

Reality and Assurance in Chrau Conditional Sentences

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1. *Semantic components*

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A conditional sentence is defined as a sentence whose parts (whether present or understood) stand in a conditional semantic relationship with each other. A semantically conditional sentence may take a number of forms. Semantic characteristics of sentences are assumed to be near-universal, i.e., a functioning human language must have some way of expressing these notions; the forms will differ with each language. It is hoped that this description of Chrau conditional forms will facilitate comparisons with other languages.¹

1. Semantic components.

The semantic nucleus, or root, of a conditional sentence is composed of a conditioning event and a resultant event (cf. Thomas 1983:104,144). This conditional relationship tends to be

involuntary or automatic, and not infrequently uses intransitive or passive forms for the resultant event. The conditioning event may be viewed as a cause or a triggering state or action. A conditional sentence differs from a purposeful sentence (which it often resembles in form) in that a purposeful sentence is voluntary and has a goal in mind; a conditional sentence is more automatic, and the action ends at the result, without going on further to a purpose.

The sentence root may be modified by time or location settings, compounding, pragmatic modals (illocution, psychological mood, reality, status), or by any of a variety of free-floating or overarching semantic elements which I am calling semantic prosodies,² or by presuppositional elements. In this paper I confine myself to the reality (pragmatic), assurance (illocution variant), and expectation (presupposition) parameters, with occasional references to time (setting).

Did or will the condition actually occur? The reality of the conditioning event may be factual (Chrau exx. 1,5,9...), contrafactual (10, 11, 12, 13), uncertain (2,3,4...), or general (6, 16, 17). General borders on uncertain so that they are sometimes indistinguishable (6). A negative condition (2, 23, 25) is usually uncertain and is often a threat. A future conditioning event tends

to be given uncertain reality. This parameter may be illustrated from English:

You hit me so I hit you. (Factual)

If you had hit me I would have hit you. (Contrafactual)

If you hit me I will hit you. (Uncertain)

Any time you hit me I hit you back. (General)

If the conditioning event happens, how sure is it that the resulting event will happen? The assurance of the conditional relationship may vary from very strong certainty (4), to normal assurance (1, 2, 3), to weak unsureness (5, 18). This parameter is a continuum, probably segmented differently by each language. A past event tends to have normal assurance, because the event has already happened that way, but non-normal assurance is possible (19).

If you hit me I'll hit you. (Normal)

If you hit me I'll certainly hit you. (Strong)

If you hit me I may hit you. (Weak)

If you hit me there's no assurance that I'll hit you. (Very weak)

Contrasting with the internal assurance of the conditional relationship and the external reality of the conditioning event, there can also be a general presupposition regarding the conditional relationship. What do people normally expect in such a situation?

Violation of this presupposition or expectation leads to a concessive sentence (22, 23, 24).

If you hit me I'll hit you. (Normal)

Even if you hit me I won't hit you. (Contraexpectancy)

Even if you hit me I'll go ahead and hit you.

(Contraexpectancy (you are bigger than me))

(1) Jun lăp dăq, nỏq Luc păn̄h nẻ̄h.

deer enter trap so Luc shoot it

A deer entered the trap, so Luc shot it. (Factual, normal assurance, expected, past, declarative)

(2) Đă̄ng, ă̄nh pâm̂ may chử̄t.

not I beat you dead

If you don't I'll beat you to death. (Uncertain reality, normal assurance, expected, future, declarative)

(3) Hẻ̄ chaq yang palỏm nỏq, thi an gatayh so.

if demon spirit pollute that then let sneeze dog

If the spirits have polluted it, then let a dog sneeze.

(Uncertain reality, normal assurance, expected, future, imperative)

(4) Niu may pâm̂ ă̄nh, nỏq nhằ̄ng ă̄nh pâm̂ may.

if you hit me then truly I hit you

If you hit me I'll certainly hit you. (Uncertain reality,
very strong assurance, expected, future, declarative)

(5) Prau gẽh gõng mvăc jun lăp đăq đăng?

