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**A CLASSIFICATION OF**

**CONDITIONAL SENTENCES**

**BASED ON SPEECH ACT THEORY**

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*The assumption that the meaning of conditional sentences can be*

*determined solely by surface structure features, such as tense, mood,*

*and particles, severely restricts the exegetical task. The meaning of*

*any utterance cannot be understood apart from the speaker's intent,*

*the situational and linguistic context, as well as the linguistic form.*

*Speech act theory provides objective criteria to help the exegete*

*integrate these elements. When applied to conditional sentences,*

*speech act theory yields more meaningful results than traditional*

*approaches.*

\* \* \*

INTRODUCTION

THE approach one takes to understand an utterance rests on

underlying assumptions concerning how thoughts are communi-

cated through language. Traditional approaches to Greek grammar

have not yielded satisfactory results in classifying the meanings of

conditional sentences. Greek rhetoricians debated the meaning of

Greek conditional sentences.1 In reference to conditional sentences,

Robertson remarked, "In truth the doctors have disagreed themselves

and the rest have not known how to go.”2 Blass and Debrunner

observe, "The classical grammars are also hopelessly at variance.”3

Recent work, however, in linguistics and philosophy offer potential

for a fresh understanding of Greek conditional sentences.

l Callimachus (*Epigrammatum Fragmenta* 393) remarks, "Even the crows on the

rooftops are discussing the question as to which conditionals are true." Cf. Sextus

Empiricus, *Adversus Grammaticos* 309. For the debate see Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus*

*Dogmaticos* 2.112-23.

2 A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of*

*Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 1004.

3 F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other*

*Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961) 189.

30 GRACE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

Most modern grammarians of NT Greek follow Robertson's

classification of conditional sentences.4 Robertson essentially follows

the system of Gildersleeve and Winer in identifying four classes of

conditionals based on the surface structure phenomena of mood and

tense.5 Meanings are then assigned to each class.

The first class condition is identified by εἰ with an indicative verb

in the protasis and a verb of any tense and mood in the apodosis.6

Because the first class uses the indicative mood (the mood of reality)

in the protasis, it is commonly said to mean that the protasis is

"determined as fulfilled." Robertson claims that the speaker assumes

the reality of his premise. The premise may or may not be actually

true. If the premise is objectively true, it may be rendered with

"since." Otherwise the speaker is either falsely assuming the reality of

the premise or assuming its reality for the sake of argument.

The second class condition is identified by an εἰ with a secondary

tense indicative mood verb in the protasis and the particle ἄν (usually)

with a secondary tense verb in the apodosis.7 The second class condi-

tion is said to mean that the premise is determined as unfulfilled. The

indicative is used because the speaker is of the persuasion that the

premise (protasis) which he sets forth is contrary to fact. The premise

may actually be contrary to fact (John 5:46), or it may be contrary to

what the speaker believes to be the facts (Luke 7:39).

The third class condition is identified by ἐάν with a subjunctive

mood verb in the protasis and a verb with any tense and mood in the

apodosis (usually present or future tense and indicative mood).8 Ac-

cording to Robertson this construction means that the premise is

undetermined but has a prospect of determination. Since the subjunc-

4 Notable among modern grammarians who do not follow Robertson are C. F. D.

Moule (*An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek* [Cambridge: Cambridge University,

1968] 148-52), E. Burton (*Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*

[Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898] 100-112), and W. LaSor (*Handbook of New Testa-*

*ment Greek* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973] 2.225).

5 Robertson, *Grammar*, 1004-27.

6 There are about 300 examples of this surface structure phenomenon in the NT.

J. L. Boyer ("First Class Conditions: What Do They Mean?" *GTJ* 2 [1981] 75-114)

counts 308 using GRAMCORD. It may be questionable whether all the examples that

Boyer cites represent conditional sentences. J. W. Roberts ("Some Aspects of Condi-

tional Sentences in the Greek New Testament," *Restoration Quarterly* 4 [1960] 72)

counts 339.

7 There are about 50 examples of this surface structure form in the NT. J. L. Boyer

("Second Class Conditions in New Testament Greek," *GTJ* 3 [1982] 81.) counts 47.

J. W. Roberts ("Some Aspects of Conditional Sentences," 72) counts 51.

8 There are about 300 examples of this structure in the NT. J. L. Boyer ("Third

[and Fourth] Class Conditions," *GTJ* 3 [1982] 163) counts 277. J. W. Roberts ("Some

Aspects of Conditional Sentences," 72) counts 332.

YOUNG: A CLASSIFICATION OF CONDITIONAL SENTENCES 31

tive is a mood of unreality or uncertainty, its use indicates that the

premise has not yet become a reality. The third class is essentially a

future condition. The speaker regards the premise as having a greater

probability of becoming a reality than would have been true if he had

used a fourth class condition, which uses the optative mood. The

speaker does not assume the premise to be true or untrue.

The fourth class condition is identified by εἰ with an optative

mood verb in the protasis and the particle ἄν with an optative mood

verb in the apodosis. No example of this construction exists in the

NT having both the protasis and apodosis.9 It is said that the premise

of the fourth class condition is undetermined with remote prospect of

determination. The fourth class condition is understood to indicate a

future (undetermined) condition with a less probable chance of ful-

fillment than is true with a third class condition.

INADEQUACY OF THE TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING

The traditional approach to Greek conditionals is adequate for

classifying the surface structure phenomena. It is inadequate, how-

ever, for describing the semantic range of conditional sentences. For

example, in Luke 22:42 there is a first class condition: "Father, if you

are willing, take this cup from me" (*NIV*). The premise is not true; it

was the Father's will for Jesus to suffer. It cannot be said that Jesus

assumes the truth of the premise for the sake of argument, for that

understanding of the statement would result in a serious theological

problem, namely, disunity in the Godhead. The other option, that

Jesus falsely assumed the truth of the premise, is highly questionable.

It could be said with Boyer10 that first class conditions merely repre-

sent a simple if/then relation. Grammatically this is correct, but

semantically it barely scratches the surface. What did Jesus mean by

the utterance? Why did he say it?

In Gal 4:15 there is a second class condition: "If you could have

done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me"

(*NIV*). The traditional interpretation (contrary-to-fact condition)

would yield the following understanding: "If you could have done so

(which for some reason you could not do), you would have torn out

your eyes and given them to me (which of course you did not do

because the premise was never realized)."11 This is nothing more than

9 Roberts ("Some Aspects of Conditional Sentences," 72) counts 12 examples of

the partial construction in the NT, but Boyer ("Third [and Fourth] Class Conditions,"

170) denies that any exist.

