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# Illocutionary conditionals and discourse strategies in aphasia: A corpus-based analysis

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**Abstract:** This study investigates illocutionary conditionals – conditional constructions that modulate speech acts such as requests, offers, and warnings – in speakers with aphasia. Previous clinical research has mainly focused on the morphosyntactic properties of conditional constructions, largely overlooking illocutionary conditionals and their pragmatic functions. To highlight the importance of this structure in everyday communication and address this research gap, the study is organized into two parts. The first part provides a comprehensive overview of the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features of illocutionary conditionals. The second part presents a corpus-based analysis of how speakers with aphasia use these constructions. Preliminary findings indicate that individuals with aphasia are capable of producing illocutionary conditionals using strategies broadly similar to those of neurotypical speakers, though some differences emerge. These results underscore the need to consider the pragmatic dimensions of conditional constructions in clinical research and suggest that more fine-grained theoretical distinctions from linguistics should be integrated into experimental studies.

**Keywords:** aphasia; conditionals; speech acts; illocutionary conditionals; ellipsis

## 1 Introduction

The literature on the production of conditional sentences in people with aphasia is limited but shows consistent findings. Existing studies indicate that individuals with aphasia experience greater difficulties in comprehending and producing conditional sentences than declarative ones, and that these difficulties are more pronounced for counterfactual conditionals than for indicative ones. This is mainly due to problems with verb tense selection (Dragoy and Bastiaanse 2013; Martínez-Ferreiro and Bastiaanse 2013; Yarbay Duman et al. 2011, 2014), which is essential for expressing the

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degree of reality of an event. In indicative conditionals, present or future tenses signal realistic, likely scenarios, whereas in counterfactual conditionals, a past subjunctive in the protasis combined with a modal plus (perfect) infinitive in the apodosis expresses an unlikely or counterfactual scenario. A study by Rofes et al. (2013) on Catalan showed that non-fluent (Broca's) aphasic people encountered particular difficulties in producing periphrastic conditionals (e.g., "if the man had had time, he would have…") compared to simple conditionals or future forms, while neurotypical participants showed no significant differences across these structures. These findings have been interpreted by Bastiaanse et al. (2011) through the lens of the Past Discourse Linking Hypothesis (PADILIH), which posits that verb forms requiring temporal anchoring to past events are particularly vulnerable in aphasia. Previous studies (Bastiaanse 2008; Stavrakaki and Kouvava 2003; Yarbay Duman and Bastiaanse 2009) have confirmed this tendency, showing that past-tense forms – including past conditionals – are generally more vulnerable to impairment than present- or future-tense forms. More recent research (Yarbay Duman et al. 2015; Yarbay Duman and Maviş 2013) has further suggested that the difficulty with periphrastic conditionals also stems from their high cognitive load. These constructions require the speaker to keep the protasis active in working memory while processing the apodosis – a demand that becomes particularly taxing when the protasis is long or heavily subordinated. Moreover, counterfactual conditionals involve a double temporal and spatial displacement, which weakens the connection between the two events and increases both syntactic and memory processing effort.

In this paper, I argue that existing clinical research offers a narrow view of the linguistic competence of individuals with aphasia, as it largely overlooks the significant progress made by linguistic studies in understanding the complexity of conditional constructions (see Edgington 2007; Kratzer 2012; Traugott et al. 1986; von Fintel 2011). To date, research in aphasiology has focused almost exclusively on morpho-syntactic aspects, neglecting broader classificatory frameworks that consider the functional and pragmatic diversity of conditional forms. Conditionals do not constitute a homogeneous category. On the contrary, they represent a highly differentiated set of structures that vary in form, function, and degree of contextual dependence. Among these, one particular type has remained largely unexplored in clinical research: the *illocutionary conditional* (see Austin 1979; DeRose and Grandy 1999; Johnson-Laird 1986; Predelli 2009; Siegel 2006). Its absence from the literature can likely be attributed to the fact that it shares the same verbal moods as the canonical conditional – which is designed to describe a hypothetical relationship between two events – and has therefore often been mistakenly treated as equivalent to it on purely formal grounds. However, a closer examination shows that the

illocutionary conditional operates in a fundamentally different way. Rather than describing a truth or validity relation between two propositions, it functions to modulate the force, scope, or relevance of a speech act. From this perspective, a comprehensive understanding of aphasic speakers' competence with conditional constructions cannot be achieved without first establishing a detailed distinction among different types of conditionals and explicitly including illocutionary conditionals in the analysis.

For this reason, the present study is divided into two parts, each pursuing distinct yet interconnected objectives. The first part provides a theoretical overview of conditional constructions, emphasizing their syntactic, semantic, and – most importantly – pragmatic distinctions, with special attention to the illocutionary conditional and its contextual grounding. The second part applies this theoretical framework to the clinical domain, examining how illocutionary conditionals are used by individuals with aphasia and assessing whether their strong reliance on context facilitates or hinders performance in comparison with neurotypical speakers. These two parts will be structured as follows.

In Section 2, I review the existing literature on conditionals, distinguishing three main categories: propositional, counterfactual, and illocutionary. The first type evaluates the truth relation between propositions; the second describes alternative, non-real scenarios through the semantics of possible worlds; and the third imposes conditions on a speech act (e.g., an offer, order, or promise). Syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic differences clearly show that illocutionary conditionals cannot be adequately accounted for either by truth-functional logic or by possible-world semantics, and thus require an independent analytical framework.

In Section 3, I show that a central feature of illocutionary conditionals is their remarkable formal flexibility. Unlike propositional and counterfactual conditionals, in this type, one of the two clauses can be omitted and inferred from context. This flexibility is not arbitrary but is strategically exploited to achieve specific discourse goals. Across Sections 3.1 to 3.3, I highlight three key discourse strategies characteristic of these constructions: (i) the omission of the consequent, used to emphasize the premise; the omission of the premise, used to highlight the communicative force and effects of the consequent; and (iii) the omission of grammatical markers, employed as an informal persuasive strategy to prompt interlocutors to take action in response to a contextually salient situation.

In Section 4, through corpus analysis, I compare the use of illocutionary conditionals by individuals with aphasia to that found in ordinary language. The corpus employed for this study is *AphasiaTalkBank* (MacWhinney et al. 2011), a resource developed by the scientific community to share linguistic data on aphasic speakers and to advance understanding of their communicative abilities. Given the wide

variety of materials available, the present analysis was limited to English-language productions, focusing exclusively on group discussions recorded during therapeutic sessions. This choice is motivated by the hypothesis that interactive and collective contexts provide greater opportunities for the use of illocutionary conditionals than one-on-one conversations (which are often oriented toward standardized testing). In total, 59 discussions were examined, ranging in duration from 10 to 160 min.

Overall, the preliminary corpus analysis suggests that individuals with aphasia are indeed capable of handling the underlying structures of illocutionary conditionals, albeit with some differences compared to neurotypical speakers. Much work remains to be done to substantiate this hypothesis – particularly given the experimental limitations of the present study. Nevertheless, the limited data available offer encouraging indications: aphasic speakers appear to show relatively stronger competence with illocutionary conditionals than with other types of conditional constructions, suggesting that distinctions among conditional types should be applied not only theoretically but also in experimental research.