Prau have meat because deer enter trap no

Does Prau have meat because a deer entered the trap? (Factual,
weak assurance, expected, past, interrogative)

2. Correlation with forms

A simple conditional sentence may be manifested by a juxtaposed form with non-final intonation on the condition clause (2, 17, 22). Or by a form with a medial conjunction nõq 'then', thi 'then', or mvăc 'because' (1, 18, 19). Or by a form with an initial conjunction hê 'if', niu 'if', or mvăc 'because' together with a medial nõq 'then' or thi 'then' (3, 4).

The condition clause normally precedes the result clause. But when they are reversed niu 'if', hê 'if' or mvăc 'because' are used as medial conjunctions, and not infrequently chăc 'probably, possibly' is used with the result clause (5, 6, 25).

(6) Chăc Prau tât Saigon hê gẽh

probably Prau to Saigon if have

Prau will probably go to Saigon if he can.

Forms with an initial hê 'if' but without a medial conjunction are rare, and this seems to be a Vietnamese form, often actually containing Vietnamese loanwords; and the result clause in these sentences seems generally to be a complex clause (7, 8).

- (7) Hê iêr may alăh, ban be may dĩch năc may
if cock your lose friend friend your slave slave your
ănh nhũp lểq.

I take all

If your cock loses then I take all your slaves.

- (8) Hê ănh huch alăc dăq nào, nêh ôp ănh dăq nây.
if I drink wine time any he do me time that
Whenever I drink wine he attacks me.

2.1 Reality

A factual condition (i.e. where the condition is known to actually take place) is generally marked by medial nỏq 'so' or another member of the { pach } or { nỏq } classes (see Sec.3). (1, 9, 16, 20, 21).

- (9) Nêh sĩq palây heq en, nỏq chắc ănh vlam nêh.
he return land this already so probably I meet him
He has come back, so probably I'll meet him. (Factual)

It may also be marked by initial mvăc 'because', which seems to be a Vietnamese calque seldom found in older Chrau texts, or by initial tôm a or tôm u 'resulting from'.

A contrafactual condition is marked by an initial dăng or more rarely vâng or mvâng 'if it hadn't been' (10, 11).³ Or it may be marked by the expression chở ma ẻq gẻh 'if it hadn't been' (12), or chở bẻ 'indeed not' (13).

The result clauses in 10-13 are all stated positively, though they are contrary to fact. (English marks them specifically as contrafactual.) The condition clauses are also stated positively but put a negative before the clause. (English puts the negative inside the condition clause of 10-12 and has no negative in 13). Furthermore, though 10-12 are positive contrafactuals (you did go (10)), and 13 is a negative contrafactual (he was not foolish), Chrau uses the same structure of Marker -- Positive Clause for all of them, indicating the difference only by the individual initial markers.

(10) Dẻng may saq ẻnh gẻh gẻng ẻn.

if-not you go I have meat already

If you hadn't gone I would have had meat already.

(Contrafactual)

(11) Vâng may tacăh ănh nhâng ănh hũch-chěq.

if-not you remind me truly I forget

If you hadn't reminded me I would have forgotten.

(Contrafactual)

(12) Chố ma êq gẻh sipăm sẳm, ănh câu ănh

indeed but not have shaman treat I swear I

lẻq chửt en.

already die already

If the shaman hadn't treated me I swear I would have been

dead already. (Contrafactual)

(13) Chố bô vu gala cà nẻh mà vu chửt.

indeed not person foolish as him but person dead

If he had been as foolish as (the king) he would have been

dead already. (Contrafactual)

An uncertain condition (i.e. where the causal relationship may be certain but the factual fulfilment of the condition is not certain) is the most common state of a conditional sentence. It may have zero marking (2, 17), which seems to be the commonest form in old Chrau and in much informal Chrau, or it may be marked with loans from Vietnamese such as hê 'if, when', niu 'if' (3, 4, 7, 8) in careful speech. Or it may be marked by embedding with cồ 'who, which' (14, 15).

