Iffy discourse:
Japanese *moshi* in conditionals and nominal topics

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The Semantics and Pragmatics of Conditional Connectives
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Introduction
What is iffiness?

Some conditional markers require the truth of the antecedent to be open: First observed by Lewis (1975) on English if vs. when; (1) {?If / When} Caesar woke up, he usually had tea. 'the if-variant suggests that there was a question for each day quantified over whether Caesar would wake up or not...This suggests that if is not a mere marker of quantifier restrictions [...]

This property of if is later coined the term 'iffiness' by von Fintel and Iatridou (2002). See Appendix 1 for how German conditional connectives fare with Lewis's example.
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Caesar woke up, he usually had tea. 'the if-variant suggests that there was a question for each day quantified over whether Caesar would wake up or not...This suggests that if is not a mere marker of quantifier restrictions [\ldots] but adds some meaning beyond that.' (von Fintel and Iatridou 2002: 8)

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Japanese moshi as a case study:
1. To have a precise description of the iffiness that moshi associates;
2. To propose an account for it within a theory of conditionals.

The main take-aways:
1. Iffiness may be a more general phenomenon that goes beyond conditionals;
2. For moshi at least, iffiness amounts to unsettledness in the context;
3. For cross-linguistic studies on iffiness, the tests established here could help disentangle the iffiness associated with each conditional marker.
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Why Japanese *moshi*?: Preliminaries
Japanese conditionals

They are obligatorily marked by suffixes on the verbs in the antecedents:

(2) John-ga J-nom {ku-reba come-cond / ki-tara come-cond},
Mary-wa M-top ko-nai come-neg darou.

'mIf John comes, Mary will probably not come.'

They can also be optionally accompanied by moshi, which usually appears at the beginning of antecedents (cf. Yoshida 2006 for clause-medial moshi):

(3) It's not clear whether John will come, but..

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'mIf John comes, Mary will probably not come.'

moshi does not appear in root clauses:

(But see Appendix 3 for moshi in modal subordination)

(4) (*moshi)

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The iffiness of *moshi* in conditionals
Test #1: Lewis’s test

Whether one wakes up tomorrow is normally not questionable, but whether one wakes up in the middle of the night may be. See also Appendix 2 for a similar argument with evidence from unconditionals.
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(5) *(??moshi)*  
J-ga ashita oki-tara, mazu meeru-o chekku suru darou.  

MOSHI  J-NOM  tomorrow  get.up-COND  first  mail-ACC  check  do  MOD  

‘When J. wakes up **tomorrow**, he’ll probably check his e-mail right away.’

(6) *(moshi)*  
J-ga yonaka oki-tara, mazu meeru-o chekku suru darou.  

MOSHI  J-NOM  midnight  get.up-COND  first  mail-ACC  check  do  MOD  

‘When J. wakes up **midnight**, he’ll probably check his e-mail right away.’

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Whether one wakes up *tomorrow* is normally not questionable, but whether one wakes up *in the middle of the night* may be.

See also Appendix 2 for a similar argument with evidence from unconditionals.
Whose iffiness?

An 'iffy moshi analysis seems on the right track so far; but whose iffiness about the antecedent does moshi express?

A natural thought: iffiness = speaker's uncertainty? But moshi doesn't require speaker's uncertainty w.r.t. her private beliefs:

(7) Mary and John bought a lottery ticket together. John checked the result before Mary did, and found that they won one million yen. In hope of making the surprise even more delightful, he asked the following question before telling Mary the result...

(moshi) "If we won one million yen, what will you buy?"

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Antecedents of factual conditionals are presupposed to be true. (Iatridou 1991)

moshi is infelicitous in factual conditionals (Arita 2007):

(8) A: John came.
B: moshi

'If John came, Mary probably also came.'