## 2 Classifying conditionals

There is broad consensus in linguistic field that conditionals cannot be treated as a single, unified category. The fundamental distinction does not concern mere variations in the use of one linguistic structure, but rather entirely distinct types, each characterized by its own syntactic and semantic properties. The most robust and empirically supported classification distinguishes between *propositional* (or *indicative*),[1] *counterfactual*, and *illocutionary* conditionals, each of which can be further divided into subtypes (see Dik 1990 for a more in-depth discussion).

The *propositional conditional* centers on the truth relation between two propositions (A and B) within a hypothetical context. Its analysis is rooted in a long philosophical tradition that treats the particle "if" as a truth-functional logical operator, on a par with conjunction ("and") or disjunction ("or") (see Edgington 1995). Within the framework of analytic philosophy, this perspective led to the study of conditionals through the use of truth tables (Russell and Whitehead 1910), with the aim of constructing a systematic theory capable of deriving the truth value of any conditional sentence from the truth values of its components and their possible

**1** In the literature, the term *indicative conditional* is commonly used to describe constructions that express a truth or validity relationship between two states of affairs. However, this label can be misleading, since *illocutionary conditionals* may also appear in the indicative mood. To avoid ambiguity, I adopt Dik's (1990) term *propositional conditional*, which more accurately captures the intended function of this type of construction.

combinations. However, this approach has faced significant challenges, as the actual use of propositional conditionals in natural language often diverges markedly from the predictions of formal logic. To address the paradoxes generated by the classical-analytic framework, several authors have proposed modifications and refinements to the traditional model. Grice (1989), for example, highlighted that a conditional must be not only logically valid but also conversationally appropriate. Jackson (1987), in turn, introduced the notion of *robustness*, arguing that a conditional remains valid even in the face of new contextual information. Despite these different theoretical formulations, a central assumption remains consistent across accounts of propositional conditionals: they constitute, whether in more intuitive or formalized terms, a means by which speakers evaluate the truth or validity of one proposition in hypothetical relation to another.

The *counterfactual conditional*, by contrast, refers to scenarios that are alternative to the real world, in which the premise is assumed to be false. The semantics of possible worlds, introduced by Kripke (1963) and further developed by Stalnaker (1968) and Lewis (1979) during the 1960s and 1970s, has proven to be the most suitable framework for examining the functioning of this type of conditional. The central idea is that counterfactual conditionals do not merely describe the combination of two truth values (A, B), but rather refer to possible worlds that are alternatives to our own. In evaluating such conditionals, we do not consider all worlds in which A is true, but only those that are as similar as possible to the actual world – except for the minimal difference required to make A true.

In an illocutionary conditional, the focus is on communicative acts. This type of conditional was originally introduced by Austin (1979). Here, two-valued logics are of only marginal relevance: speakers using such structures are not concerned with truth, but with establishing a condition under which they commit to performing a given speech act. Examples of illocutionary conditionals include:

(1) If you're thirsty, help yourself to a drink from the fridge.

(2) If it rains, bring me the umbrella.

(3) If you die, I'll take care of your children.

The examples above correspond respectively to an offer, an order, and a promise – each placed under a specific condition. The decision to impose a condition on a speech act may depend on a wide range of discourse or relational factors. For instance, a speaker may formulate an offer conditionally to avoid placing direct pressure on the interlocutor and to preserve their sense of autonomy and non-imposition (Brown and Levinson 1987). Regardless of the motivation, when speakers explicitly state a condition A, they do so to regulate the communicative force or the full realization of a speech act B. If the preparatory condition is not met, for any

reason, the corresponding speech act cannot be considered accomplished or relevant in the discursive context. Thus, for example, if in the case of (2) it is not raining and you do not bring me the umbrella, I cannot accuse you of having disobeyed or ignored my order. Similarly, if in the case of (1) you are not thirsty – or behave in a way that clearly indicates as much – I cannot accuse you of having refused or disregarded my offer.

As mentioned earlier, the distinction among different types of conditionals is supported by multiple lines of evidence – pragmatic-discursive, syntactic, and semantic.

From a pragmatic-discursive perspective, the motivation that leads a speaker to use an *illocutionary conditional* is fundamentally different from that underlying the use of a *propositional* or *counterfactual* conditional. In the former case, the goal is neither to establish a truth relation between antecedent and consequent, nor to imagine what would have happened in a possible world similar to our own if a condition that is false in reality had been met. Rather, a speaker employing an illocutionary conditional formulates a *hypothetical commitment* concerning a given communicative act, with the intention of establishing an expectation of behavior or outcome.

From a syntactic perspective, many of the differences among the three types of conditionals have been highlighted by Dik (1990) and Iatridou (1991). One clear distinction between counterfactual and illocutionary conditionals concerns the use of verbal moods and tenses. Illocutionary conditionals do not allow forms that express unreality – such as the past subjunctive in the antecedent, or constructions with *modal* + *bare infinitive* or *modal* + *perfect infinitive* in the consequent. An utterance like *"If you had been thirsty, you could have taken a drink from the fridge"* does not convey a conditional offer; at most, it implies that the speaker forgot to make such an offer. This is because, for the speech act to be applicable, the premise must be interpreted as *potentially valid*, rather than as a condition already excluded by the facts of reality.

The syntactic differences between illocutionary and propositional conditionals are more subtle. On the surface, both types frequently employ the indicative mood; yet, upon closer examination, they are governed by distinct structural principles. One key distinction identified by Dik (1990) concerns the position of the protasis (the *if*-clause), which may be either *clause-integrated* or *extra-clausal*.[2] In the first case – typical of propositional conditionals – the protasis functions as an ordinary subordinate clause, showing syntactic dependency on the main verb. In the second case – characteristic of illocutionary conditionals – the protasis is not syntactically

2 In both cases, the protasis can appear either before the apodosis (P1 or initial position) or after it (P2 or final position).

embedded within the main clause. Instead, it operates as a *discourse adjunct*: an independent unit that helps organize the discourse, similar to expressions like *"As for…"*. This second configuration is marked in English by a distinct intonational contour, typically represented in writing by a comma that separates the two parts of the conditional.[3] The placement of the protasis in an extra-clausal position underscores its role as an *illocutionary satellite* (Dik 1990: 255) – a pragmatic and situational frame that sets the conditions under which the illocutionary act is to be interpreted.

