Learnability and Modality Restrictions on Conditionals in L2 Japanese and English

Makiko Hirakawa and Kazunori Suzuki
Bunkyo University

1. Introduction

We report on two experimental studies that investigate L2 acquisition of English and Japanese conditionals. In particular, we focus on modality restrictions on Japanese conditionals. In the case of English, a possible future condition is introduced in *if* or *when* clauses with the simple present tense, and either future or present tense can be used in the main clause to talk about a possible future result, as shown in the examples in (1):

(1) a. If the weather is fine, I will play golf.
b. When it rains, I feel unpleasant.

Japanese conditionals can be expressed with four different conjunctive particles: *to*, *ba*, *tara*, and *nara*. They are the equivalents of *if* and *when*. Examples with *ba* and *to* are shown in (2).

(2) a. *Asu harere **ba**, gorufu o shitai.*
tomorrow fine if (ba), golf acc want to play
'If the weather is fine tomorrow, I want to play golf.'
b. *Kaze ga tsuyoi **to**, densha ga okureru deshoo.*
Wind nom strong if (to), trains nom delay will
'If it is very windy, trains will be delayed.'

It has been noted that some conditionals in Japanese observe modality restrictions (Inoue 2007, among others). Modality refers to the speaker's attitude toward the action indicated by a verb, especially with regard to necessity, desirability, and probability（e.g., Masuoka 1991, 2007）. English and Japanese differ in whether modality can be expressed in the main clause of conditional sentences. In English conditionals, there are no modality restrictions. Therefore, the main clauses can include modality expressions. All examples in (3) are acceptable in English.

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(3) If / when the weather is fine, …
   a. I will go on a picnic. (intention)
   b. I want to play golf. (desire)
   c. please take me to the zoo. (request)
   d. go for a walk with your dog. (command)

Thus, English observes no modality restrictions so that conditionals are acceptable regardless of whether the predicate has modality. On the other hand, some conditionals in Japanese have modality restrictions on the main clause predicates. These restrictions depend on the particle. Examples in (4) show that the particle *to* when used with either stative or eventive verbs disallows modality predicates. In (4a), the main clause represents judgment, and it is an acceptable sentence. In contrast, (4b) and (4c) are unacceptable with main clauses representing a desire and an order, respectively.

(4) a. *Kaze ga tsuyoi **to**, densha ga okureru deshoo.* (judgment)
   wind nom strong if (to) train nom delay think
   'If it is very windy, trains will be delayed.'
   b. **Kaze ga tsuyoi **to**, kuruma de ikitai.* (desire)
   wind nom strong if (to) car in want to go
   'If it is very windy, I want to go in my car.'
   c. **Jikan ga aru **to**, test benkyo o shinasai.* (order)
   time nom exist if (to), test study acc do
   'If there is time, study for the exam.'

Examples with the particle *ba* are shown in (5). *Ba* is more complex than *to*. When *ba* is used with an eventive verb, it observes modality restrictions. (5a) with a statement of fact is acceptable whereas (5b) with a modality predicate is unacceptable. It should be noted that when the particle *ba* is used with a stative verb, there are no modality restrictions, as shown in (5c).

(5) a. *Haru ni nare **ba**, sakura ga sakimasu.* (fact)
   spring come if (ba) cherry trees nom bloom
   'When spring comes, cherry trees bloom.'
   b. **Haru ni nare **ba**, sakura o mimashoo.* (intention)
   spring come if (ba) cherry blossoms acc let's see
   'When spring comes, let's see cherry blossoms.'
   c. *Jikan ga are **ba**, sakura o mimashoo.* (intention)
   time nom exist if (ba) cherry blossoms acc let's see
   'If there is time, let's see cherry blossoms.'

While the particles *to* and *ba* (with an eventive verb) observe modality restrictions, the other particles, *tara* and *nara*, do not observe the restrictions, as shown in the examples in (6).

(6) a. *Natsu ni nat **tara**, umi ni ikitai desu.* (desire)
   summer come if (tara) sea to want to go
   'When summer comes, I want to go to the sea.'
   b. *Ryokou ni iku **nara**, keikaku o tatemashoo.* (intention)
   travel go on if (nara) plan acc let's make
   'If we travel, let's make some plans.'