10 Boyer, "First Class Conditions: What Do They Mean?" 81-82.

11 Boyer ("Second Class Conditions in New Testament Greek," 83) explains the

meaning of second class conditions by means of a similar expanded paraphrase. He

remarks, "It states a condition which as a matter of fact has not been met and follows

with a statement of what would have been true if it had."

32 GRACE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

a truism that does not say anything at all. The exegete must realize

that the situation was emotionally charged and that Paul is express-

ing something more than meaningless double-talk.

The main cause for exegetical problems with the traditional

approach stems from a simplistic view of semantics.12 There is an

overemphasis on a one-to-one correspondence between form and

meaning, which does not fully recognize the semantic range of εἰ or

that one type of condition may be represented by various surface

structure forms. As observed in the above survey, conditional sen-

tences are classified according to surface structure phenomena (mood

and tense) and then a meaning is attached to each class.13 The

assumption that there is a one-to-one correspondence between form

and meaning is often violated in actual usage. Lexical forms usually

have many meanings (e.g., the word "run"); likewise, grammatical

constructions often have multiple meanings (e.g., the Greek genitive

case). Any attempt to uncover the meaning of conditionals must be

based on a more productive theory of semantics.

Furthermore, the traditional approach fails to recognize the role

of the situational context in the communication act.14 To interpret the

meaning of language purely on the basis of its linguistic features is a

12 "Semantics" as used here refers to the study of total meaning rather than the

meaning of language structure. This includes the meaning of the propositional content

of the linguistic structure, the propositional content of inferential material, and the

intent of the speaker. Since these elements are necessary for understanding an utter-

ance, they must be part of the study of total meaning. Semantics then will be used in its

broadest sense and closely associated with the concept of understanding. For an

extensive bibliography on semantics, see S. Delancy and T. Payne, "Semantics Master

Bibliography," *Notes on Linguistics* 37 (1987) 5-43.

13 Some have rightly observed a semantic overlap between the four classes of

conditions. For the similarity between a first class form in which the protasis is

obviously false and a second class form see M. Winger ("Unreal Conditions in the

Letters of Paul," *JBL* 105 [1986] 110-12). Winger (p. 111) states, "Grammarians

generally agree that writers of ancient Greek--classical or Hellenistic--sometimes

stated conditions they regarded as unreal without using secondary tenses or ἄν. Thus,

the unreal form is only an option; any past or present condition may be unfulfilled, but

the unreal condition is explicitly, and therefore emphatically, unfulfilled." Boyer ("First

Class Conditions: What Do They Mean?" 76) isolated 36 first class examples from the

NT in which the protasis was obviously false. Boyer correctly concluded that every

sentence with a first class form will not fit the meaning attached to it by Robertson. Yet

what Boyer does is simply to replace Robertson's meaning with another, retaining the

one-to-one correspondence between form and meaning. Burton (*Moods and Tenses*,

104-5) argues that εἰ with the future tense conveys the same idea as ἐάν with the

subjunctive. There are 22 examples of εἰ with the future tense in the NT.

14 The context includes such things as the shared experience of the speaker and

audience, the shared knowledge about the culture, the immediate situational setting,

the prior statements of the same and related discussions, the relationship between

speaker and audience, the formality of the situation, and the social register of the

speaker and hearer.

YOUNG: A CLASSIFICATION OF CONDITIONAL SENTENCES 33

basic fallacy that grammarians are prone to make. Situational con-

text influences the meaning of an utterance in two ways. (1) Speakers

often allow the context to communicate part of their message for

them. Why say something that is obvious and insult your audience's

intelligence? As in most forms of human behavior, there is a principle

of least effort. People say just enough to be understood in light of the

situation. They allow the audience to compare what was said with

the context and to draw the proper inference, thereby arriving at the

intended meaning. The speaker may leave part of his propositional

content or his intent to be inferred by his audience. (2) The speaker

may be influenced by pragmatic concerns and modify how he says

something. Sometimes a conditional construction is used as a polite-

ness marker when requesting a superior to do something: "If you

wouldn't mind. . . ," or "If you would be willing. . . ." This interac-tion between linguistic form and situational context implies that the

linguistic form cannot be adequately explained apart from consider-

ing the communication situation. How much is actually said and how

it is said will depend on various pragmatic factors, such as formality

and social register.

Little attention has been given to indirect utterances and the

distinction between propositional meaning and use. A speaker may be

influenced by pragmatic concerns to the extent that he will use a

surface structure phenomenon in a way that is alien to its literal

meaning.15 If a wife makes the statement, "The car is dirty," and her

husband replies, "You're right," and then continues to read the sports

page, he is likely to exasperate his poor wife. Her utterance was not

really a statement, it was a request. Indirect speech acts still retain

their literal meaning. The car is indeed dirty. The wife, however,

meant not only what she said, but something else in addition. The

questions that concern the semanticist are, "What were the pragmatic

influences that caused her to express her desires in the form of a

statement?" "Is it possible to develop criteria or rules to define such

use of language and to recover the speaker's intent?”16

15 Common examples of disjunction between meaning and use would be idioms,

figures of speech, and one part of speech used for another. More relevant to our study

of conditional sentences is where one type of sentence is used for another. Questions

are often equivalent to statements. For example, "What shall it profit a man. . . ?"

(Matt 16:26). No answer is expected, rather, it is a rhetorical question that conveys an

emphatic negative assertion, "It will surely not profit a man. ..." Questions can be

used for commands or request, "Will you please close the door?" or "Can you pass the

salt?" In the latter, the ability of the person addressed is hardly the issue. Statements

may be used for commands, "It's rather drafty in here" could mean "Please close the

window."

16 R. A. Jacob and P. S. Rosenbaum (*Transformations, Style, and Meaning*.[New

York: Wiley, 1971] 1) state, "No one knows the exact nature of the relationship

34 GRACE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

There needs to be more attention given to a speaker's intent

when interpreting what any utterance means. Both the propositional

content of what is said and how the speaker uses the words have

direct bearing on the proper understanding of an utterance. If a

hearer simply decodes the propositional content in the question "Can

you pass the salt?" he might respond with an affirmative answer

rather than the desired action. He would not have understood what

was said because he did not consider the intent of the speaker. The

goal of biblical exegesis is to understand what the writers of Scripture

said; this cannot be done by viewing the text (on any level) apart

from the intent of the author/speaker.