- (14) May cồ an nỏq may nhai bầy ănh.
 you who give then you speak with me
 If you are going to give it away, tell me. (Uncertain)

- (15) Vôn cồ saq vôn vro digõq canõq.
 we who go we buy much like-that
 If we go we buy a lot. (Uncertain)

A general condition (i.e. where the sentence is speaking in general terms, not concerned with the factuality at a given time) is usually marked by gẽh 'have, be' or zero. Gẽh is used before a subject (16), zero is used when there is no subject present (17). The intonation in (16) distinguishes between general and factual condition. The form of (17) is ambiguously general or uncertain condition; only the context can disambiguate them. A sentence can be made unambiguously general by the use of đâu nào 'whenever' (8) or other similar phrases.

- (16) Gẽh jun lăp dăq, nỏq Luc păn̄h nẽh.

be deer enter trap so Luc shoot it

If a deer enters the trap Luc shoots it. (General)

(or) Gẽh jun lăp dăq, nỏq Luc păn̄h nẽh.

A deer entered the trap, so Luc shot it. (Factual)

(17) Vlam sipai pǎnh sipai.

meet rabbit shoot rabbit

Whenever you see a rabbit, shoot it. (General)

(or) If you see a rabbit, shoot it. (Uncertain)

2.2 Assurance of result.

The assurance of the conditional relationship is manifested in various ways. The normal unmarked state (1, 2, 3) indicates reasonable assurance that the cause brings about the result. Total certainty is marked by nhằng or nhằng bâng 'truly' in the result clause (4) or by borrowing the Vietnamese chắc chắn 'certainly'. Probability, less than normal certainty, is marked by chắc 'probably, perhaps' (originally from Vietnamese but watered down) (6, 19). A probability form like ănh sinăng 'I think that...' is not well attested in Chrau. A lower probability or possibility can be expressed somewhat awkwardly with ănh dăng gút...ha dăng 'I don't know... or not' in the result clause (18). Medial nỏq (1, 4) gives more certainty than medial thi (3, 18). In ex. 23 the strong wording of the first clause shows that the chắc in the second clause is to be taken with its Vietnamese meaning of strong certainty, not with its weaker Chrau meaning.

(18) May pâm ănh, thi ănh dăng gút ănh pâm may ha dăng.

you hit me thi I not know I hit you or not

If you hit me it's possible I may hit you. (Weak)

(19) Nễn tấi chấc mấc ấnh cuối nễn.

he come perhaps because I call him

He came perhaps because I called him. (Weak)

A near-certain negative state is marked by initial pấch 'what', mốq 'how' or vadấng 'how' with high intonation and heavy stress on these markers. These could be called rhetorical questions, as they have the form of questions but are in fact strong declarations, emphasizing the impossibility of the condition (20, 21).

(20) Nễn con se, vadấng nễn saq.

he child young how he go

He was a child, so how could he go? (i.e., if he had not been a child he could have gone.) (Very strong)

(21) Nễn chot caniết, pấch nễn mốch ấnh, ấnh mốch nễn.

he scaly itchy what he near me I near him

He has a skin disease, so how would we have gotten together?

(i.e., if he hadn't had the skin disease we might possibly have gotten together; but as it is, we certainly would not have.)

(Very strong)

2.3 Presupposed relations.

Presupposed relations generally form the basis for the assurance of the result (Sec. 2.2). But occasionally the normally

presupposed relationship is unexpectedly contradicted by the actual relationship. An unexpected (contraexpected, concessive) relation between the conditioning event and the resultant event is often indicated by hôm 'still' and đăng 'not' in the result clause (22). Hôm is the preverb that in most contexts indicates a continuing action 'still', but in this context is concessive.

(22) May pâm ănh, ănh hôm đăng pâm may.

you hit me I still not hit you

Even if you hit me I still won't hit you. (Unexpected)

Contraexpectancy may also be indicated by cồ...mà 'though ...but' (23) or cồ...khỏi 'though...also' (24).