In sum, we observe that conditionals in English and Japanese are in a superset/subset relation. Japanese conditionals represent a more restricted, subset grammar, because there are modality restrictions, while English conditionals are less restricted since there are no modality restrictions, representing a superset grammar. Negative evidence may be necessary for English-speaking learners to

acquire Japanese conditionals. In contrast, positive evidence may be sufficient for Japanese-speaking learners to acquire English conditionals (c.f., Inagaki 2002, White 2003). Thus we assume that it may be easier for Japanese-speaking learners to acquire English conditionals.

Inaba (1991a, b) conducted an experimental study on L2 Japanese conditionals, with two groups of English-speaking learners of Japanese: one consisting of 28 beginning learners of Japanese at a university in Japan, and the other consisting of 17 intermediate learners studying Japanese at a university in the U.S. She administered a grammaticality judgment task to see whether these learners would observe modality restrictions. The results showed that both beginning and intermediate groups in general accepted grammatical conditionals, but the two groups failed to reject ungrammatical conditionals with *to* and *ba* containing eventive verbs.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research questions and predictions

Our research questions are as follows:

1) How and to what extent do learners acquire conditionals in the L2?
2) Are L2 learners of Japanese aware of modality restrictions?
3) Do L2 learners of English know that there are no modality restrictions in English conditionals?

Expanding on Inaba (1991a, b), we administered a grammaticality judgment task and included not only an L2 Japanese group but also an L2 English group. As described above, Japanese conditionals are more restricted than English conditionals. As we assume that L1 plays a role in L2 acquisition, we predict it will be easier for Japanese learners of English to acquire English conditionals than for English-speaking learners of Japanese to acquire Japanese conditionals.

2.2. Participants

We had 4 groups of participants: Two learner experimental groups and two native speaker control groups. The details are summarized in Table 1. The L2 Japanese learner group consisted of two sets of university students: one studying Japanese in Japan and one studying Japanese in the US. The L2 English learner group consisted of 45 university students studying English in Japan. Control groups consisted of 23 Japanese and 25 English native speakers.

Table 1: Groups and Numbers of Participants

L2 Japanese Study	**L2 English Study**
【Learner group】 (n=24) University students studying Japanese in Japan and in the US.	【Learner group】 (n=45) University students studying English in Japan.
【Control group】 (n=23) University students in Japan.	【Control group】 (n=25) University students in the US.

Table 2 gives background information of the learners in the L2 English Study: their mean age, mean age of exposure, mean length of study and their proficiency scores. We divided the learners of English into two groups, based on their scores on the CASEC (Computerized Assessment System for English Communication) proficiency test, which had been previously administered in the university they attend. There were 20 advanced (CASEC scores > 633; mean 680) and 25 intermediate learners (CASEC scores < 633; mean 583). Table 3 summarizes the same information for the learners in the L2

Japanese study. Fourteen learners living in the US were recruited primarily through advertisement in the upper-intermediate or higher level Japanese classes (4th year level or up; over 360-hour classroom instruction) at two universities in Ohio, USA; they were contacted by the first author through emails and were asked to respond to the test materials individually. It was found that 12 out of 14 had stayed in Japan for a year or more. The other group consisted of 10 learners who were enrolled in the intensive Japanese course at a university in Japan. The test was administered in the second month of the course. We were not able to administer an independent proficiency test to these learners, but the learners in the US were considered more proficient than the learners in Japan as the students in the US had stayed in Japan longer (i.e., natural exposure, mean length of stay, 11.5 months) than the group of students in Japan (2.75 months). Thus, we divided them into two groups based on their location at the time of the testing and were considered to be advanced and lower intermediate groups, respectively.

Table 2: Background Information (L2 English Study)

L2 English Learner group (n=45)		
Level	Intermediate (n=25)	Advanced (n=20)
Mean age	19.6 (Range: 18 - 23)	19.8 (Range: 18 - 24)
Mean age of exposure	11.08 years old (Range: 6 - 13)	11.15 years old (Range: 6 - 13)
Mean length of study	8.48 yrs (Range: 6 - 13)	8.65 yrs (Range: 5 - 15)
Level of English (CASEC)	582.96 (Range: 470 - 631)	680.35 (Range: 635 - 786)

Table 3: Background Information (L2 Japanese Study)