Semantics is perhaps the least precise and most difficult sub-

division of language study. The reason for this is that there are a

great number of factors involved in the meaning of human communi-

cation, such as the intent of the author, the situational context,

shared knowledge, the words used, the arrangement of the words, the

inflection of the voice, discourse features such as prominence and

structure, the attitude of the speaker, and the relation of the speaker

to the audience. There is much more involved in meaning than simply

linguistic phenomena. The questions are how do all these factors

interact and is it possible to devise a theory of meaning that takes

everything into account?

A NEW APPROACH: IMPLICATURE AND SPEECH ACT THEORY17

The theory of "implicature" was proposed by Grice in a series of

lectures at Harvard in 1967.18 Grice recognized that the meaning of

communication is dependent not simply on what is said, but also on

what is implicated (implied). He distinguished between the inferences

that one could possibly draw from an utterance and the inferences

between form and meaning. . . . One of the major goals of linguistics, perhaps the

major one, is to make this relationship explicit."

17 The theory of implicature and speech act theory are subdivisions of the study of

pragmatics. Pragmatics is broadly defined as the study of language usage. It is con-

cerned with the relation between context and language and how language usage affects

language structure; cf. S. C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University,

1983) 5-35.

18 His work has only been partially published; see H. P. Grice, "Logic and Conver-

sation," in P. Cole and J. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 3, *Speech Acts*

(New York: Academic Press, 1975) 41-58. A recent development of Grice's theory is

relevance theory; cf. D. Sperber and D. Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and*

*Cognition* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); D. Sperber and D. Wilson, "An Outline of

Relevance Theory," Notes on Linguistics 39 (1987) 5-24; Ernst-August Gutt, "Un-

ravelling Meaning: An Introduction to Relevance Theory," *Notes on Translation* 112

(April 1986) 10-20; and Ernst-August Gutt, "What is the Meaning We Translate,"

*Occasional Papers in Translation and Textlinguistics* 1 (1987) 31-58.

YOUNG: A CLASSIFICATION OF CONDITIONAL SENTENCES 35

that the speaker intended. The latter he called implicatures.19 This

concept arose out of five principles (or rules) that he formulated by

which efficient, rational, and cooperative use of language is achieved.20

Since meaning is conveyed through both the linguistic activity and

the situational context, it follows that there is more communicated

than what is said. "The words and sentences on the page are reliable

clues, but they cannot be the total picture. The more pressing ques-

tion is how the texts function in human interaction.”21

Two pioneers of speech act theory are J. L. Austin22 and John R.

Searle.23 Their basic thesis is that people actually perform acts by

using speech patterns. Austin begins by saying that there are a num-

ber of utterances that are not reports about reality and therefore not

subject to being true or false. Instead, these utterances are actions

(e.g., "I name this ship Queen Elizabeth," or "I bet you a dollar it will

rain tomorrow"). By making the utterance the speaker is actually

performing the action. Such use of language is termed "performa-

tive." Thus, Austin theorizes, language may be used either to say

something about reality (constative utterance) or to do something

(performative utterance ).24

Often the performative will be marked in the surface structure by

a definite formula: the first person singular pronoun, the present

tense, and a performative verb, such as promise, warn, thank, com-

mand, congratulate, or apologize.25 Other times it will not be overtly

19 Distinction should also be made between Grice's concept of conversational

implicature and logical implication, which is based solely on semantic content.

20 These principles are as follows: (1) The Cooperative Principle: the participants'

contributions are in keeping with the common purpose or direction of the exchange;

(2) The Principle of Quality: the participants do not normally say things they know to

be false; (3) The Principle of Quantity: the participants' contribution is only as

informative as required by the purposes of the exchange; (4) The Principle of Rele-

vance: the participants' contributions are relevant to the discussion; and (5) The

Principle of Manner: the participants normally attempt to be brief and orderly,

avoiding obscurity and ambiguity. See Grice, "Logic and Conversation," 45-47.

21 R. de Beaugrande and W. Dressler, *Introduction to Text Linguistics* (New York:

Longman, 1981) 3. They go on to say (p. 35) that a text is the result of an unconscious

process of decision and selection which cannot be interpreted in isolation from those

factors that were involved in its formation. "We must constantly seek to discover and

systemize the motivations and strategies according to which the creation and utilization

of texts are kept in operation."

22 J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (New York: Oxford University,

1962).

23 John R. Searle, *Speech Acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (New

York: Cambridge University, 1969).

24 Austin himself came to reject this distinction since even statements about reality

can be expressed using a performative verb, "I hereby state that X." Thus all utterances

are performatives.

25 Austin (*How to Do Things with Words*, 149) claimed that there are over a

thousand such words in English. If a verb could collocate with the word "hereby" ("I

36 GRACE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

marked in the surface structure. For example, "Can you pass the

salt?" would be the implicit form of "I request that you pass me the

salt.”26 Thus, there are two categories of performatives: explicit per-

formatives (marked in surface structure by standard formula) and

implicit performatives (not marked in surface structure by standard

formula).27

Performatives can carry a certain force (rebuke, warning, etc.) or

can achieve a certain effect (conviction, persuasion, etc.). The first is

called an illocutionary act (e.g., "He urged me to shoot her") and the

second is called a perlocutionary act (e.g., "He persuaded me to shoot

her"). If an illocutionary act fulfills all its necessary conditions, it will

produce in the hearer a recognition of the intent of the utterance.

In order for communication to be effective, the speaker must get

the hearer to recognize the intent of his utterance. This may be

accomplished in several ways--which one the speaker chooses de-

pends on situational factors. He may indicate his intent in a conven-

tional manner by (1) the standard formula, (2) a recognized device in

the surface structure other than the standard formula,28 (3) a sentence-

type that represents a certain illocutionary force,29 or in a nonconven-

hereby promise that X"), it was deemed a performative verb. Austin then used his

collection of verbs as the basis for classifying speech act types into five groups.

However, it is Searle's classification of speech act types which is more commonly

accepted today, but even his scheme is not without opponents. According to Searle

(*Expression and Meaning* [New York: Cambridge University, 1979] 1-29) there are five

types of utterances: (1) assertives, which commit the speaker to the truth of the

expressed proposition (e.g., assert, conclude, affirm); (2) directives by which the speaker

attempts to get the hearer to do something (e.g., request, question); (3) commissives,

which commit the speaker to some future course of action (e.g., promise, offer);

(4) expressives, which express a psychological state (e.g., thanking, apologizing); and

(5) declarations, which affect immediate changes in the state of affairs (e.g., declaring

war, christening, excommunicating). B. Fraser ("Hedged Performatives" in Cole and Morgan,

*Speech Acts*, 187-210) groups speech acts into eight categories based on speaker's intent.