(23) cồ lểq sắq ndu đăng cớnh bắy cồ, mà ănh heq
though all cl. person not want with you but I here
chắc đắng ngai a cồ đắng.

surely not far from you no

Even if everyone leaves you, surely I won't. (Unexpected)

(24) Cồ vu tachút ănh, ănh khỏi đắng đimo cồ nồq.

though people kill me I also not deny you no

Though they kill me I still won't deny you. (Unexpected)

3. Set of forms.

Conditional sentences may take the following set (battery) of forms: (C = Condition, R = Result, \pm = non-final intonation)

- | | | |
|-------|------------------------|--|
| i. | {hê} C, {nốq} R | Formal, precise. (3, 4) |
| ii. | {hê} C, R | Less formal, Vietnamese, rare. (7,8) |
| iii. | C {nốq} R | Informal. (1,9,18) |
| iv. | C {pách} R | Strong denial of fact. (20,21) |
| v. | C R | Common, normal. (2,17) |
| vi. | cồ C {mà} R | Contraexpected or alternative (23,24,26) |
| vii. | C, hôm đăng R | Strong concessive. (22) |
| viii. | C-cồ, \pm {nốq} R | Embedded condition. (14,15) |
| ix. | \pm chăc R {hê} C | Emphasized result. (5,6,25) |
| x. | {gêh} C, \pm {nốq} R | Uncertain condition (10,11,12,13,16) |
| xi. | R {chăc} mấc C | Past, non-normal assurance (19) |

It is assumed that in general any conditional sentence can be transformed into any of these forms, though there are probably some restrictions on form viii and perhaps on some of the others. Following are the multi-member sets of functors used in the formulas. Functors not in brackets in the formulas are one-member sets.

{hê} hê, niu, niu má 'if', mấc 'because', tóm u 'since'.

Conjunctions.

{nốq} nốq 'so, then', thì, là, cồ, mà, túc là 'that is, then'. Conjunctions.

- {păch} păch, mǒq, vadâng 'what, how'. Introducers.
- {mà} mà 'but', thì 'that is', khóí 'also', vrēq 'now'.
Conjunctions.
- {gěh} gěh 'be, have, there is', đǎng 'not, don't', vâng,
mvang 'if it hadn't', chơ' bô 'indeed not',
chơ mà êq gěh 'if it hadn't been'. Introducers.
- {chắc} chắc 'perhaps', chắc chắn 'certainly', nhâng,
nhâng bâng 'truly'. Assurance markers.

Other sentences may be embedded within a conditional sentence, in either the conditioning event or the resultant event position, such as the purposeful sentence embedded in the result position of the conditional sentence in ex. 25.

(25) Niên-khwa tăt heq ănh sĩq trường chěq hóc

term come this I return school to study
mva lěq niu đǎng gěh păch lây trở-ngăn
year last if not have thing any hinder

(Result) This coming term I'll return to school to study
my last year (Condition) if nothing hinders me.

When the condition clause contains short alternatives the sentence form is cồ...thì 'if...then' (26).

(26) Cồ yăh êq yăh thì en.

if good not good then finished

If it's good or not it's alright.

4. Comments.

This description of Chrau is far from exhaustive, yet I think it contains the major forms and the most common conjunctions, with a rough picture of their functions.

Several possible ways suggest themselves in which Chrau could be usefully compared with other languages, perhaps leading eventually to typological statements or to reconstructions of proto-Mon-Khmer grammar:

- (i) compare the positions of particles and conjunctions
- (ii) compare the required combinations of initial and medial conjunctions
- (iii) compare the preferred and the permitted clause orders
- (iv) compare the constructed conjunctions and markers, e.g.,
*I think that...
- (v) compare the membership of the battery of forms
- (vi) compare the functions of the forms in the battery.

Footnotes

¹ Chrau is a South Bahnaric Mon-Khmer language spoken 50 miles E.N.E. of Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City). This paper made use of a Chrau text concordance sponsored by Grant GS-270 of the National Science Foundation (1966), and is part of a larger study of Chrau sentences in preparation. My wife Dorothy read the manuscript and made a number of helpful suggestions.

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² The sentential semantic prosodies include time movement, information flow, reference structure, assertion structure, topicalization, and cohesion (Thomas 1980:SN. 11-12).

³ This contrafactual đăng is in pre-sentence position. The đăng of a negative condition (ex.2) is a pre-verb.

Reference

Thomas, David. 1983. An Invitation to Grammar. Bangkok:Mahidol University.