditional relationships, situating them within the broader framework of conceptualization, discourse function, and human reasoning. Consequently, the study of conditionality now stands at the intersection of linguistic form, mental representation, and communicative purpose—making it one of the most revealing phenomena in modern linguistics.

## Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative and analytical research design aimed at exploring the theoretical and functional aspects of conditional relationships in linguistic



structures. Rather than collecting empirical or experimental data, the research focuses on a conceptual analysis of conditional constructions within the frameworks of cognitive linguistics and functional grammar. The goal is to understand how language encodes mental representations of conditionality, dependency, and causation, as well as how speakers use conditional structures to express reasoning, inference, and hypothetical thought.

The study relies primarily on descriptive, comparative, and interpretive methods, synthesizing insights from prior theoretical works, such as those by Langacker (2008), Fauconnier (1994), Sweetser (1990), and Dancygier and Sweetser (2005). These frameworks are used to identify cognitive and pragmatic patterns that underlie conditional constructions across languages. The research does not aim to establish quantitative generalizations but to provide a systematic theoretical explanation of how conditionals function as expressions of human conceptualization.

### **3.2 Data and Sources**

The analysis is based on linguistic examples drawn from English and comparative languages as represented in previous linguistic studies and authentic language use. Selected examples illustrate the variety of conditional forms, their semantic features, and their cognitive interpretations. These include both canonical (if-then) constructions and non-canonical conditional expressions, such as those marked by conjunctions like *unless*, *provided that*, *as long as*, and *in case*. The examples serve to demonstrate how linguistic form interacts with conceptual meaning and how context influences interpretation.

#### **Sources include:**

Foundational theoretical texts in cognitive linguistics (Langacker, 1987, 2008; Fauconnier, 1994; Sweetser, 1990);

Functional grammar and discourse analysis studies (Halliday, 1994; Thompson, 1994);

Contemporary linguistic research exploring cross-linguistic variations and cognitive mapping (Evans, 2009; Dancygier & Sweetser, 2005).



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All sources were selected for their relevance to the research focus on conditionality as a cognitive and functional construct.

### **3.3 Analytical Framework**

The analysis follows a cognitive-functional analytical framework consisting of three interrelated dimensions:

#### **Cognitive Dimension:**

This dimension examines how conditional relationships reflect human mental processes, such as reasoning, prediction, and inference. Drawing on Mental Spaces Theory (Fauconnier, 1994) and Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 2008), the study analyzes how speakers mentally construct hypothetical scenarios and causal connections. Each conditional clause is seen as opening a mental space linked conceptually to the main clause through dependency or contrast.

#### **Functional Dimension:**

From a functional perspective, conditionals are analyzed according to their communicative purposes and discourse roles. Halliday's (1994) model of systemic functional grammar provides the theoretical basis for identifying the interpersonal and textual functions of conditionals — such as expressing persuasion, negotiation, or politeness. This dimension reveals how linguistic form is chosen strategically to achieve communicative goals in specific contexts.

#### **Comparative Dimension:**

To capture the diversity of conditional expressions, a comparative analysis is applied across different linguistic and pragmatic contexts. This involves contrasting English conditionals with structures found in other languages (e.g., Slavic, Turkic, or Romance languages), as discussed in previous cross-linguistic studies. This comparative dimension highlights the universal and language-specific cognitive mechanisms underlying conditionality.





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### **3.4 Procedure**

The analysis proceeds through the following stages:

Identification of conditional structures in linguistic examples, both prototypical (if-then) and alternative forms (unless, provided that, etc.).

Classification of these structures according to their semantic and pragmatic functions — such as factual, hypothetical, counterfactual, predictive, or pragmatic conditionals.

Interpretation of the data using the cognitive-functional model to determine how speakers conceptualize dependency and hypothetical reasoning.

Integration of findings with theoretical insights from cognitive and functional linguistics to form a coherent explanation of conditional relationships.

### **3.5 Theoretical Rationale**

The chosen methodology aligns with the epistemological foundations of cognitive linguistics, which views meaning as emerging from conceptualization rather than from abstract syntax (Evans & Green, 2006). It also incorporates the functionalist view that grammatical forms evolve to meet communicative needs. Therefore, the research integrates both theoretical traditions to produce a holistic understanding of conditionality that accounts for linguistic form, conceptual structure, and communicative function.