26 Some suggest that implicit performatives are merely idioms. Levinson (*Prag-*

*matics*, 268-70) argues to the contrary. Among his reasons are: (1) indirect speech acts

may be responded to literally, indicating that they retain their literal meaning (e.g,

"Can you pass the salt?" "Yes I can, here it is"); and (2) many indirect speech acts canbe transferred literally into another language since the principles of their formation are

not language specific.

27 All implicit performatives can be expressed explicitly with the formula "I

(hereby) V p (you) (that) S," where V p is a performative verb and S is an embedded

sentence.

28 Levinson (*Pragmatics*, 233) observes that the force of implicit performatives

could be indicated by mood ("Shut the door" rather than "I order you to shut the

door"), particles ("Therefore, X" rather than "I conclude that X"), adverbs ("I'll be

there without fail" rather than "I promise that I will be there"), and even intonation of

voice ("It's going to change" rather than "I state [or question] that it's going to

change").

29 The interrogative sentence is normally associated with the act of questioning, an

imperative with commanding, and a declarative with stating. Yet this correspondence is

YOUNG: A CLASSIFICATION OF CONDITIONAL SENTENCES 37

TABLE I

*Necessary Conditions for Requests and Assertions*a

Conditions Requests Assertions

Propositional Content Future act of hearer Any proposition

Preparatory Speaker believes hearer can Speaker has evidence for the

do act truth of proposition

It is not obvious that hearer It is not obvious to speaker

would do act without being that hearer knows

asked proposition

Sincerity Speaker wants hearer to do Speaker believes proposition

act

Essential Counts as an attempt to get Counts as an undertaking to

hearer to do act the effect that proposition

represents an actual state of

affairs

a Adapted from Searle, Speech Acts, 66-67.

tional manner by (4) framing his words in such a way (without any

commonly recognized surface structure marker) so that the audience

can make the proper inferences. The first would be a direct speech

act; the other three would be indirect speech acts.

By avoiding the standard illocutionary force marker a speaker

can soften an otherwise harsh performative ("Can you pass the salt?"

instead of "I request you to pass me the salt"). It is probable that

speakers of Koine Greek used conditional sentences to tone down the

force of certain acts such as rebuke or request. When Martha rebuked

the Lord for not being there to prevent Lazarus from dying, she used

the form of a conditional sentence: "If you had been here, my brother

would not have died" (John 11:21). If Martha's utterance is analyzed

according to the traditional understanding of second class conditions,

her intention will not be understood.

If some performatives are not marked in the surface structure by

the standard formula, there needs to be some criteria for exegetes to

determine what type is taking place. Searle argues that speech acts

"are performed in accordance with certain rules for the use of linguis-

tic elements.”30 He devised a set of necessary and sufficient conditions

for speech acts to be successfully performed in a given utterance (see

Table).

not strictly observed. For example, the explicit performative "I request that you close

the door" could be communicated with an interrogative ("Can you close the door?"),

an imperative ("Close the door"), or a declarative ("I would be very happy if you'd

close the door"). Some would classify sentence types that are recognized as expressing

a certain performative act as explicit rather than implicit performatives (e.g., impera-

tives for expressing a command).

30 Searle, *Speech Acts*, 16.

38 GRACE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

From his conditions, Searle derived a set of rules for the use of

the illocutionary force indicator.31 He has since modified his theory to

accommodate Grice's theory of implicature by adding criteria to help

determine the illocutionary force of indirect speech acts, e.g., to

determine when the speaker is asking the hearer to pass him the salt

and when he is merely concerned with the hearer's ability to do so.

After analyzing various indirect requests, Searle proposed the follow-

ing generalizations: (I) a speaker can make an indirect request by

either stating that or asking if the propositional content condition

concerning the future act of the hearer is in effect (e.g., "Do you have

change for a dollar?"). (2) A speaker can make an indirect request by

either stating that or asking if the preparatory condition concerning

the hearer's ability to do an act has efficacy (e.g., "Can you pass the

salt?"). (3) A speaker can make an indirect request by stating that

(not asking if) the sincerity condition concerning his desire to the

hearer to do an act is true (e.g., "I wish you wouldn't do that"). (4) A

speaker can make an indirect request by either stating that or asking

if there are sufficient reasons for doing an act (e.g., "You had better

go now"). (5) A speaker can make an indirect request by asking if

the hearer wants to do an act (e.g., "Would you like to go to the

store?”).32

Indirect speech acts which are constructed by questioning or

stating one of the necessary conditions are called conventional. Some,

however, do not follow this pattern; e.g., "Boy, I'm starving" can be

used for a request. Such nonconventional indirect speech acts seem-

ingly violate Grice's principles of communication and place the bur-

den on the hearer to make the proper inference.

The hearer can usually discern that an utterance is a certain type

of performative by inference from what was said in light of the

context.33 For example, the utterance "There is a bull in the field"

could either be a simple remark or a warning. It all depends on which

31 Rules for the illocutionary force indicating device of a request are as follows.

(I) The Propositional Content Rule: the request is to be uttered only in the context of a

sentence or longer stretch of discourse. The utterance predicates a future act of the

hearer. (2) The First Preparatory Rule: the request is to be uttered only if the speaker

believes the hearer can do the act. (3) The Second Preparatory Rule: the request is to

be uttered only if it is not obvious that the hearer would do the act without being

asked. (4) The Sincerity Rule: the request is to be uttered only if the speaker wants the

hearer to do the act. (5) The Essential Rule: the utterance of the request counts as an

attempt to get the hearer to do the act. See Searle, Speech Acts, 62-63.

32 John R. Searle, "Indirect Speech Acts," in Cole and Morgan, *Speech Acts*, 59-

82. The essay was reprinted in Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, 30-57.

33 Searle (*Expression and Meaning*, 32) states, "In indirect speech acts the speaker

communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their

mutually shared background information, both linguistic and nonlinguistic, together

with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer."

YOUNG: A CLASSIFICATION OF CONDITIONAL SENTENCES 39

side of the fence the person being addressed is standing! In the same

way one can infer from the context and what was said that Martha's

utterance (John 11:21) has the illocutionary force of a rebuke.