From a semantic perspective, further evidence supports the separation among illocutionary, propositional, and counterfactual conditionals. Let us begin with the first two. In a propositional conditional, denying the protasis challenges the truth or validity link between the two components (the *protasis* and the *apodosis*). This kind of denial does not produce any discursive oddity. For instance, in the utterance *"If it rains George takes the dog out,"* one can reject the premise and propose *"If it doesn't rain George takes the dog out."* Each counterproposal concerning the protasis of a propositional conditional can be justified by reasons that speakers are willing to defend on the basis of their own beliefs (even if these beliefs turn out to be mistaken). Here, the disagreement concerns a single assertive unit – whether one event implies or affects another. By contrast, in an illocutionary conditional, denying the premise undermines a preparatory condition of the speech act itself, leading to a pragmatic or discursive anomaly. As widely discussed in the pragmatics literature (Austin 1962; Searle 1969), every illocutionary act presupposes a set of contextual and epistemic prerequisites – commonly referred to as *felicity conditions* – that must be satisfied for the act to be appropriate and meaningful. These felicity conditions are typically presupposed and remain implicit within the common ground. In illocutionary conditionals, however, one such condition – usually a particularly salient or contextually relevant one – is brought to the foreground and explicitly formulated as part of the utterance itself. Once this contextualization has taken place, it can no longer be disputed or questioned. Consider, for instance, *"If you're thirsty, help yourself to a drink from the fridge."* Negating the premise yields *"If you aren't thirsty, help yourself to a drink from the fridge,"* which sounds incoherent. This incoherence arises because it is self-defeating to introduce a premise that establishes the felicity condition of a speech act and then proceed to challenge or reject it. Once a premise has been introduced and accepted, it must remain *potentially valid* within the common ground

**3** In languages such as Dutch, the distinction between the two possible positions of the protasis is particularly evident due to the rule requiring the finite verb to occupy the second position. When the protasis is clause-integrated, it occupies the first position in the sentence, immediately followed by the verb. When it is extra-clausal, the first position must still be filled, a role often assumed by *dan* ('then'), which not only preserves the syntactic order but also signals the external function of the protasis (Dik 1990: 254).

for the utterance to retain coherence. The protasis's resistance to denial thus provides a useful semantic-pragmatic criterion for identifying illocutionary conditionals.

Interpretative distortions become even more evident when one attempts to apply the classical theory of the material conditional, developed within analytic philosophy, to an illocutionary conditional. Consider the example of a command (adapted from Edgington 1995: 288):

(4) If you write the article, send it to the journal.

If we treat (4) as a material conditional, the corresponding logical form would be:

(5) Either you do not write the article, or you send it to the journal.

From a logical point of view, this paraphrase is flawless, since it reflects the equivalence between $A \supset B$ and $\neg A \vee B$ (the two formulas share the same truth conditions). However, it is clear that it does not capture the speaker's communicative intentions. The speaker who utters (4) commits to issuing a conditional directive ("send the article if you write it"), but not to asserting (5), which is not only awkward from a grammatical perspective but also inconsistent with the intended speech act. In other words, a speaker who genuinely commits to (4) would be unlikely to endorse (5), despite their logical and truth-functional equivalence. This discrepancy demonstrates that, although formally correct, material logic cannot adequately model the semantic functioning of illocutionary conditionals, which operate on a different level – that of speech acts and their appropriateness.

The situation does not change significantly when possible-world semantics is applied to illocutionary conditionals. This framework, in fact, was designed to account for assertions and thus explains only the truth-conditional relationship between the two clauses of a conditional. The notion of verifiability it relies on cannot be straightforwardly extended to the domain of speech acts. When we attempt to project this model onto the illocutionary level, further interpretive distortions emerge. To illustrate this point, let us consider an example. In Stalnaker's (1968) framework, a conditional of the form "If A, then B" is evaluated by looking at the closest (or "most similar") possible world to the actual one in which A is true: the conditional is considered true if B also holds in that selected world. Now consider a conditional command such as "If it rains, take the umbrella." Following Stalnaker's model strictly, we would evaluate this command as follows: "In the closest possible worlds where A is true (i.e., where it rains), B must also be true (the person takes the umbrella)." If, in those nearest A-worlds, the agent does not take the umbrella, then – according to this reading – the agent has disobeyed the command. Let us now imagine the actual situation where (i) it does not rain, and (ii) the agent is distracted or forgets the instruction. In the closest possible worlds where it rains, the agent still

fails to take the umbrella (because he has forgotten or were never informed). According to this "Stalnakerian" reading, the agent has already disobeyed – even though, in the real world, it neither rained nor was there any occasion to obey. Intuitively, this interpretation is clearly mistaken: it makes no sense to judge as "disobedience" something that has had no chance to occur in the actual world.

These considerations confirm that illocutionary conditionals require a distinct analytical treatment. In the following pages, I will examine some of their defining features, showing that – both in ordinary discourse and in pathological contexts – speakers employ specific communicative strategies that underlie their use.

## 3 Illocutionary conditionals, pragmatics, and communicative strategies

A comprehensive account of illocutionary conditionals requires a thorough examination of their pragmatic dimension. Focusing on this aspect is essential, as the mere production of an *if*-clause + illocutionary-act structure does not in itself demonstrate speakers' competence in managing such constructions. Unlike propositional and counterfactual conditionals, illocutionary conditionals exhibit greater structural variability, as they can be realized through several grammatical configurations. In particular, in this type of conditional, one of the two clauses may be omitted and deriving its discursive salience not from linguistic expression but from the surrounding context. This phenomenon arises from the fact that, as noted by Dik (1990), the premise of an illocutionary conditional is not syntactically integrated into the main clause but functions as an external satellite that modulates the force, scope, or applicability of the speech act. Consequently, it does not contribute to the truth conditions of the proposition, since it does not form part of a single assertive unit. It is precisely this property of illocutionary conditionals that allows, in many instances, the omission of one clause without resulting in an inconclusive discourse. The ability to vary the order of elements or to omit one part provides significant expressive flexibility. This flexibility, along with the possibility of inferentially retrieving a salient element of the conditional from context, is not *left to chance,* but it is strategically employed to achieve specific discursive strategies.

The relationship between grammar and pragmatics is well established in the literature and is clearly articulated in Levinson (2000). According to Levinson, the possibility of expressing the same propositional content or speech act through different linguistic forms generates a systematic network of correspondences between grammatical structure, semantic interpretation, and default pragmatic

effects. In other words, when a speaker has the option of choosing one form over another, that choice triggers a set of generalized implicatures that guide the interpretation of the utterance. When applied and adapted to illocutionary conditionals, this framework suggests that variation in form – such as the omission of one of the two clauses or the use of non-canonical markers – should not be seen as a sign of grammatical incompleteness. Rather, it represents a marked pragmatic choice that produces predictable interpretive effects. In one of her studies, Traugott (1985) acknowledges the existence of significant connections between the differential marking of conditional components and the adoption of specific discourse strategies. However, she deliberately refrains from pursuing this issue in depth, noting that it would require a much broader and more systematic investigation. As she puts it:

> [i]t is possible that where the apodosis is marked by preference over the protasis, this may be a function of discourse strategies that favor marking the end-point, or final comment in a unit of text. […] My comments here on strategies for marking either the protasis or the apodosis are tentative at this point. But there is some evidence for shifts in strategies from marking end-points to strategies marking beginning-points in the development of the forms for many conjunctions, including conditional conjunctions. (Traugott 1985: 300–301).

In the following sections, I do not aim to provide a systematic or exhaustive account of all the discourse strategies that may arise from the omission of certain components of the conditional structure. Rather, my aim is to identify a set of specific pragmatic functions associated with marked or non-canonical uses of conditionals, showing how these uses remain consistent with the structural possibilities permitted by grammar. Depending on discourse dynamics and communicative context, speakers can use several strategies to bring different parts of a conditional into focus. Clarifying how these strategies work is a key step toward a systematic understanding of the pragmatics of illocutionary conditionals.