This approach allows for a multi-layered interpretation of conditionals, showing how they simultaneously reflect cognitive processes, discourse strategies, and linguistic conventions. By adopting a qualitative, theory-driven methodology, the study aims to bridge the gap between formal grammatical description and cognitive explanation, providing a comprehensive account of how conditional relationships operate in language and thought.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Conceptual Nature of Conditional Relationships**

Conditional relationships constitute a fundamental mechanism through which human cognition organizes experience and expresses reasoning. The construction of conditional statements such as If X, then Y reflects an inherent capacity to connect causes with effects, preconditions with outcomes, and possibilities with



results. This connection forms a cornerstone of human thought and communication, enabling speakers to simulate hypothetical worlds and assess alternative courses of action.

In linguistic terms, conditionals establish a biclausal dependency in which the truth or realization of one clause (the apodosis) depends on the fulfillment or assumption of another clause (the protasis). This dependency is not purely syntactic but cognitive and pragmatic, as it conveys the speaker's mental stance toward the likelihood, desirability, or hypothetical nature of the event described. According to Dancygier and Sweetser (2005), conditional constructions embody the speaker's mental operations — mapping real or imagined situations onto one another within a structured mental space.

Thus, the cognitive foundation of conditionals lies in their capacity to represent “if–then” reasoning, an essential component of both logic and language. Unlike logical implication, however, linguistic conditionals are influenced by contextual and pragmatic variables such as speaker intention, background knowledge, and the assumed world shared by interlocutors. For instance, the sentence *If it rains, the ground gets wet* expresses a general truth, while *If it rained yesterday, the streets will be muddy today* presupposes a real-world temporal link between past and present events.

## **4.2 Types of Conditional Relationships**

A wide range of conditional constructions exists across languages, reflecting distinct semantic and pragmatic interpretations. Following Comrie (1986) and Sweetser (1990), conditionals can be categorized into three primary types:

**Factual or Real Conditionals:**

These conditionals describe situations based on factual or probable conditions. For example: *If the sun rises, it becomes light*. Such constructions rely on empirical relations and represent cause-effect reasoning grounded in reality.

**Hypothetical or Unreal Conditionals:**

These indicate imagined or contrary-to-fact situations, as in *If I were rich, I would travel the world*. Here, the speaker projects an unrealized or impossible scenario within a hypothetical cognitive space. Linguistically, this is marked by the use of past tense morphology to convey unreality.



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### **Predictive and Pragmatic Conditionals:**

These express assumptions or contingencies based on expectations or social conventions, e.g., If you need help, let me know. Pragmatic conditionals often function as indirect speech acts — expressing offers, warnings, or requests rather than logical dependencies.

These categories demonstrate that conditionality extends beyond simple logical relations to encompass semantic gradation, speaker perspective, and communicative purpose. As Sweetser (1990) observed, conditionals are organized into “domains” — content (real-world), epistemic (knowledge-based), and speech-act (interactional) — each reflecting distinct cognitive and social functions.

### **4.3 Cross-Linguistic Variations and Typological Perspectives**

The expression of conditionality varies widely across languages, revealing the universal yet diverse nature of human reasoning.

In English, conditionals are predominantly marked by conjunctions such as if, unless, in case, provided that, or as long as. These subordinators explicitly encode the logical connection between the protasis and apodosis.

In contrast, Turkic languages such as Uzbek, Kazakh, and Turkish express conditionality morphologically, often through verbal suffixes like -sa/-se. For instance, the Uzbek construction *kel-sa, ketaman* (“If he comes, I will leave”) demonstrates how the conditional relation is encoded directly on the verb rather than through an independent conjunction. This typological difference underscores that conditionality is a cognitive universal, but its linguistic realization is shaped by each language’s grammatical architecture.

Similarly, Slavic languages (e.g., Russian, Polish) employ both conjunctions (*esli, koli*) and mood markers to convey real or unreal conditions. The comparative study of these patterns (Khrakovsky, 1992; Osmanova, 2018) highlights that while the conceptual essence of conditionality is consistent across languages, its grammatical manifestation differs according to morphosyntactic and semantic principles. These cross-linguistic patterns reveal how human languages provide varied yet parallel means of expressing dependency, causation, and hypothetical thought.



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#### **4.4 Cognitive and Functional Interpretation**

From a cognitive-linguistic perspective, conditionals serve as windows into how speakers mentally structure experience. Fauconnier's (1994) Mental Spaces Theory posits that each conditional clause constructs a distinct "space" representing a potential scenario. The conditional link between clauses thus mirrors the cognitive operation of mapping — connecting one mental representation to another based on conditional reasoning.

For instance, in *If the temperature drops, the lake will freeze*, the speaker mentally constructs a causal connection between temperature and freezing — a representation grounded in experiential knowledge.