Basically there are two elements involved in understanding an

utterance: (I) the propositional meaning, or what was said, and (2)

the intent of the speaker, or why it was said (the illocutionary force).34

In some cases the two elements are not detachable; the propositional

content includes the force indicating device. If the fellow picking

daisies on the other side of the fence recognized only the proposi-

tional meaning of "There is a bull in the field," he would probably

end up being gored. He may have been able to parse every word and

to look up the meanings in a lexicon, but he would have failed to

understand because he missed the intent. Both elements should be

recognized as an interconnected unit. Illocutionary force then is an

aspect of meaning that can be described in terms of conditions or

rules. Propositional content conveys what is being said, and the

illocutionary force conveys how it is to be taken. To understand

the statements in Scripture, exegetes must be sensitive not only to the

propositional meaning but also to devices that mark illocutionary

force.

ANALYSIS OF CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

Speech act theory categorizes utterances according to function

rather than form. There is greater exegetical and homiletical value in

classifying conditionals in this way, for it brings the interpreter closer

to the speaker's intent. When viewed through the speech act model,

all conditionals are seen as implicit performatives which are used to

do something in addition to stating a condition; i.e., to persuade the

listener, to make a strong assertion, to manipulate the listener, to give

an exhortation, to express a respectful rebuke, to ask something in a

polite way, to justify one's self, to mock someone, or to convey a

lament. Pragmatic reasons cause a speaker to use a conditional in-

stead of a more direct expression. The following is a partial classifica-

tion of conditionals on the basis of function.

*Rebuke*

To soften a rebuke and make it more respectful, it may be

cloaked in a conditional sentence or some other rhetorical device.

Shakespeare has said, "Your 'if' is the only peacemaker; much virtue

34 Searle (*Intentionality* [New York: Cambridge University, 1983] 27), in discussing

the relation between illocutionary force and intentionality, states, "To characterize

them [utterances] as beliefs, fears, hopes, and desires is already to ascribe intentionality

to them."

40 GRACE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

in 'if,.”35 The necessary conditions (in terms of Searle's theory) for a

rebuke are that the hearer performed an act in the past (propositional

condition), the speaker does not believe that the act was in his best

interest (preparatory condition), the act angered the speaker (sincerity

condition), and the speaker intends his expression as a reprimand

(essential condition). Indirect rebukes may be made by questioning or

stating anyone of the above conditions. For example, a speaker may

question why the hearer did an act ("Why didn't you get the car

fixed?"), or he may state that an act was not in his best interest ("You

sure got us in a jam this time"). A speaker may combine the proposi-

tional content with what would have been in his best interest ("If you

had gotten the car fixed, we wouldn't be stranded out in the middle of

nowhere").

An example of a conditional sentence used as a rebuke is found

in John 11:21, "If you had been here, my brother would not have

died.”36 A number of factors were involved in the formation of

Martha's utterance. Her brother had just died. She was in deep

sorrow and perhaps angered that Jesus had not been there to heal

Lazarus's sickness. Martha was not in the frame of mind to begin a

discourse in logic with her teacher. The sight of Jesus only caused her

emotions to become more agitated. This charged emotional state then

surfaced in a rebuke. The most important factor involved in the

formation of Martha's utterance was the social register between her

and Jesus. She was his devoted follower, having great respect and

admiration for him as her teacher. The last thing she would want to

do is to offend him. Because of this, she softened her rebuke by

avoiding the illocutionary force marker and framing it in the form of

a conditional sentence. The explicit form would have been, "I hereby

rebuke you for not being here and preventing my brother from

dying. "

*Lament*

Consider the statement, "If my husband were still alive, I would

be so happy." If it is not known that the husband is dead, the speaker

is expressing hope; if it is known that the husband is dead, the

speaker is expressing a lament. The protasis of a conditional used to

express a lament is contrary to fact. About one-fourth of the so-called

second class conditionals in the NT express lament. The necessary

35 *As You Like It*, V.iv.108.

36 This was the initial statement that both Mary and Martha made when they saw

Jesus (John 11:21, 32). Mary's utterance, however, could be a lament. Since most of

the necessary conditions for a rebuke and lament are the same, many of their indirect

forms could be constructed in the same way. The observation that Mary fell down at

Jesus' feet and wept suggests that her utterance was a lament rather than a rebuke.

YOUNG: A CLASSIFICATION OF CONDITIONAL SENTENCES 41

conditions for a lament are that an event happened in the past

(propositional condition), the speaker does not believe that the event

(which he believes to have occurred) was in the best interest of

himself or the hearer (preparatory condition), the speaker is grieved

because of the event (sincerity condition), and the speaker counts his

utterance as expressing sorrow (necessary condition). Indirect laments

may be conveyed by stating the event the speaker would like to have

happened (e.g., "I wish that John had not gotten aboard flight 256"

or "If John had taken another flight, he would still be with us").

In Matt 11:21 a conditional is used to express a lament: "Woe.

unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty

works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon,

they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." The

explicit form of the lament is "I hereby lament that you did not

repent as Tyre and Sidon would have because of the miracles you

saw."

*Argue*

The illocutionary act of arguing (i.e., an attempt by a speaker to

persuade the hearer to accept his opinion) is very common in condi-

tionals. Two rules of inference are involved in the use of conditionals

for arguing (these rules will be illustrated by the conditional state-

ment, "If I get my car fixed, then I will come to see you"). *Modus*

*ponens* (method of affirming) is used to argue that the consequent is

true by affirming the antecedent ("I fixed my car. Therefore, I will

come to see you"). *Modus tollens* (method of denial) is used to argue

that the antecedent is false by denying the consequent ("I did not

come to see you. Therefore, I did not get my car fixed"). No valid

conclusion can be drawn regarding the consequent by denying the

antecedent ("I did not get my car fixed. I may or may not come to see

you depending on whether I can get another ride ") or regarding the

antecedent by affirming the consequent ("I came to see you. I may

or may not have fixed my car. Actually, someone else gave me a

ride"). Thus, in order for a conditional to be used to argue a point,

both parties must agree that the "if" clause is true or the "then"

clause is false.37 The point of agreement does not need to be asserted

in the text; it may be understood from the context.