NB: moshi is odd regardless of whether B is actually convinced of A’s assertion.

moshi improves if B explicitly indicates that she is unwilling to commit to A’s assertion:

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B: *moshi* John-ga HONTOU-ni ki-ta nara, Mary-mo ki-teiru hazu  
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**Description of moshi**’s iffiness in conditionals:

*moshi* requires the antecedent proposition not to be entailed by CS.
The iffiness of *moshi* in topics
Relevance topicality

As for the pastor, the marriage sermon was wonderful.

Japanese topic marker *wa* can mark relevance topics:

(10) [Teacher speaking in front of students in classroom] shinbun-o yomi-tai hito-wa, koko-ni datarimasu. lit. 'People who want to read newspapers, they are here.'

≈ 'If you want to read newspapers, they are here.' (Tateishi 1990: 459 (1))

New observation: *moshi* is allowed in relevance topics:

(12) moshi shinbun-o yomi-tai hito-wa, koko-ni datarimasu. npst ≈ (11) lit. 'People who want to read newspapers, they are here.'
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   a. Teacher: Who wants to read newspapers? Raise your hands if so. 
   b. (All students raised hands.) 
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(14) The Relevance Constraint: A relevance topic must not pick out all salient individuals in the context.
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Relevance topics impose a restriction on the topical entities:

(13)

a. Teacher: Who wants to read newspapers? Raise your hands if so.
b. (All students raised hands.)
c. T: #shinbun-o yomi-tai hito-wa, koko-ni ar-imasu yo.
   newspaper-ACC read-want people-TOP here-DAT be-POL.NPST SFP
   ‘People who want to read newspapers, they are here.’ (cf. Arita 1992)

I formulate it as the following Relevance Constraint:

(14) **The Relevance Constraint:** A relevance topic must not pick out all salient individuals in the context.

Since this constraint is independent of *moshi*, our tests for *moshi*’s iffiness in topics should not be confounded by it.
Iffiness in topics

Intuition: when individuals satisfying the topical property are all identified, moshi is infelicitous:

(15) a. Teacher: Who wants to read newspapers? Raise your hands if so.

b. (Those who want newspapers raised hands, others didn't.)


‘People who want to read newspapers, they are here.’

(16) [Teacher heard from Ann, Bill and Chris that they want to read newspapers, but hasn’t heard from the other students.] moshi shinbun-o yomi-tai hito-wa, koko-ni dat arimasu.

‘People who want to read newspapers, they are here.’

Both sentences are not confounded by the Relevance Constraint, i.e. it is not the case that all students want to read newspapers.

Description of moshi’s iffiness in topics: moshi requires it to remain open as to which individuals satisfy the property expressed by the topic and which individuals don’t.
Iffiness in topics

**Intuition:** when individuals satisfying the topical property are all identified, *moshi* is infelicitous:
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(15)  
   a. Teacher: Who wants to read newspapers? Raise your hands if so.  
   b. *(Those who want newspapers raised hands, others didn’t.)*  
   c. T: *(#moshi)* shinbun-o yomi-tai hito-wa, koko-ni arimasu.  
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**Intuition:** when individuals satisfying the topical property are all identified, *moshi* is infelicitous:

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\begin{align*}
\text{a. Teacher: Who wants to read newspapers? Raise your hands if so.} \\
\text{b. (Those who want newspapers raised hands, others didn’t.)} \\
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\end{align*}

*MOSHI* newspaper-ACC read-want people-TOP here-DAT be.POL.NPST

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[\text{Teacher heard from Ann, Bill and Chris that they want to read newspapers, but hasn’t heard from the other students.}] \\
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Iffiness in topics

**Intuition:** when individuals satisfying the topical property are all identified, *moshi* is infelicitous:

\[(15)\]
\begin{enumerate}
  \item Teacher: Who wants to read newspapers? Raise your hands if so.
  \item (Those who want newspapers raised hands, others didn’t.)
  \item T: (≠*moshi*) shinbun-o yomi-tai hito-wa, koko-ni arimasu.
\end{enumerate}

\[\text{MOSHI}\text{ newspaper-ACC read-want people-TOP here-DAT be.POL.NPST}\]

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\[(16)\]
[Teacher heard from Ann, Bill and Chris that they want to read newspapers, but hasn’t heard from the other students.]