## 3.1 Omitting the consequence as a mitigation strategy

The first type of omission involves suppressing the clause that explicitly expresses the illocutionary act itself. In such cases, speakers articulate only the preparatory condition of the act and leave it to the context to infer the communicative content that would follow – or that becomes relevant – should the condition be fulfilled. Typical examples include:

(6) Maybe, if you use that stool…

(7) If you change your mind…

Consider the following scene. Miranda is visiting her friend Federica. Federica is trying to reach a book on a very high shelf, but despite her efforts, she cannot get to it. Miranda then points to a nearby stool and utters (6). Although the sentence is formally incomplete, given the communicative and perceptual context, Federica can easily infer the intended meaning—something like *"Maybe, if you use that stool, you'll be able to reach the book"* or *"… you can reach the shelf."*

A similar reasoning applies to (7). Imagine a bank consultant who has just offered a client a loan proposal. The client declines. Before leaving, the consultant places his business card on the table and says (7). The inferred meaning is something like *"if you change your mind, let me know"* or *"… call me at the number on the card."* The consultant is not suggesting that the client call him under any circumstances, but only on the condition that the client reconsiders the offer. This condition is foregrounded and grammatically marked by the particle *if*.

This construction serves to highlight the premise – that is, the condition – which becomes the true focal point of the utterance. Pragmatically, its main effect is to assign greater communicative force to the protasis: what matters is not so much the outcome, which is left implicit or taken for granted, but rather the fulfillment of the condition, which drives the progression of the action and unlocks what follows. At the same time, this strategy reinforces the utterance's allusive or indirect nature, softening the impact of directives, warnings, or offers that, if expressed explicitly, might sound overly direct or socially awkward.

As in the canonical form of illocutionary conditionals, the clause introduced by *if* does not serve to establish a truth relation between two propositions. Rather, it creates a discursive frame that guides the speaker's communicative intentions. The missing portion of the utterance is pragmatically reconstructed by the interlocutor based on contextual cues and what is most relevant or appropriate to the situation at hand – such as a pointing gesture, the act of leaving a business card, or other salient elements within the scene. Contemporary research provides multiple perspectives on the interface between verbal and nonverbal communication, framing language as a fundamentally multimodal system (see Graci 2024; Giorgi 2023; Giorgi and Dal Farra 2019).

These cases can be described as *elliptical illocutionary conditionals*, where the term *elliptical* is understood broadly: it refers to instances in which the speaker does not fully articulate the thought linguistically, but leaves much of it to be reconstructed from the context. The completion of the message thus relies on a combination of grammatical and contextual resources. On the one hand, the particle *if* signals the establishment of a conditional premise, marking its syntactic and discursive role. On the other, it is the situational or conversational context that enables the interlocutor to infer the consequent. A satisfactory explanation of this interpretive process is possible only within the framework of Stainton's (2004: 280)

critique of the AIS (*Algorithm Is Sufficient*) model. According to his view, language cannot be equated with a purely compositional and deterministic algorithm, where syntactic and semantic mechanisms alone would suffice to generate the full meaning of every utterance. Rather, the output provided by grammar is often partial and underspecified. In elliptical conditionals, for example, the premise evokes the prototypical sentential schema *if A, B.* Once an utterance begins with *if*, the listener anticipates a following clause that completes the conditional construction. However, deriving clause B requires an additional, non-deterministic inferential process – one that enriches the partial linguistic schema with general knowledge and contextual information. Within this framework, understanding such a conditional relies on two complementary systems: (i) a specialized linguistic module that decodes the signal and yields partial semantic representations, and (ii) a central, non-linguistic system that completes those representations through contextual inference.

Precisely because of this dual process, elliptical conditionals can function effectively only when the surrounding context makes the implied consequence both recognizable and pragmatically plausible. In the absence of such a context – one that provides immediate and salient cues – the utterance remains defective and incomplete, as the listener lacks the information needed to reconstruct the intended consequent.

## 3.2 Omitting the premise as a strategy of dramatic emphasis

The second type of omission is, in some respects, more difficult to capture. It involves the explicit expression of a speech act whose communicative relevance depends on a specific contextual condition, one that is more salient than others and can only be inferred from the situation. Unlike the previous cases, where the grammatical marker *if* triggers the reconstruction of a prototypical conditional schema – whose missing component is pragmatically inferred – here the recovery of the conditional premise depends primarily on pragmatic mechanisms grounded in discursive reasoning. These mechanisms operate to preserve the interlocutor's rationality and to avoid conversational anomalies (see Capone 2006, 2008). Let us consider the following examples:

(8) You better use this.

(9) You'll break your leg.

Suppose the weather is highly uncertain: the sky is dark, and it looks as though it could start raining at any moment, though it isn't raining yet. My son is about to leave the house. I stop him, hand him an umbrella, and say (8). A literal

reading – interpreting the advice as a general recommendation to use an umbrella in all circumstances – would clearly be inappropriate or irrelevant. For the utterance to make sense, there must be a motivating condition. It is obvious that the possibility of rain constitutes the underlying premise that governs the speech act being performed. The illocutionary conditional nature of (8) becomes evident when we consider what happens if this implicit premise fails to obtain: just as with other illocutionary conditionals, the failure of the condition nullifies the act itself. If it does not rain and my son chooses not to use the umbrella, I would have no grounds to reproach him for ignoring my advice.

Now consider a different situation: John is performing skateboard tricks. As he slides down the handrail of a public staircase, he loses his balance and falls. His friend Jim, after checking that he is not seriously hurt, gives him the warning (9) in a concerned tone. As in the previous case, the warning is tightly bound to the specific activity – performing dangerous skateboard stunts. For the utterance to have the intended effect, an implicit premise must be inferred, something like *"if you keep doing reckless things"* or *"if you continue skateboarding like that."* Without such an inferred condition, the statement would be reduced to an unanchored, generic warning about an arbitrary future event.

One possible objection to these cases might be the following: if we accept this line of reasoning, then every speech act could, in principle, be implicitly conditional. Even a seemingly straightforward promise such as *"I'll take you to the park tomorrow"* is, in fact, structured around a potentially infinite set of underlying conditions – *"if I'm feeling well," "if there's no traffic," "if the car works," "if there isn't an earthquake," "if my grandmother doesn't die,"* and so on. Each of these contingencies could, by itself, invalidate the act to the extent that, should it occur, no reasonable person would consider my promise broken. This observation is certainly valid. However, these are *accidental conditions* – unforeseeable events that merely suspend the act. When I speak of an *implicit premise*, by contrast, I refer to a *contextually salient condition*, one that stands out against the background of other possible contingencies and directly guides interpretation. In the umbrella example, we are not concerned with an indefinite constellation of potential mishaps; what dominates the communicative scene is the concrete possibility of rain. Two key factors come into play here: first, the semantic prominence of the word *umbrella*, shaped by its usage, frequency, familiarity, and habitual association with rain (Giora 2003); and second, the situational salience (Kecskes 2013), determined by the uncertain weather conditions at that specific moment. It is the interaction of these two forms of salience that activates and foregrounds this particular conditional reading in the speaker's and hearer's minds, making it relevant over all other conceivable contingencies.