L2 Japanese Learner group (n=24)		
level	Intermediate: JAPAN (n=10)	Advanced: USA (n=14)
Mean age	20.2 (Range: 18 - 21)	22.5 (Range: 20 - 31)
Mean age of exposure	15.1 years old (Range: 11 - 20)	18.3 years old (Range: 13 - 23)
Mean length of study	4.1 yrs (Range: 1 - 10)	3.5 yrs (Range: 1 - 7)
Mean length of stay in Japan	2.75 months (Range: 1 - 13)	11.5 months (Range: 0 - 56)

2.3. Tasks and materials

The task was an acceptability judgment task with 40 test items. Each test item had a simple sentence structure with vocabulary considered to be basic for L2 learners. The test sentences were presented in dialogues. Learners were asked to judge whether or not the underlined sentences were natural or unnatural in spoken English or Japanese. A choice of 'don't know' was also included. Japanese test items, in general, were equivalents to the test sentences in English. Example test sentences

for English and Japanese are given in Tables 4 and 5, respectively.

Table 4: Samples of English Test Items with Conditionals

No.		Natural	Unnatural	don't know
1.	A: At what age can we start smoking in Japan? B: When we turn twenty years old, we can smoke in Japan.	✓		
2.	A: There will be a strong wind tomorrow. B: Really? If it will be very windy, let's go by car.		✓	
3.	A: When summer comes, I want to go to the sea. B: I see, but I want to go to mountains.	✓		

Table 5: Samples of Japanese Test Items with Conditionals

No.		自然	不自然	わからない
1.	A：日本では、何歳からタバコが吸えますか？ *Nihon de wa, nansai kara tabako ga suemasu ka?* ('At what age can we start smoking in Japan?') B：二十歳になると、タバコが吸えます。 *Hatachi ni naru to, tabako ga suemasu* ('When we turn twenty years old, we can smoke in Japan.')	✓		
2.	A：明日は風が強いでしょう。 *Ashita wa kaze ga tsuyoi deshoo* ('There will be a strong wind tomorrow') B：本当？風が強いと、車で行きましょう。 *Hontoo? Kaze ga tsuyoi to, kuruma de ikimashoo* ('Really? If it will be very windy, let's go by car')		✓	
3.	A：夏になったら、海に行きたいです。 *Natsu ni nat tara, umi ni ikitai desu* ('When summer comes, I want to go to the sea') B：そうですか。私は山に行きたいです。 *Soo desu ka. Watashi wa yama ni ikitai desu* ('I see, but I want to go to mountains')	✓		

Table 6 shows the details of the test sentences in English. We created 20 acceptable and 20 unacceptable sentences. 12 of the acceptable sentences had modality predicates and 8 were without modality. Among 20 unacceptable sentences, either future or past tense was used in the *if/when* clause, which made the sentences ungrammatical. There were 15 future and 5 past tense sentences.

Table 6: Number and Types of English Test Sentences

	Acceptable		Unacceptable	
Number of Items	20		20	
Sentence Type	＋M	12 / 20	*will	15 / 20
(number / total)	－M	8 / 20	*past	5 / 20

＋M (modality) : intention /desire / request / command　　－M (modality) : fact / judgment

Table 7 summarizes the details of the test sentences in Japanese. As in the English experiment, there were equal numbers of acceptable and unacceptable test sentences. Acceptable sentences included 5 types of particles (*to*, *ba*-eventive, *ba*-stative, *tara* and *nara*); unacceptable sentences included 8 modality violations and 12 sentences that included meaning violations related to time sequence. That is,

except the particle *nara*, the event described in the main clause needs to follow the event described in the conditional clause in time sequence. So for example, sentences such as *Tosyokan e it-tara, jitensya-de ikimasu* ('When I go to the library, I will go by bicycle') is unacceptable, as the main clause event 'going by bicycle' does not follow but precedes the event in the conditional sentence 'going to the library' whereas sentences such as *Tosyokan e it-tara, syosetsu-o karimasu* ('When I go to the library, I will borrow some novels') is acceptable, as the event of borrowing novels will follow the event of going to the library in time sequence.