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**Description of moshi’s iffiness in topics:**

*moshi* requires it to remain open as to which individuals satisfy the property expressed by the topic and which individuals don’t.
Analysis
Desiderata and framework for a theory of *moshi*
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We want to

1. capture the *iffy requirements* in conditionals and topics
Desiderata and framework for a theory of *moshi*

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1. capture the **iffy requirements** in conditionals and topics
2. rule out *moshi* in **root clauses**
Desiderata and framework for a theory of *moshi*

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I assume that conditional antecedents and topics are interpreted as a referring speech act (Ebert et al. 2014, building on Searle 1969; Lambrecht 1994; Endriss 2009 a.o.)
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- introduce discourse referents
- draw the listeners’ attention to those referents
- compose with the consequent/comment at the speech act level

(17)

```
REF
   /\  
  ASSERT
     /   \    
If Mary comes John will also come
```
Baseline illustration: topics as speech act

wa-marked phrases denote intensional properties; A speech act operator ref maps intensional properties to definite descriptions of the salient individuals satisfying the properties at wc:

\[ a. \text{YP} \text{XP} \langle s, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle \text{NP} \text{people who want to read newspapers} \]

\[ b. J \text{XP} K c = \lambda w. \lambda x. \text{want-to-read-newspapers}(x)(w) \]

\[ c. J \text{ref} K c = \lambda P \langle s, et \rangle. \sigma(\{x | P(wc)(x)\}), \text{where x is salient in } c(\sigma \text{maps atomic individuals to the maximal element of their closure under sum, Link 1983}) \]

The topic denotes the plural definite description of individuals \( a_1 \oplus a_2 \ldots \oplus a_n \) such that each atom is salient and wants to read newspapers in wc.
Baseline illustration: topics as speech act

(18) a.

```
YP_e
   /\     /
  X   Y
 /\       /
XP_{s,(e,t)}  YP_e
 /\         /
NP   X
   /
people who want to read newspapers
```

wa-marked phrases denote intensional properties; a speech act operator maps intensional properties to definite descriptions of the salient individuals satisfying the properties at wc.

The topic denotes the plural definite description of individuals such that each atom is salient and wants to read newspapers in wc.
wa-marked phrases denote intensional properties;

(18)  a. 

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{NP} \\
\text{people who want to read newspapers} \\
\text{XP}_{e} \\
\text{YP}_{e} \\
\end{array}
\]

b. \[ [\text{XP}]^{c} = \lambda w. \lambda x. \text{want-to-read-newspapers}(x)(w) \]
Baseline illustration: topics as speech act

- **wa-marked phrases** denote intensional properties;
- A speech act operator $\text{REF}$ maps intensional properties to definite descriptions of the salient individuals satisfying the properties at $w_c$

\[(18)\]

a. $\text{YP}_e$

$$
\begin{array}{c}
\text{XP}_{\langle s, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle} \\
\text{NP} \\
\text{people who want to read newspapers}
\end{array}
$$

b. $\llbracket \text{XP} \rrbracket^c = \lambda w. \lambda x. \text{want-to-read-newspapers}(x)(w)$

c. $\llbracket \text{REF} \rrbracket^c = \lambda \langle s, \langle et \rangle, e \rangle . \sigma(\{ x \mid P(w_c)(x) \})$, where $x$ is salient in $c$

($\sigma$ maps atomic individuals to the maximal element of their closure under sum, Link 1983)
Baseline illustration: topics as speech act

- **wa-marked phrases** denote intensional properties;
- A speech act operator \( \text{REF} \) maps intensional properties to definite descriptions of the salient individuals satisfying the properties at \( w_c \)

\[(18)\]  

a. 