An example of a first class conditional used for a *modus tollens*

argument is found in Matt 12:26: καὶ εἰ ὁ Σατανᾶς τὸν Σατανᾶν

ἐκβάλλει, ἐφ' ἑαυτὸν ἐμερίσθη / 'And if Satan casts out Satan, he is

37 Cf. I. Copi, *Introduction to Logic* (New York: Macmillan, 161) 274-77. Some of

the ideas in this section have been adapted from J. K. Baima, "Making Valid Con-

clusions from Greek Conditional Sentences" (Th.M. Thesis, Grace Theological Semi-

nary, 1986).

42 GRACE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

divided against himself'. It is clear from the following rhetorical

question ("How then will his kingdom stand?") that the consequent is

false. Satan's kingdom does stand and he is not divided against

himself. Since the consequent is false, then the antecedent must also

be false. Jesus, then, is arguing that Satan does not cast out Satan.

He is not merely assuming the verity of the antecedent for the sake of

argument (in which case his own position would be indeterminate); he

is arguing for its falsity. This then becomes the basis for the rest of

the argument of the passage (Matt 12:27-28).

A second class conditional using the *modus tollens* form of

argument is found in Luke 7:39: Οὗτος εἰ ἦν προφήτης, ἐγίνωσκεν  
ἃν τίς καὶ ποταπὴ ἡ γυνῆ ἥτις ἅπτεται αὐτοῦ / 'If this man were a

prophet he would know who is touching him and what kind of

woman she is--that she is a sinner' (Luke 7:39, *NIV*). Robertson

states, "The Pharisee here assumed that Jesus is not a prophet be-

cause he allowed the sinful woman to wash his feet.”38 The pharisee,

however, was not merely assuming the case, he was convinced that

Jesus was not a prophet. By denying the consequent ("Jesus does

not know what kind of woman is touching him"), the pharisee was

seeking to persuade the others that Jesus was not a prophet.

Many first class conditions use *modus ponens* to argue for the

truth of the consequent. The truth of the antecedent is often clearly

the point of agreement and thus not explicitly affirmed. In such cases,

εἰ may be translated "since." For example, in Rom 3:29-30 Paul

argues that the Jews do not have sole claim on God: "Since God is

indeed one, then he is God of the Gentiles as well." Paul used the

common agreement regarding the unity of God to argue for the truth

of the consequence.

*Request*

Sometimes a speaker will frame a request or command in the

form of a conditional sentence for the sake of being polite. An

employee would not barge into his boss's office and bluntly demand a

raise. Rather, he would soften his request with "If you would con-

sider" or the like. The "if" clause is a mitigator or politeness marker.

There is a polarity between being direct (i.e., "I command you to

pass me the salt" or "Give me the salt") and being polite (i.e., "Can

you pass the salt" or "If you wouldn't mind, I would like some salt").

A speaker would tend toward politeness if the situation is formal, the

social status of the hearer is above that of the speaker, there are

others listening, the hearer is in close proximity to the speaker, or if

the speaker desires the conversation to continue. The demands for

politeness usually supersede the need for clarity.

38 Robertson, *Grammar*, 1012.

YOUNG: A CLASSIFICATION OF CONDITIONAL SENTENCES 43

An example of a conditional used for a request is found in Matt

17:4: εἰ ξέλεις, ποιήσω ὦδε τρεῖς σκηνάς / 'If you wish, I will put up

three shelters' (*NIV*). The impetuous Peter might normally have

blurted, out, "Let me put up three shelters." But the awe of the

situation--seeing Jesus in his radiant splendor conversing with Moses

and Elijah--led Peter to frame his request in a politer form using a

conditional.

Jesus' request in the garden of Gethsemane ("If it is possible,

may this cup be taken from me" [Matt 26:39; cf. Luke 22:42 and

Mark 14:36]) is perplexing. One line of reasoning argues that the "if"

clause introduces an indirect request asking whether the preparatory

condition of the hearer's ability to do the requested act has efficacy.

The utterance would then be after the analogy of "Can you pass the

salt?" The sincerity of the request is explained by saying that the

belief that the act was possible arose from the human nature of Jesus,

which was not yet in perfect harmony with the desire of the Father.

This disharmony perhaps was due to a temptation to avoid the path

of suffering, but nevertheless, it is said, Jesus recognizes the impossi-

bility of circumventing the cross in his second prayer, "If (since) it is

not possible. . ." (Matt 26:42) and accepts the will of his Father.

Such a line of interpretation does not do justice to the hypostatic

union between the divine and human in Jesus. A second line of

reasoning understands the "if" clause as an expressive, not a directive.

That is, the "if" clause expresses a condition necessary for the hearer

to perform the requested act, but both the hearer and the speaker

realize that the "if" clause is impossible (i.e., false). In such a situa-

tion, the conditional makes no logical sense (see the discussion of

conditionals used to argue above), but makes perfect sense if it is

understood as expressing the speaker's feelings or needs. For ex-

ample, if a boy had a particular dislike for a certain girl, he might say

to his friend, "If you give me a million dollars, I'll ask her out for a

date." Both he and his friend realize that the friend does not have a

million dollars; thus the speaker is not questioning the hearer's ability

to meet a necessary condition (he already knows that he cannot meet

the condition) but is using a conditional form to express his aversion

to dating that particular girl. Thus, Matt 26:39 can be understood not

as a request that the immutable God reverse one of his eternal

decrees, but as expressing the agony Jesus felt as he faced the cross

event.

*Assert*

The necessary conditions for an assertion are the same as for an

argument except that the assertion is not an attempt to convince the

hearer of a proposition. Assertions are recognized in conditionals

44 GRACE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

when the "then" clause does not follow logically the "if" clause.39 For

example, in the sentence "If Hitler was a military genius, then I'm a

monkey's uncle," the consequence is so obviously false that the sen-

tence is in fact a strong negative assertion-- "Hitler was in no way a

military genius." Most uses of conditionals in the NT for assertion are

a form of Hebraic oath in which only the "'if" clause is stated; the

"then" clause is omitted because the conclusion is unthinkable or

abominable.

An example of a conditional used to make an assertion is found

in Mark 8:12: εἰ δοθήσεται τῇ γενεᾷ ταύτῃ σημεῖον. A literal trans-

lation would be, "'If a sign will be given to this generation. . . ." An

idiomatic translation that captures the illocutionary force of the

speaker would be, "A sign will not be given to this generation."

Asseverations marked by aposiopesis, such as Mark 8:12, most likely

reflect Semitic influence. Mark, however, made no attempt to explain

the Semitism to his Roman audience as he does on other occasions.