Within Functional Grammar, conditionals perform vital interpersonal and textual functions (Halliday, 1994). They enable speakers to negotiate assumptions, convey politeness, or introduce hypothetical reasoning within discourse. For example, *If I may say so, your argument is persuasive* serves as a politeness strategy that mitigates assertion through conditional framing. This illustrates that conditionality operates not only as a cognitive mechanism but also as a social and communicative strategy.

Moreover, cognitive semantics emphasizes that conditionals encode conceptual relationships rather than truth-functional logic. The protasis does not necessarily entail the realization of the apodosis but rather establishes a conceptual dependency between potential states of affairs. This interpretative flexibility is what allows conditionals to convey modality, uncertainty, and inference — fundamental components of human reasoning.

#### **4.5 Conditionality as a Functional-Semantic Field**

Building on the field theory developed in Uzbek linguistics (Mahmudov, 2010; Usmanova, 2015; Minnikulov, 2021), conditionality can be conceptualized as a functional-semantic field encompassing lexical, morphological, and syntactic means that collectively express conditional meaning.

The core of this field includes explicit conditional markers such as *if* or *-sa/-se*, while its periphery involves expressions of related meanings like causation (because), concession (even if), and implication (otherwise). This field-based model highlights the gradience of conditional meaning — showing how linguistic



expressions range from prototypical conditionals to forms that blend conditionality with other semantic functions.

According to Slivkov (2017), each semantic field contains a nucleus (core) representing prototypical meanings and a periphery expressing overlapping or contextual meanings. In the conditional field, the core constructions encode direct dependency, while peripheral constructions illustrate semantic blending — for example, sentences like I'll go if you like versus Even if you ask, I won't go. Both express conditionality, but the latter merges it with opposition or concession.

This field-based approach reveals how languages organize conditional meanings systematically, reflecting both cognitive categorization and functional diversity. It also explains the flexibility with which speakers manipulate conditional forms to achieve nuanced communicative effects.

#### **4.6 Integrating Cognitive, Functional, and Typological Insights**

The synthesis of cognitive, functional, and typological perspectives demonstrates that conditional relationships are multidimensional constructs bridging grammar, logic, and cognition.

Cognitively, conditionals mirror inferential reasoning and hypothetical thought; functionally, they serve interpersonal and textual purposes; typologically, they reflect language-specific encoding strategies.

Therefore, conditionality is not confined to a single grammatical form but represents a network of meanings and functions distributed across linguistic structures. This integrated approach provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how humans conceptualize dependency, possibility, and causation — and how language encodes these fundamental operations of thought.

#### **Conclusion**

The study of conditional relationships occupies a central position in the field of linguistics, bridging the gap between grammatical structure, semantic meaning, and human cognition. Throughout this paper, it has been demonstrated that conditionals are far more than syntactic constructs; they represent fundamental patterns of human reasoning, reflecting how individuals conceptualize cause, dependency, and hypothetical thought. The evolution of linguistic theory—from





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traditional structural and logical models to functional and cognitive frameworks—has progressively deepened our understanding of how conditionality operates both linguistically and conceptually.

Traditional and structural approaches provided essential groundwork by classifying conditionals according to tense, modality, and syntactic configuration. However, these frameworks often overlooked the communicative and cognitive dimensions of conditional reasoning. Functional linguistics expanded this perspective by emphasizing the role of discourse, intention, and context, recognizing that conditionals are used strategically by speakers to express persuasion, probability, politeness, and inference. The subsequent emergence of cognitive linguistics further advanced the field, revealing that conditional constructions mirror the mental operations underlying human thought, such as prediction, simulation, and conceptual mapping.

Within the cognitive paradigm, conditional sentences are understood as linguistic manifestations of mental spaces, where hypothetical situations and alternative realities are created and connected through conceptual links. This insight underscores the deep relationship between language and cognition: speakers use conditionals to mentally navigate possible worlds, reason about outcomes, and express varying degrees of certainty and expectation. Thus, conditionality serves not only a grammatical purpose but also a cognitive and pragmatic one, reflecting the human capacity to think abstractly and imagine beyond the immediate context.

An integrative theoretical approach, combining structural precision, functional pragmatism, and cognitive interpretation, provides the most comprehensive framework for analyzing conditional relationships. Such a synthesis acknowledges that language is simultaneously a formal system, a communicative tool, and a reflection of human conceptual organization. Future research on conditionality may benefit from interdisciplinary collaboration, incorporating insights from psychology, logic, and cognitive science to further elucidate how humans construct meaning through conditional expressions.

In conclusion, conditional relationships embody one of the most intricate and insightful intersections of language and thought. They reveal how speakers linguistically encode dependency, possibility, and causality—core features of





human cognition. Understanding these relationships not only enhances linguistic theory but also contributes to a broader comprehension of how language serves as a mirror of the human mind

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