Table 7: Number and Types of Japanese Test Sentences

	Acceptable			Unacceptable			
Number of Items	20			20			
Sentence Type (number/total)	*to*	−M	4 / 20	*to*	−M	TSV	4 / 20
	ba - eventive	−M	4 / 20	*to*	+M		4 / 20
	ba - stative	+M	4 / 20	*ba* - eventive	−M	TSV	4 / 20
	tara	+M	4 / 20	*ba* - eventive	+M		4 / 20
	nara	+M	4 / 20	*tara*	−M	TSV	4 / 20

+M (modality) predicate : intention /desire / request / command −M (modality) predicate: fact / judgment
TSV = time sequence violations

3. Results

3.1. L2 English study

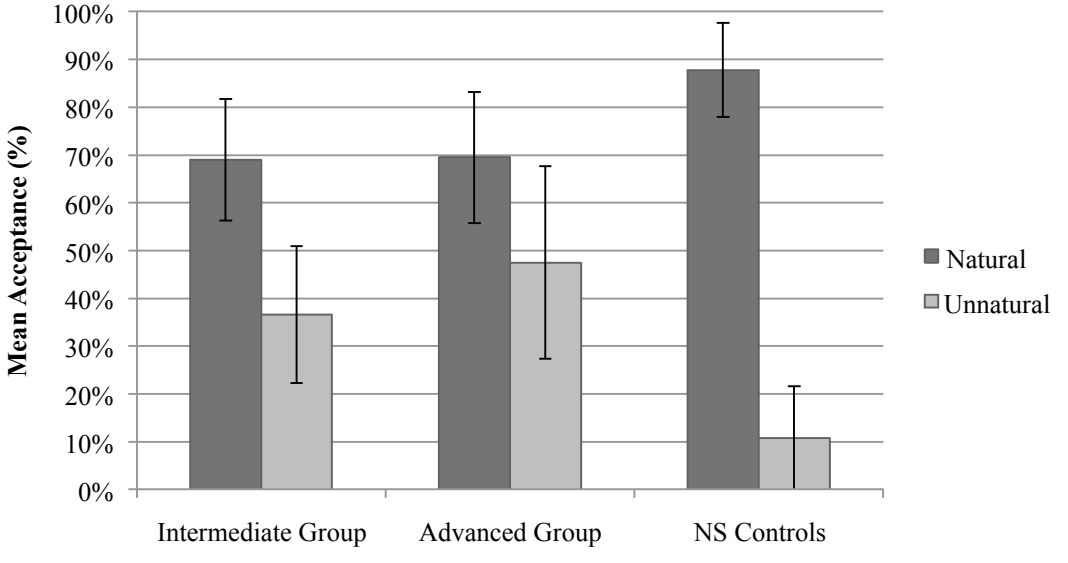

Figure 1: Overall Results of L2 English Study (Mean Acceptance)

Figure 1 presents the mean acceptance rates and standard deviations on natural and unnatural sentences for each group. There were a very few 'don't know' choices, which we scored as inaccurate. Native speaker controls responded as expected, allowing natural (acceptable) and rejecting unnatural (unacceptable) sentences more than 87% of the time. As for the two learner groups, they behaved in a similar manner; they accepted natural sentences around 69% of the time, but did not generally accept unnatural sentences, about 36~47% of the time. A repeated measures ANOVA reveals that there were statistically significant effects of Group ($F_{(2, 67)}$=4.746, p=0.0118), Sentence Type ($F_{(1, 67)}$=342.6, p<0.0001), and Interaction ($F_{(2, 67)}$=51.77, p<0.0001). Post hoc tests further show that the two learner groups differed significantly from the native controls, but they did not differ from each other in their responses to each sentence type (p>0.05). Therefore, both learner groups distinguished between acceptable and unacceptable sentence types, even though they were significantly less accurate in accepting natural and rejecting unnatural sentences than native speakers. Since there were no significant differences between the two learner groups, we combine them into one and report the combined results below.

Table 8 shows the mean acceptance rates and standard deviations (SDs) of the natural and unnatural sentences by the learner and native speaker (NS) control groups. A repeated measures ANOVA shows significant differences between sentence types ($F_{(1, 68)}$=441.5, p<0.0001), groups ($F_{(1, 68)}$=5.652, p<0.05) and a significant interaction ($F_{(1, 68)}$=97.43, p<0.0001). Therefore, even though many learners failed to reject unnatural sentences, the difference between the L2 learners' acceptance rates for the two types of test sentences was significant (69.22% for natural and 41.44% for unnatural sentences), which suggests that they differentiated the two types.