The apparent acceptance of this Semitism into Greek supports the

contention that the formation of indirect speech acts is not entirely

language specific, the syntax being understood across language bound-

aries. Robertson remarked that his construction is "'not un-Greek in

itself.”40 Other examples of this construction are OT quotations (e.g.,

Heb 3: 11, 4:3, 4:5).41

39 K. Sorensen ("Asseverative IF and its Congeners," *English Studies* 59 [1978] 248)

remarks that these conditionals "are assertions that operate under cover of logic."

40 Robertson, *Grammar*, 1024.

41 A milder form of assertion employs a concession or contraexpectation relation

between the two propositions (perhaps they could be called acts of maintaining). The

speaker states a contrary thesis and then maintains his position in spite of it. Even

though this relation may be conveyed by a first class form (using εἰ, εἰκαί, or εἴπερ),

the subordinate clause does not stipulate a condition (e.g, "Although all will be

offended in you, I will never be offended" [Matt 26:33]). Burton (*Moods and Tenses*,

112) argues that such sentences should not be regarded as conditionals, saying "The

force of a concessive sentence is thus very different from that of a conditional sentence.

The latter represents the fulfillment of the apodosis as conditioned on the fulfillment of

the protasis; the former represents the apodosis as fulfilled in spite of the fulfillment of

the protasis." J. H. Greenlee ("IF in the New Testament," *TBT* 13 [1962] 42-43) agrees,

saying, "Whereas a conditional clause sets up a condition favorable to the occurrence

of an event, a clause of concession sets up a condition which is affirmed to be

inadequate to bring about the event." Nelson Goodman (*Fact, Fiction, & Forecast*

[Cambridge: Harvard University, 1955] 15) argues that semifactuals ("even if" clauses)

do not assert a causal connection between the antecedent and consequent; rather they

deny that such a relation exists. The idea of connection is a basic element in real

conditions. J. Haiman ("Conditionals are Topics," *Language* 54 [1978] 579) observes

that some logicians and linguists "deny that semifactuals are conditionals at all-

regardless of their superficial morphological similarity to true conditionals." The ques-

tion, however, is really one of definition. Haiman (564) remarks, "Until a satisfactory

definition for a category exists, the sole criterion for identification of its supposed

YOUNG: A CLASSIFICATION OF CONDITIONAL SENTENCES 45

*Manipulate*

A speaker may use a conditional to manipulate the listener. A

manipulation is an attempt to get someone to do something that he

normally would not do or thinks is wrong (e.g., "If you won't be a

good boy, Santa won't come"). The necessary conditions for the

performance of a manipulation are that the hearer perform a future

act (propositional condition), the hearer is able to do the act, but it is

not obvious to the speaker that the hearer is willing to perform the

act (preparatory condition), the speaker wants the hearer to perform

the act (sincerity condition), and the speaker counts his utterance as

an attempt to force the hearer to perform the act (essential condition).

Indirect manipulations may be performed by questioning the hearer's

ability to do an act ("You cannot do . . .") or by questioning the

hearer's character ("If you're a man, you would. . .").

An example of a conditional used for manipulation is found in

Matt 4:3: Εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ, εἰπὲ ἵνα οἱ λίθοι οὗτοι ἄρτοι  
γένωνται / 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become

loaves of bread'. If a command if found in the consequent, then the

truth value of the antecedent is dependent upon the response. If Jesus

obeyed, making the consequent true, nothing could be said regarding

the truth value of the antecedent. If, however, he did not obey,

making the consequent false, then by *modus tollens* the antecedent is

also false-a denial of his own deity. To escape Satan's trap, Jesus

responded by saying that obedience is due God rather than to his

tempter. Satan is not merely assuming the premise to be true, he

is using Jesus' character as a leverage to force him to do some-

thing.42 Other examples of manipulation are found in John 19:12

and Phlm 17.

*Exhort*

An exhortation is an attempt to urge a hearer to do something

he recognizes is proper. It differs from a manipulation in the prepara-

tory and necessary conditions; it is not obvious to the speaker that

the hearer would do the act without being encouraged, and it counts

as an attempt to urge the hearer to perform the act. Exhortations

members is common superficial form: in the case of conditional clauses, the presence,

in English, of a common conjunction *if*; in other languages, of a corresponding

conjunction, word-order, verbal desinence, or whatever." Exegetical precision calls for

a definition of conditionals based on the logical relations between propositions and on

the speaker's usage, rather than solely on form.

42 It is obvious that Satan was attempting to force Jesus to do something that he

would never otherwise do (obey him rather than the Father). As such it is classified as a

manipulation rather than an exhortation. However, the question remains whether εἰ

46 GRACE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

may be strengthened by stating the reason the act should be done.

Among the ways a causal relation can be formed in Greek is by using

the conjunction ei]. Such usage should not be considered conditional.

An example of an exhortation is found in 1 John 4:11: Ἀγα-

πητητοὶ, εἰ οὕτως ὁ θεὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, καὶ ἡμεῖς ὀφείλομεν  
ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν / 'Beloved, since God so loved us, we also should

love one another'. Exhortations are also found in John 13:14 and Col

3:1. The matrix clause may contain an imperative, a statement using

"ought," or a rhetorical question which can be interpreted as an

imperative (e.g., Luke 12:26).

*Mock*

Sometimes a person will boast about being correct and mock or

deride another for being wrong. This ridicule is made even more

pointed when it is constructed in the form of a conditional sentence.

The conditions necessary for the performance of a mockery are that

the hearer has performed a past act or made a proposition (proposi-

tional condition), the hearer believes the act was right or the pro-

position true (preparatory condition), but the speaker believes the act

was wrong or the proposition false (sincerity condition), and the

speaker counts his utterance as an attempt to ridicule the hearer

(necessary condition).

An example of mockery is found in Matt 27:40: Εἰ υἱος εἶ τοῦ  
θελῦ, κατάβηθι ἀπὸ τοῦ σταροῦ / 'If you are the Son of God, come

down from the cross'. The scorners were certainly not trying to

manipulate Jesus to come down from the cross (they did not believe

that he could). Instead, they were deriding Jesus for his "false assess-

ment" of who he was and asserting that they were right all along--the

fact that he was hanging helpless on the cross proves for them that

they were correct; he cannot be the Son of God. For other examples

of mockery see Matt 27:43; Luke 23:35, 37.

