

Indirect *if* parentheticals: Syntactic development and pragmatic function

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Quirk et al (1985) identify a class of *indirect conditions*, where the condition “is not related to the situation of the matrix clause” (1089) but is “dependent on an implicit speech act of the utterance” (1095). This paper explores two sets of indirect conditionals, one expressing metalinguistic meaning (*if you choose, like, prefer, want, wish*) and one expressing epistemicity (*if you ask me, if I may say so*), as in

- (1) a species designed by the Almighty, or by evolution **if you prefer** (1996 Strathy: ACAD)
- (2) It was all the mother’s fault, **if you ask me** (2005 COCA: FIC)

Both serve a variety of politeness functions and are intersubjective in nature. Since in all cases the apodoses are missing, indirect *if*-parentheticals bear a resemblance to monoclausal *if*-constructions (*If only he would stop drinking!*(Dancygier and Sweetser 2005: 217-19) or insubordinated clauses, that is “*the conventionalized main clause use of [...] formally subordinate clauses*” (*If you could just wash your hands.*) (Evans 2007: 367). As insubordinated clauses are assumed to derive from full clauses, this paper investigates whether a similar derivation – in this case from main clause to parenthetical – can be adduced here, with ellipsis of the apodosis expressing the implied speech act (viz. “if you prefer, then I will call it so”, “if you ask me, then I will tell you”).