Table 9 focuses on the results of the grammatical conditional sentences with and without modality predicates. Recall that English conditionals are grammatical regardless of whether the predicate has modality. If their L1 Japanese had had some effects in their L2 English, these English learners would have rejected the sentences with modality predicates, as Japanese conditionals observe modality restrictions. A repeated measures ANOVA, however, reveals no significant differences between the two sentence types ($F_{(1, 68)}$=1.863, p=0.1768) and no interaction ($F_{(1, 68)}$=3.637, p=0.0607). Only a difference between the two groups was significant ($F_{(1, 68)}$=40.38, p<0.0001). Thus, we can conclude that the learners of English accepted both conditionals with and without modality, even though they were significantly less likely to accept the two types of conditionals than native speaker controls.

Table 8: Mean Acceptance Rates (%) and SDs by Naturalness for L2 English

	L2 English Learners	NS Controls
Natural	69.22	87.80
	(13.14)	(9.80)
Unnatural	41.44	10.80
	(18.45)	(10.77)

Table 9: Mean Acceptance Rates (%) and SDs by Modality for L2 English

	L2 English Learners	NS Controls
+ Modality	72.04	87.33
	(14.67)	(11.81)
- Modality	65.00	88.50
	(18.00)	(11.92)

3.2. L2 Japanese study

Figure 2 presents overall results of the L2 Japanese study in terms of mean acceptance rates, as in the L2 English study. Native speaker controls' responses were as expected, accepting natural and rejecting unnatural sentences more than 97% of the time. The two learner groups accepted grammatical sentences around 60 to 71% of the time, but their acceptance rates of ungrammatical sentences were much lower at around 40%, suggesting that they distinguished natural from unnatural sentences, even though their rejection of ungrammatical sentences was less accurate than that of Japanese native speakers. A repeated measures ANOVA shows significant differences between sentence types ($F_{(1, 44)}$=294.5, p<0.0001) as well as a significant interaction ($F_{(2, 44)}$=78.53, p<0.0001), but there was no significant difference among groups ($F_{(2, 44)}$=1.338, p=0.2729). Since there were no significant differences between the two learner groups, we combine them into one and report the combined results below.

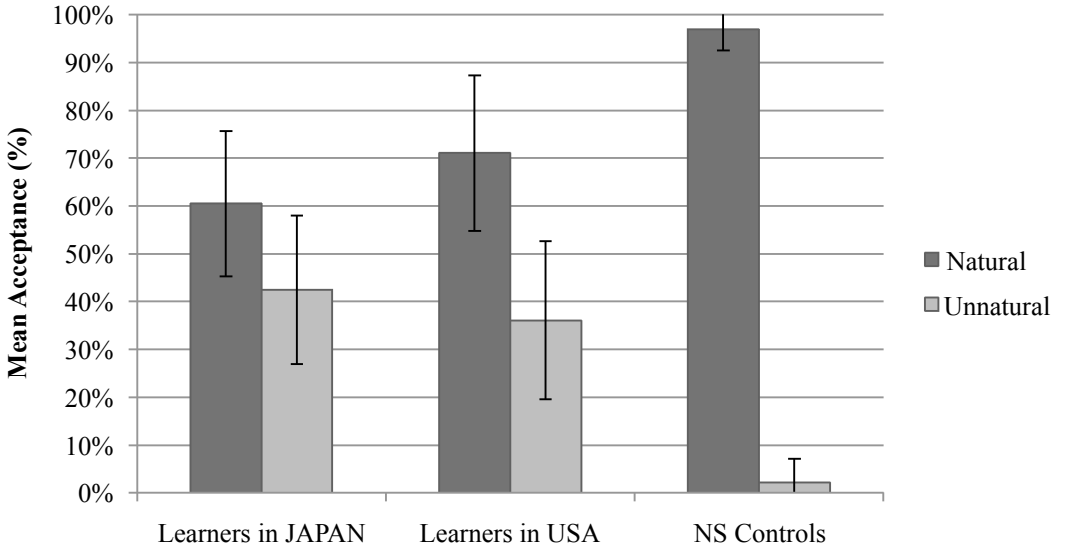

Figure 2: Overall Results of L2 Japanese Study (Mean Acceptance)

Table 10 gives mean acceptance rates and standard deviations for the L2 learners (two groups combined) and the native speaker controls. It is clear that the L2 learners distinguished between the two types of test sentences, natural vs. unnatural, but that they accepted both natural (66.67%) and unnatural sentences (38.75%) less accurately than native speakers (96.96% vs. 2.17%).