CONCLUSION

Speech act theory has called attention to the function of an

utterance in human communication and to the necessity of consider-

ing both the propositional meaning and speaker's intent when inter-

preting what any given communication means.43 The speaker's intent

should be rendered "since" or "if". "Since" would indicate that Satan is manipulating

by flattery; "if" would indicate that Satan is manipulating by *modus tollens*. Both types

of manipulation are performed by questioning the hearer's character or ability. The

hearer is being forced to comply in order to vindicate his reputation. The latter,

however, is much more forceful and is, therefore, probably the force Satan intended.

43 Speech act theory lends substantial weight to Hirsch's contention that the text is

not autonomous from the speaker's intent (E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation*

YOUNG: A CLASSIFICATION OF CONDITIONAL SENTENCES 47

can be detected from surface structure markings or by the interaction

of the surface structure and situational context. This latter observa-

tion forces the exegete to integrate the total context (situational as

well as linguistic) into his grammatical and lexical analysis at all

levels.

Analyzing conditionals in light of speech act theory can be a

useful tool to bring the exegete nearer to the intended meaning of the

speaker/author and to resolve exegetical problems. The analysis of

conditionals in light of mood, tense, and particles is not wrong, but it

only examines part of what contributes to meaning. Viewing a prob-

lem from different angles usually results in a clearer understanding. It

is like taking pictures of different sides of a building. A picture of the

front of the building may be an accurate representation, but it cannot

provide the viewer with an understanding of the whole (How long is

the building? Is there a back porch?). Analyzing conditionals in light

of speech act theory simply takes another picture of the problem from

a different angle, augmenting the understanding based on traditional

grammar.

One purpose of this paper has been to question the prevailing

assumption that the linguistic form of a conditional sentence (i.e.,

tense, mood, and particles) is the sole criteria to ascertain meaning.

This has been the approach of most previous work on conditionals.

Perhaps the reason for the prevalence of this assumption is that

Greek studies have traditionally been confined to linguistic features.

Those who have passed through traditional instruction, therefore,

have a tendency to equate propositional meaning with total meaning.

Further studies could be made in several areas. First, more

precise categories and criteria will enhance the accuracy of the results

and eliminate some subjectivity. For example, what determines that

an utterance fits the criteria for a certain illocutionary act when

exactly the same words are said (as in the case of Mary and Martha

in John 11:21, 32)? To say that Martha's utterance was a rebuke and

that Mary's was a lament when they say exactly the same thing must

rest entirely on the exegete's analysis of the total context, including

the actions of the speakers and hearers when the utterances were

made. For example, a rebuke is rarely given when a person is bowing

down before another and weeping (as Mary was). Mary's posture

reflects her being deeply grieved rather than resentful and angry.

The various aspects of the total context must be evaluated in

terms of how they influence the necessary conditions for a particular

speech act (the propositional, preparatory, sincerity, and essential

conditions). A rebuke and lament differ mainly in the sincerity and

[New Haven: Yale University, 1967]). The theory demonstrates that the speaker's

intent is inseparably linked with both the surface structure and the situational context.

48 GRACE THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

essential conditions. The reason their indirect forms can be expressed

with identical surface structure phenomena is because the proposi-

tional (a past act of the hearer or a past event) and preparatory (the

speaker believes the past act or event was not in his best interest)

conditions are very similar. The sincerity condition reflects an inner

disposition or emotion which often surfaces in observable actions.

These actions, for the most part, are not consciously performed, yet

they do convey a certain emotional state. The sincerity condition for

a rebuke (the speaker is angered because of an act) might be revealed

by voice inflection and increased volume, rapidity of speech, short

choppy phrases, or tension and rigidness of body. The sincerity

condition for a lament (the speaker feels grieved because of an event)

could be discerned from weeping, solitude, bowing the head, or a

quiet, broken voice. None of the behavior patterns for a lament were

observed in connection with Martha's utterance, but two accompanied

Mary's. It is only on such a basis that a difference in meaning can be

determined when the propositional content is identical.

The essential condition reflects an attempt to communicate a

certain disposition or intent. The behavior patterns associated with

the essential condition, therefore, are more deliberate than those

associated with the sincerity condition. Circumstances accompanying

a rebuke might include the speaker being in close proximity to the

hearer, the speaker leaning forward, a characteristic facial expres-

sion, or short quick gestures with the lower arm and hand. A rebuke

is more confrontational than a lament. Actions in the ancient Jewish

culture that help to convey a lament include beating the breast,

rending one's garments, lifting one's hands, fasting, dressing in black

garments, going barefoot, removing ornaments from one's attire,

sitting among ashes or sprinkling ashes on oneself, or public wailing.

The expression of a rebuke involves retaliative behavior against an

offender instead of outbursts of undirected energy, as with a lament.

Martha's meeting with Jesus was more confrontational, thereby sug-

gesting that she was rebuking him.

The above represents suggestions for integrating the situational

context with the propositional content to arrive at the speaker's

meaning. All of the behavior patterns mentioned, whether consciously

or unconsciously performed, are modes of communication. Since they

contribute to the total meaning, they cannot be ignored by the exe-

gete. Of course, some behavior patterns cannot be discerned from a

literary text, but many can, especially in the Scriptures. The Hebrew

people were honest with their feelings and when something displeased

them, they would not hesitate to lift their voice to God and cry out,

"Why have you allowed this to happen?" Such outbursts were not

disrespectful, as might be construed in a more reserved culture.

YOUNG: A CLASSIFICATION OF CONDITIONAL SENTENCES 49

A second area of further research lies in applying speech act

theory to other categories of language study. For example, a rhetori-

cal question is an indirect speech act that can be formed when a

speaker questions the truth of a proposition. The preparatory condi-

tion for an assertion is that the speaker has evidence for the truth of a

proposition. By questioning the truth of a proposition, a speaker is

actually making a strong negative assertion. Thus, the rhetorical

question, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and

lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36), is actually a negative assertion, "It

will surely not profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own

soul. "

A third area of further research concerns the implications of

speech act theory for translation work. Speech act theory indicates

that the illocutionary force of a sentence must be retained if a sen-

tence is to be understood. For instance, explicit performatives in a

source language may be best rendered implicitly in a receptor lan-

guage. For example, Luke 14:18b reads, ἐρωτῶ σε, ἔχε με παρῃτη-

μένον. The *NIV* translation, "Please excuse me," accurately renders

the illocutionary force of the sentence without explicitly translating

every lexical item from the source language.

Traditional grammar does not adequately explain the meaning of

certain passages of Scripture. This article has demonstrated that

speech act theory can lead to a better understanding of the biblical

text.

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