This point becomes even clearer in the case of the skateboarding example. Here, the situational salience of the scene, together with the habitual use of expressions

linked to risky actions, triggers a contextually relevant scenario that stands out above all others (see also Fillmore 1982; Fillmore and Baker 2009 on *Frame Semantics*). Jim is not warning John that he might break his leg for any random, unpredictable reason; he is warning him that this could happen as a potential consequence of that specific reckless behavior. The conditional nuance underlying the warning is part of Jim's communicative intention and has a clear *psychological reality*. Suppose John follows Jim's advice and actually stops performing skateboard tricks, but later breaks his leg in a completely unrelated accident – say, because a tree branch falls on him. Technically, Jim's prediction comes true, but no one would interpret the event as the result of John's failure to heed the warning. Likewise, Jim himself – being aware of what happened – could not legitimately say *"I told you!"* or *"You should have listened to me!"*. The reason is that a warning is designed to discourage a specific behavior in a specific context. The communicative force of the utterance arises precisely from this pragmatic-discursive link between a salient, contextually inferred condition and the undesirable outcome being warned against. This salient condition exhibits a form of resistance to cancellation (as observed in other illocutionary conditionals): once established by context, its removal or denial results in a discourse anomaly.[4]

The communicative strategy underlying this type of conditional hinges on the prominence of the speech act itself. In the first example, the speaker takes for granted the conditions that justify the use of an umbrella and focuses instead on its practical relevance for the interlocutor: what is highlighted is not so much the possibility of rain, but the need to prevent undesirable consequences. In the case of the warning, by omitting the premise and emphasizing only the consequence, the speaker gives the utterance a stronger dramatic intensity, underscoring the danger linked to reckless behavior. The overall effect is a message that feels more direct, urgent, and difficult to ignore, as the communicative focus shifts from the antecedent to its potential outcome.

## 3.3 Omitting grammatical markers as a strategy of persuasion

The final type of omission concerns the absence of the grammatical marker *if*, which typically signals the conditional relationship between the premise and the speech act. In such cases, we find two juxtaposed clauses that seem independent at the surface level but are connected interpretively through a conditional relationship. That is, the first clause functions as the premise, while the second expresses the

**4** See Macagno and Graci (2024); Capone (2009), and Burton-Roberts (2006) for a more detailed discussion of the cancellability of pragmatic inferences.

consequence to be enacted if the condition holds. Consider the following examples (case (11) comes from the corpus examined in this study and was produced by a clinician):

(10) You want to sleep better… avoid screens before bedtime.

(11) You want to find the groups you're a part of… go to your homepage.

To account for these cases, it is useful to say something more about the role of grammatical markers in conditional constructions. In English, the protasis of a conditional is regularly introduced by *if*, whereas the apodosis does not necessarily require *then*. Unlike *if*, *then* is optional in most cases and, when it does appear, its role extends beyond mere grammar – it carries pragmatic and discourse-level implications (see Iatridou 1993). One could say that English exhibits an implicational hierarchy: if the apodosis is marked with *then*, the protasis must also be marked with *if*; however, the reverse does not hold. A similar hierarchy seems to exist in several other languages, where marking the consequence is permissible only if the condition is explicitly marked as well. However, as Traugott (1985) points out, this is neither a universal feature of English nor a cross-linguistic universal. Some languages, such as Chinese, tend not to mark either the protasis or the apodosis (Li and Thompson 1981), while others, such as Bengali and Tok Pisin, more frequently – and sometimes obligatorily – mark the apodosis instead (Sankoff and Laberge 1980). Mühlhäusler et al. (2003: 24–25) show that in Tok Pisin, conditional sentences can be formed in two ways: either with the conjunction *sapos* (corresponding to *if*) or with no grammatical marker in the protasis and only one in the apodosis (e.g., *orait*). According to the authors, the latter construction occurs when the conditional relationship is already made clear by context. The examples they provide are as follows:

(12) Yu gat mani *orait* yu ken i kam (you have money, you can come).

(13) Mipela i laik kamap olsem ol masta *orait* mipela i mas marimari long ol meri bilong mipela (we want to become like Europeans, we have to treat our wives well).

These examples exemplify the functioning of illocutionary conditionals: the initial clause establishes a condition that must be satisfied for the speech act expressed in the following clause (an invitation or directive) to take effect. Interestingly, both (12) and (13) remain fully acceptable even when *sapos* is included, indicating that this conjunction is optional in Tok Pisin and that its omission has little or no significant impact on the overall communicative function of the construction.

Returning to English, Traugott (1985) points out that marking strategies can vary both diachronically and discursively, depending on the context in which speakers

operate. Historically, for instance, a connective may originate as an anaphoric adverb, used to refer back to a previous segment of discourse, and later evolve into a cataphoric conjunction that introduces the following clause. On the discursive level, the presence or absence of grammatical markers may serve communicative strategies that do not necessarily align with the principles of formal logic (as discussed in the previous sections).

The use of forms such as (10) and (11) reflect another instance of this phenomenon: the omission of the conditional marker *if* seems to function as a way to engage the interlocutor more directly in the communicative act. Rather than formulating the premise indirectly (*If you want to*…), the speaker shortens the relational and social distance, framing the scenario as one already shared with the listener (*You want to*…). This mechanism makes the utterance more immediate and conversational, removing the formal barrier of conditional marking and transforming the instruction into a suggestion that appears as a natural extension of the addressee's own desire. From a pragmatic perspective, this strategy allows the speaker to produce a message that is more direct, persuasive, and attuned to a need or goal *already* recognized by both participants in the interaction. This strategy is reinforced by two essential features: (i) *positional rigidity* and (ii) *intonational profiling*.

(i) Unlike more common illocutionary conditionals, the two clauses in this construction are not freely interchangeable without altering the overall meaning of the utterance.
(ii) The second distinctive feature concerns intonation: the first clause typically carries a *rising intonation*, followed by a *falling intonation* in the second clause. This prosodic contrast highlights their distinct communicative roles.

When combined, these two features produce a structure in which the first clause functions as a prominent circumstance, drawing the interlocutor's attention to a problem, goal, or situation of personal relevance; the second clause, by contrast, provides the resolutive response – both at the level of discourse (it offers a solution) and prosody (the falling intonation marks closure). The examples analyzed reveal this dynamic. In (11), the instruction *go to your homepage* only makes sense if we assume that the interlocutor is *already* struggling to locate his group and is motivated to resolve the issue; without this contextual premise, the directive would lack purpose. Similarly, in (10), the advice *avoid screens before bedtime* is meaningful only against the background of an existing sleep problem – a condition presented as self-evident and made explicit through direct address. In both cases, removing the underlying circumstance would deprive the utterance of its communicative relevance and pragmatic force.