Table 11 summarizes the results from the test sentences with modality restrictions; i.e., *to* and *ba* with eventive verbs. As can be seen from the table, L2 Japanese learners accepted natural sentences at a higher rate than unnatural sentences, but the differences between the two sentence types for both *to* and *ba*-eventive conditionals were much smaller than those observed among Japanese native speakers. As for *to* conditionals, a repeated measures ANOVA reveals that there were statistically significant effects of Group ($F_{(1, 45)}$=4.636, p<0.05), Sentence Type ($F_{(1, 45)}$=162.5, p<0.0001), and Interaction ($F_{(1, 45)}$=67.72, p<0.0001). As for *ba*-eventive conditionals, a repeated measures ANOVA also shows statistically significant effects of Group ($F_{(1, 45)}$=10.95, p<0.01), Sentence Type ($F_{(1, 45)}$=150.7, p<0.0001), and Interaction ($F_{(1, 45)}$=97.78, p<0.0001). In sum, although the L2 learners distinguished grammatical sentences observing modality restrictions from ungrammatical sentences violating modality restrictions, their rejection of the ungrammatical sentences was quite weak especially in *ba*-eventive conditionals, suggesting some difficulty for these learners to acquire the modality restrictions with conditionals.

Table 10: Mean Acceptance Rates (%) and SDs by Naturalness for L2 Japanese

	L2 Japanese Learners	NS Controls
Natural	66.67	96.96
	(16.40)	(4.46)
Unnatural	38.75	2.17
	(16.10)	(4.96)

Table 11: Mean Acceptance Rates (%) and SDs by Modality Restrictions for L2 Japanese

		L2 Japanese Learners	NS Controls
to	observe Modality Restrictions	67.71	97.83
	Natural	(28.05)	(7.20)
	violate Modality Restrictions	46.88	1.09
	Unnatural	(26.90)	(5.21)
ba - eventive	observe Modality Restrictions	66.67	98.91
	Natural	(26.24)	(5.21)
	violate Modality Restrictions	56.25	2.17
	Unnatural	(24.73)	(7.20)

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Focusing on modality restrictions, the results of the two L2 studies on conditionals show that learners of English were generally aware of the grammaticality of English conditionals, tending to accept grammatical conditionals with modality and that learners of Japanese had difficulty rejecting conditionals violating modality restrictions. We argue that these results support our initial hypothesis that L1 Japanese speakers acquire conditionals in L2 English more easily than L1 English speakers acquire L2 Japanese conditionals. At the same time, we must admit that we failed to observe the expected increase in acceptance of grammatical conditionals among advanced learners of English. Furthermore, given our subset/superset distinction, it is somewhat surprising that the Japanese-speaking learners of English did not perform better. The L2 English learners in our study are all university students who have received L2 English input mainly in the classroom; therefore, positive evidence alone may not have been sufficient for them to acquire the target structure, or low frequency of the target structure may have been the main reason, as previously reported by Inagaki (2002, 2006). A follow-up study with more advanced learners who have been exposed to English in natural settings would be able to address this issue.

Nevertheless, when we examined their individual scores in both the L2 English and L2 Japanese studies, there were learners who consistently gave correct answers (75% or more of the time for each sentence type). About 40% of the learners in both the L2 English and the L2 Japanese studies responded consistently on the acceptable sentences, and 16 to 20% of the learners did so on the unacceptable sentences. Five learners of English and 4 learners of Japanese responded accurately throughout the task, thus they can be considered to have acquired conditionals in their L2. The results of such successful learners suggest that it is in fact possible to acquire the conditional structures in an L2.

An interesting question that remains to be investigated is whether learners who have acquired the constraints in their L2 have done so after receiving negative evidence as part of L2 instruction. As far as we have checked the contents of the textbooks our L2 Japanese learners had used in class, it is doubtful

that they had received such negative evidence: i.e., there are semantic distinctions based on the type of predicate conditionals can have. Unfortunately, this question lies beyond the scope of the present study and must therefore be left to further research.

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