

# If that's what she said, that's what she said: an analysis of pleonastic conditionals in English

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This paper investigates so-called pleonastic conditionals (PCs) in Present Day English as exemplified in 1-5:

- 1) Sweetheart, I understand. **If you have to go, you have to go** (SOAP, 2003, Pass)
- 2) It is an investment, and **if we lose it, we lose it**. There are more important things (SOAP, 2008, GL)
- 3) **If you are allergic, you are allergic** (TV, 2015, A to Z)
- 4) **When you're gifted, then you're gifted** (TV, 2011, Glee)
- 5) They are the best beepers that bucks can buy. I mean **when they beep, they beep** (TV, 1981, Soap)

PCs are rhetorical statements in which the antecedent and the consequent are formally and semantically identical (Declerck & Reed 2001: 359). The construction is characterized by stylistic reduplication and propositional redundancy. It is exactly this tautological nature which has a considerable effect on the discourse-pragmatic functions of the construction. So far, PCs have not been investigated in a usage-based, empirical manner. This paper aims to fill this research gap by analyzing the construction's frequency, form and functions. Python was used to extract data from three corpora that approximate informal everyday English: the *Movie Corpus* (Davies 2019), the *TV Corpus* (Davies 2019), the *Corpus of American Soap Operas* (SOAP; Davies 2011). 2151 examples of *if*- and *when*-PCs are analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively to answer the following RQs:

**RQ 1:** Which syntactic variant is most often used to form PCs?

**RQ 1.1** Which conditional connecting device(s) are recruited to formulate a PC?

**RQ 1.2** Can preferences with regard to polarity value be observed?

**RQ2:** Which discourse-pragmatic functions can be identified?

**RQ 2.1** What are the functional differences between the variants [*if* X<sub>cl</sub><sup>i</sup>, (*then*) X<sub>cl</sub><sup>i</sup>.] and [*when* X<sub>cl</sub><sup>i</sup>, (*then*) X<sub>cl</sub><sup>i</sup>]?

**RQ 3:** How are the different PCs connected vertically and horizontally in the Construction and how are they related to other conditional constructions and/or other reduplication constructions?

It is argued that PCs are functionally too different to be classified as default conditionals in the strict sense as they do not express a condition or inference. Moreover, it is shown that PCs are used to express ACCEPTANCE (ex.1), INDIFFERENCE (ex.2) or FACTUALITY/CERTAINTY of the proposition (ex.3). On top of that, they also code PROTOTYPICALITY which is a function completely overlooked in the literature so far (ex.5) (but see Gomeishi et al. 2004 on contrastive reduplication). Additionally, a Logistic Regression Model is fitted to predict the choice of the connector *if* or *when*. The statistical analysis confirms that the two PC types have different constructional profiles (i.e. different formal and functional behavior). With regards to theoretical modeling, the paper analyzes PCs from a usage-based, cognitive, construction grammar point of view (e.g. Goldberg 2006; Diessel 2019; Hofmann 2022) and sketches the constructions' form-meaning pairings as well as their horizontal and vertical connections in the construction.

## References

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