## 4 Illocutionary conditionals in aphasia

From the evidence gathered so far, the illocutionary conditional emerges as a broad and complex category, characterized by distinctive syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties, and employed flexibly for a range of communicative purposes. While research indicates that individuals with aphasia can produce and comprehend propositional conditionals, their ability to understand and use illocutionary conditionals has yet to be systematically investigated. As a result, there is a lack of empirical data showing the extent to which these structures are mastered, or enabling a comparison between the use of propositional and illocutionary conditionals. Although no studies have directly addressed this issue, the competence of aphasic speakers can be preliminarily investigated through corpus analysis. This is the approach adopted in the second part of the present study. The corpus used, *AphasiaTalkBank* (MacWhinney et al. 2011), contains several noteworthy instances of illocutionary conditionals, suggesting that individuals with aphasia retain a natural tendency to employ such forms in specific discursive contexts. Some illustrative examples are presented below:

(14) Fire extinguish… **You use them if you can fix it**.

(15) I think it's a nice voice… I guess… **If you're into that sort of things**… **yeah it's a good song**… but I didn't really care for it song.

(16) I don't know as far as numbers… mmh… but it was a while… **Please correct me, if I'm wrong**.

In (14), the speaker suggests using the fire extinguishers only if they are actually needed to solve a problem, implying that otherwise their use would be unnecessary. In (15), the speaker offers an evaluation of a contemporary song: it is enjoyable, but only if the listener happens to like that particular genre of music. Finally, in (16), the speaker invites the interlocutors to correct him, but only in the event that he makes a mistake.

However, the presence of such examples in the corpus does not by itself demonstrate full competence among aphasic speakers in managing illocutionary conditionals or their formal variation across contexts. As previously discussed, these constructions display considerable expressive flexibility, shaped by both grammatical variation and contextual dependence. Often, the link between the premise and the associated illocutionary act must be inferred, allowing speakers to vary how much information is made explicit or left to context. This flexibility gives rise to several communicative effects – ranging from mitigation to persuasion and emphasis. Understanding aphasic speakers' competence therefore requires

considering these pragmatic dynamics, not just their use of canonical forms. For this reason, special attention in the corpus analysis has been devoted to non-canonical conditionals – those diverging from examples (14), (15), and (16).

Although the corpus contains only a few instances of non-canonical conditionals, the few examples that do occur closely replicate the discourse strategies typically found in neurotypical speakers. The first strategy to be discussed involves the omission of the consequent clause. As in ordinary language use, this construction serves a politeness function – that is, it mitigates the illocutionary force of orders, requests, or directives, making them more socially acceptable and less imposing. Consider the following exchange:

(17) APH: you've don't know got how a postcard skills… you… I can't… can't actually do… or **if you want to keep practicing**… or I mean any flower you're interested…

In this example, speakers with aphasia are engaged in a creative activity proposed by RD (a pseudonym). The exercise involves filling a plate with water and immersing candies in it: as their colored coating dissolves, it produces a range of hues. In the next phase, participants are asked to use a sheet of paper and a brush to try painting with the resulting colors. The individual in example (17) states that she is unable to produce a "beautiful" drawing and suggests that the assistant should try instead. As is evident, the utterance lacks a fully formed syntactic structure. Consistent with the clinical profile of aphasia, the speech is fragmentary and often left incomplete. Among these fragments appears an attempt to construct a conditional clause that remains unfinished: the speaker successfully formulates the premise and introduces it with *if*, but fails to articulate the consequent.

The syntactic deficit thus results in a fragmented discourse whose interpretation depends largely on contextual cues. Several elements clarify this process: *postcard skills* refers to the manual task at hand; *I can't… can't actually do* connects to the previous fragment, signaling difficulty in carrying out the activity; *if you want to keep practicing* introduces a conditional suggestion aimed at encouraging the clinician to continue; and *any flower you're interested…* implicitly invites the choice of a subject – such as a flower – to paint. The overall meaning can be paraphrased as: *"I'm not able to do this drawing, but if you want to keep practicing, you can go on, maybe choosing a flower you like."* From a discourse perspective, the speaker's strategy closely parallels that observed in neurotypical interactions: the premise functions as the communicative core, guiding the interlocutor's attention toward an implicit (and partly self-evident) consequence – continuing the activity. In this way, the invitation is framed conditionally, granting the other participant the option to decline without disrupting the interpersonal balance – thus offering a form of social "way out."

Something similar applies to the following exchange:

(18) APH: ate in each one… so **if you wanna pass them out**…
CLIN: sure… you've got a lot of stuff…
APH: yeah that's right… all this stuff

In this activity, clinicians asked participants in a group session to bring homemade food to share. During the discussion, one participant took several containers out of a bag and produced the first line of (18). Among the fragments, we find the incomplete expression *"so if you wanna pass them out…"* As in the previous example, the conditional clause is clearly introduced by *if*, but the consequent is left unspoken. Despite the fragmentary form, the communicative intention is clear: the speaker is inviting someone to distribute the food. This illustrates the typical functioning of elliptical conditionals. The grammatical marker *if* signals a prototypical conditional schema – "if A, B" – but the second part (B) must be pragmatically inferred from the situational context. In this case, the elliptical form is not simply an incomplete syntactic structure; it is also a pragmatic strategy. It allows the speaker to make the request in a more indirect and polite manner, shifting the weight of the action onto the listener's willingness: "only if you want to" or "if you feel like it." As a result, the request becomes softer and less imposing. The subsequent exchange confirms the success of this strategy: the clinician responds cooperatively and affirmatively, signaling both an understanding of the implied request and a willingness to comply.

With regard to conditionals whose premise must be inferred from the most immediately salient context, these forms are typically employed to introduce or heighten a dramatic effect within the discourse. Consider the following example:

(19) APH: yeah it's good.… But it's not good for you… **you get a heart attack**
CLIN: it's like straight butter.
APH: yes, pretty much

The context here is a discussion about a very rich, unhealthy sauce that is nevertheless appreciated for its taste. Within this exchange, the speaker with aphasia issues a warning by presenting a scenario in which the interlocutor "has a heart attack." Taken in isolation, without contextual support, the utterance might seem to predict that a heart attack will occur at some unspecified time – almost as if it were an inevitable event. However, the intended meaning becomes clear when considered within the interactive frame of the conversation, which evokes a specific scenario: the overconsumption of the sauce. This frame becomes contextually salient and constrains the interpretation of the warning. The intended sense is something like, *"If you eat too much of it, you might have a heart attack."* The clinician's response confirms this conditional interpretation, acknowledging both the pragmatic meaning of the utterance and the message the speaker sought to convey. The omission of

the protasis is not random; rather, it reflects the same discursive dynamics typical of this subtype of illocutionary conditional. By placing the communicative focus directly on the dramatic event, the speaker enhances the salience, immediacy, and rhetorical force of the warning.

A similar phenomenon can be observed in the following case. This time, the setting is another group discussion – with different participants – focused on the quality of food served in fast-food restaurants:

(20) APH 1: but oh a small French fry has one, two… two hundred and thirty… Calories…
APH 2: a small?
APH 1: A small yeah… a large… **you get the five hundred**

During the discussion, one of the participants draws attention to the high calorie content of French fries. After an initial comparison with the "small" portion, the introduction of the term *large* signals the opening of a contrastive scenario. The word *large* not only activates and frames this new context but also serves as the pivotal cue for the warning that follows. If *large* were not interpreted as a conditional premise, the utterance would appear incoherent: there would be no reason to warn the interlocutor about ingesting five hundred calories. Coherence is restored only if *large* is taken as the necessary condition that makes the warning intelligible – that is, *if you order a large portion, you get five hundred calories*. Without this implicit premise, the speaker's pragmatic commitment to performing a warning act would collapse. The use of the second person singular *you* in the final part of the utterance is also significant: the speaker is not merely stating that larger portions contain more calories than smaller ones, but emphasizing that anyone choosing that option personally takes on a substantial caloric burden. This communicative choice follows the same discursive logic as other conditionals with an omitted premise – namely, amplifies the dramatic and immediate impact of the speech act.

More interesting are the attested cases related to the last discourse strategy discussed in the previous section – namely, the omission of grammatical markers. In the corpus examined, this particular conditional construction appears with a relatively higher frequency. Its use, however, proves to be broader and more flexible, extending well beyond the persuasive function of directly engaging the interlocutor or presenting a situation of personal relevance as already established. In some instances, the construction serves to highlight the final portion of the discourse unit; in others, it appears to perform politeness functions similar to those observed in §3.1. Overall, individuals with aphasia show a marked preference for this form, likely because it is easier to produce: the conditional can be divided into two independent segments, which are simpler to articulate separately. From this perspective, the communicative strategy adopted seems to mirror, at least

functionally, the pattern documented in Tok Pisin, where grammatical resources are limited or simplified – though for entirely different, language-specific reasons. The limitations of grammatical resources often prompt speakers to creatively extend linguistic means in order to convey a wider range of meanings that rely heavily on pragmatic inference (see Capone 2019, 2016).

Let us now consider the following example:

(21) CLIN: What do you tell about the costumes?
APH 1: I used to like to dress them up… **you wanna see it**… **I have the picture**… So old… there's my sons… and they're Halloween costumes…
APH 2: wow…
APH 3: okay
APH 1: **you wanna see it**… **they can pass it around**…

In this example, the setting is a group discussion focused on participants' hobbies and leisure preferences. One of the participants responds to the clinician's question about wearing costumes on special occasions. After expressing her enthusiasm for this activity, she proposes showing the group some photos of her Halloween costumes. This proposal occurs twice during the discussion, each time following the same structural pattern that omits grammatical markers. The repetition of this form suggests that the phenomenon is not accidental but reflects a deliberate stylistic preference. This interpretation is further supported by the characteristic intonation pattern accompanying the construction: the rising and suspended tone of the first clause indicates that the subsequent action depends on the listener's potential reaction. In this instance, however, what is brought to the listener's attention is not a problematic situation or an already established point of interest, but rather the listener's willingness to take up the proposal being advanced. The overall meaning that emerges is that of a conditional offer: the second part of the utterance depends on the interlocutor's freedom to accept or reject the proposed action, consistent with the politeness strategies discussed earlier. In doing so, the speaker's contribution creates an open interactive space, where the decision to carry out the action is left to the listener's availability and willingness to engage.

Another case where this form emerges is the following:

(22) APH: And then sometimes they give me a couple dollars… umh like I made twenty dollars yesterday… it's not a_lot… but… but that… that's for gas you know… mhm… mhm… and umh… of course we're… we're… we're starting… because umh… umh… maybe one of those days they'll say… "you know what ?… **you work enough**… **uhm I'll pay you".**

To clarify this case, it is helpful to divide the speaker's account into three stages: (i) first, he describes his current work situation, emphasizing the irregular nature of

his activities and the modest earnings they provide; (ii) he then acknowledges that the amount earned is not high, but still sufficient to cover practical expenses such as the gas needed to get to work; (iii) finally, he projects an alternative scenario into the future, imagining that an employer might eventually recognize his commitment and reward him with more stable and adequate compensation. The coherence of the entire narrative relies on a pragmatically reconstructed line of reasoning: *right now I earn little, but if I work hard I may earn more in the future*. What is particularly interesting in this case is the use of direct speech, which serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, it highlights the speaker's emotional engagement with the situation being described (see Olness et al. 2010 on evaluative devices in aphasia); on the other, it allows for the introduction of a conditional structure that lacks explicit grammatical markers. This construction effectively emphasizes the final portion of the text unit, giving it both a sense of closure and pragmatic salience. The first part of the utterance functions as the starting point of the story from which a positive transformation may emerge. The second part, by contrast, represents the desired resolution, namely the fulfillment of the speaker's wish to be properly compensated for his work. From an illocutionary perspective, this structure corresponds to a conditional promise: being paid fairly is not guaranteed under all circumstances, but only if the prerequisite – *working hard enough* – is met.

Let us now turn to a case involving a group activity centered on cooking. At a certain stage of the activity, participants are instructed to soften rice papers in water, which will then serve as wrappers for various ingredients to be rolled inside. During this process, one of the participants says:

(23) APH: because what you gotta do is roll it right? So it's… it's soft enough… **it's too hard, it'll crack**.

After asking for confirmation about the next step, the speaker continues with two fragmented but meaningfully connected utterances. At first glance, they may appear disjointed, but in fact, they are linked by an implicit conditional relationship, made recognizable by the semantic contrast between *soft enough* and *too hard*. These two poles correspond to alternative scenarios: in one, the rice papers are sufficiently soft, allowing the task to be completed successfully; in the other, the papers are too hard, which leads to their breaking during the process. Interestingly, the speaker does not articulate the positive consequence of the first scenario (which is taken for granted), but rather explicitly highlights and emphasizes the negative outcome of the second. Thus, communicative attention shifts from the expected success of the action (the proper preparation of the roll) to the potential risk of failure (the tearing of the rice paper). Example (23) represents an intermediate case between the common use of conditionals that omit grammatical markers and those that omit the premise while emphasizing undesired effects, as discussed in §3.2. The phrase *"it's too hard, it'll*

*crack…"* reflects a two-part construction similar to examples (10) and (11). However, in this instance, the focus of the communicative act lies on the second clause – the consequence – which the speaker brings to the foreground as the pragmatic core of the illocutionary act of warning.

However, the same structure is also used to emphasize positive outcomes. Consider the following excerpt:

(24) APH: **you'll start smudging**… **it'll all fix itself up**

In (24), the speaker explains to the clinician a painting technique for creating flower petals: according to her explanation, blending the color with one's fingers makes the drawing look more realistic. Once again, the utterance appears on the surface as a sequence of two juxtaposed clauses, but it is in fact underpinned by an implicit conditional relationship that the listener must reconstruct. The first clause introduces the initial action – blending the color with the fingers – while the second clause expresses the positive outcome of that action, encouraging the interlocutor to proceed and guiding him toward the appropriate behavior so that the drawing "fixes itself" or achieves greater harmony. In this sense, the utterance functions as a piece of advice. The general meaning is that the speaker reassures the listener not to worry if the drawing appears to be getting ruined, since continued smudging with the fingers will, paradoxically, correct it.

At other times, the same structure appears when speakers direct a motivational act toward themselves, as in the following case:

(25) APH: I think… I still wanna… wanna… try for my s… working… I said okay I'll keep… I'll… I'll try that a little while to do all that I need for the ummh speech… and I'll keep… I'll keep doing it and… you know… **I keep going**… **it'll be better**.

The aphasic speaker replies to the clinician's inquiry regarding her desire to return to work in the future. The speaker's self-reassurance about her linguistic progress is contingent upon the continuity of the therapeutic sessions. Only through consistent effort can she legitimately hope for a possible return to work. If the condition of maintaining these sessions were no longer met, there would be no concrete reason to sustain such commitment to that goal. There are compelling grounds for interpreting this construction as conditional rather than causal, and for rejecting alternatives such as "as a result of," which would reduce the relation between the two parts to mere sequential causation. The utterance "I keep going… it'll be better" does not report a completed event or a factual outcome; rather, it projects a possible future scenario rooted in the speaker's belief and motivation. It functions as an act of self-encouragement, expressing a hypothetical relation between persistence and improvement. Pragmatically, therefore, its force lies not in asserting an established

causal link, but in articulating conditional hope – the expectation that continuation will bring about a better result. Prosodic evidence reinforces this interpretation: the pause between the two clauses, together with the rising intonation of the first and the falling intonation of the second, mirrors the prosodic contour typically associated with conditional structures. By contrast, causal or sequential statements tend to be delivered in a continuous, rhythmically unified stream, reflecting a single argumentative plane.

What emerges from examples of this kind is the absence of a consistent strategy in the use of conditionals lacking grammatical marking. This observation highlights a substantial difference between how such forms are employed by neurotypical speakers and how they appear in the speech of individuals with aphasia. Among typical speakers, the omission of grammatical markers tends to occur in well-defined communicative contexts, often as a discourse practice associated with informal or highly familiar interactions, where relational distance is minimal. In speakers with aphasia, however, the same construction is used more broadly and flexibly, serving a variety of communicative purposes that may differ considerably depending on the situation. This suggests that, for individuals with aphasia, the omission of grammatical markers cannot be interpreted only as a situational discourse strategy. Rather, it should be understood as a more general communicative resource, reflecting both linguistic economy and adaptation to grammatical limitations. In other words, the systematic elimination of markers allows aphasic speakers to maintain conversational fluency while reducing the cognitive and structural load required to produce complex utterances. The resemblance to Tok Pisin is unlikely to be accidental. In both linguistic systems – the one reduced as a result of impairment and the one structurally simplified – a logic of functional adaptation emerges. The tendency to omit markers is not purposeless; it represents an alternative way of organizing information, one that favors pragmatic transparency and formal economy over full morphosyntactic completeness.

# 5 Conclusions

The analysis presented in this paper demonstrates that illocutionary conditionals form a distinct and autonomous category within the broader domain of conditional constructions. Unlike propositional and counterfactual conditionals, their interpretation cannot be accounted for by truth-functional or possible-world models. Operating on a pragmatic level, the illocutionary conditional defines the circumstances under which a speaker commits to performing a given speech act and delineates the felicity conditions governing its appropriateness. The examination of its syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features provides converging evidence for its independence

from other conditional types. Syntactically, illocutionary conditionals exhibit a remarkable degree of structural flexibility, allowing clause omission, variation in clause order, and even the absence of canonical markers without loss of interpretability. Semantically and pragmatically, they show a characteristic resistance to denial and a strong dependence on contextual salience, anchoring interpretation in the shared common ground rather than in the logical domain of truth evaluation.

Furthermore, the analysis of omission phenomena has shown that non-canonical realizations are not indicators of structural incompleteness but rather deliberate strategies serving distinct communicative functions – such as mitigation, emphasis, and persuasion. These aspects are crucial for both the design and interpretation of clinical studies and should not be overlooked. The exclusive focus on morphosyntactic features in the classification of conditionals has led to the exclusion of illocutionary conditionals from clinical research. In the absence of dedicated experimental investigations, I carried out a corpus-based analysis, which provides an alternative perspective on how aphasic speakers handle this type of conditional.

What emerges from the corpus is that the first two discourse strategies underlying the illocutionary conditional are rarely employed by speakers with aphasia. The few instances that do occur, however, closely follow the same discourse logic found in everyday conversations. In this respect, there are no substantial deviations from the norm, despite the speakers' syntactic difficulties. The third strategy – the omission of grammatical markers – proves to be more flexible and productive. Not only does it appear with greater frequency, but it is also exploited in a wide range of ways, encompassing communicative strategies that can even be diametrically opposed. These observations appear to support the view that it functions as an adaptive communicative resource. From this perspective, the production of illocutionary conditionals without markers mirrors the pattern observed in Tok Pisin speakers: although they are capable of forming conditionals both with and without the marker *sapos*, they tend to favor the latter option. Similarly, speakers with aphasia demonstrate the ability to produce illocutionary conditionals in multiple forms, yet they show a clear preference for grammatically unmarked structures. This tendency appears to stem from cognitive pressures to minimize the processing demands placed on the linguistic system. Due to problems affecting the functional structure, many individuals with aphasia are unable to produce fully grammatical sentences and therefore rely on a principle of economy – omitting grammatical elements and adopting a more direct and essential "emergency language" (Graci 2023).

However, this finding should be considered preliminary and requires further empirical verification. It cannot be ruled out that the limited occurrence of the first two strategies is due to factors independent of the speakers' linguistic competence. A first factor concerns the very nature of certain conditional speech acts. Conditionals lacking either the protasis or the apodosis convey speech acts that are highly

dependent on situational context: they can be realized only under very specific circumstances. As noted in §3.1, understanding such utterances presupposes the presence of a sufficiently clear context – one that allows the omitted part of the conditional to be immediately inferred. In the absence of such contextual cues, these utterances appear defective. Their low frequency in the corpus may therefore reflect the relative rarity with which these contextual-pragmatic conditions arise even in ordinary spontaneous speech.

A second factor relates to the research setting itself. The recordings were conducted in clinical environments, characterized by controlled conditions and partially predetermined conversational topics. It is plausible that, in more natural and everyday contexts – such as domestic interactions – speakers with aphasia might use these structures more spontaneously and frequently. Several studies have shown the positive effects of discussions conducted in naturalistic settings or during spontaneous conversation (e.g., Cummings 2023; Dawson and Marcotte 2017; Olness and Ulatowska 2011, 2017). To assess the potential constraints imposed by the data collection methods, further targeted studies would be needed – aimed both at eliciting illocutionary conditionals in more realistic contexts and at investigating the mechanisms underlying their comprehension.

Beyond the limitations of this study, the presence of attested uses of these structures represents a meaningful finding. Although infrequent, such occurrences demonstrate that speakers with aphasia are able to recognize the communicative situation and to functionally adapt their limited linguistic resources in order to express conditional nuances in their speech acts. This observation is consistent with recent research on the pragmatic abilities of individuals with aphasia, which highlights their capacity to adopt communicatively appropriate behaviors despite linguistic impairments (Graci and Capone 2025; Goodwin 2003, 1995). Furthermore, the results of this analysis highlight the value of integrating more sophisticated and nuanced theoretical models into experimental research, thereby opening new directions for exploring how linguistic and contextual resources shape communication abilities in specific clinical populations.

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