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{YP}_e \\
\text{XP}_{\langle s,\langle e,t \rangle \rangle} \\
\text{NP} \\
\text{people who want to read newspapers}
\end{array}
\]

b. \[ [\text{XP}]^c = \lambda w. \lambda x. \text{want-to-read-newspapers}(x)(w) \]

c. \[ [\text{REF}]^c = \lambda P_{\langle s,et \rangle}. \sigma(\{x | P(w_c)(x)\}), \text{where } x \text{ is salient in } c \]

(\( \sigma \) maps atomic individuals to the maximal element of their closure under sum, Link 1983)

The topic denotes the **plural definite description of individuals** \( a_1 \oplus a_2 \ldots \oplus a_n \) such that each atom is salient and wants to read newspapers in \( w_c \)
Baseline illustration: conditional antecedents as speech act

Propositions marked by conditional markers denote sets of worlds; a speech act operator \( \text{ref} \) maps propositions to definite descriptions of worlds in the context set where the propositions is true. (Schlenker 2004; Schein 2001; Bhatt and Pancheva 2006)

(19) a. \( Y_P \langle s, t \rangle X_P \langle \langle s, t \rangle, s \rangle \)

b. \( J_X P K_c = \lambda w. \text{come}(m(w)) \)

c. \( J_{\text{ref}} P K_c = \lambda p \langle s, t \rangle . \sigma(\{v | p(v)\}), \text{where } v \in \text{CS}_c \)

Antecedent denotes the plural definite description of worlds \( w_1 \oplus w_2 ... \oplus w_n \) such that each atom is in \( \text{CS}_c \) and Mary comes there.
Baseline illustration: conditional antecedents as speech act

(19) a.

\[
(\langle s, t \rangle, v) \xrightarrow{\text{VP}} \text{Mary comes} \xrightarrow{\text{-tara}} (\langle s, t \rangle, s)
\]
Baseline illustration: conditional antecedents as speech act

- Propositions marked by conditional markers denote sets of worlds;

(19) a. $\left[ XP \right]^c = \lambda w.\text{come}(m)(w)$
Baseline illustration: conditional antecedents as speech act

- Propositions marked by conditional markers denote sets of worlds;
- A speech act operator $\text{REF}$ maps propositions to definite descriptions of worlds in the context set where the propositions is true.

(Schlenker 2004; Schein 2001; Bhatt and Pancheva 2006)

(19) a. $\text{YP}_s$

$$\begin{array}{c}
\text{XP}_{s,t} \\
\text{VP} \\
\text{Mary comes} \\
\end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{c}
\text{X} \\
\text{-tara} \\
\text{REF}_{\langle s,t, s \rangle} \\
\end{array}$$

b. $[\text{XP}]^c = \lambda w. \text{come}(m)(w)$

c. $[\text{REF}]^c = \lambda p_{s,t}. \sigma(\{v | p(v)\})$, where $v \in CS_c$
Baseline illustration: conditional antecedents as speech act

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(19) a. $\text{YP}_s$

```
XP^{(s,t)}
    /
   /           Y
VP   X
    /
   /     REF^{(s,t),s}
  /
Mary comes -tara
```

b. $\llbracket \text{XP} \rrbracket^c = \lambda w. \text{come}(m)(w)$

c. $\llbracket \text{REF} \rrbracket^c = \lambda p^{(s,t)} . \sigma(\{v | p(v)\})$, where $v \in CS_c$

Antecedent denotes the plural definite description of worlds $w_1 \oplus w_2 \ldots \oplus w_n$ such that each atom is in $CS_c$ and Mary comes there.
Proposal: *moshi* modifies the referring speech act
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*moshi* takes two arguments

\[ \text{moshi} \quad \text{XP} \langle s, \tau \rangle \]

Intuitively, *moshi* tests on whether *ref* applies to an element whose extension is unsettled in the context set. It presupposes some worlds in *CS* disagree w.r.t the extension of *moshi*'s first argument:

\[ \exists u, \exists v \in \text{CS} \quad \text{c} \left[ X(u) \neq X(v) \right] \]

...and is truth-conditionally vacuous: When defined, \[ \text{moshi} \quad \text{X}(f) = f(X) \]
Proposal: *moshi* modifies the referring speech act

*moshi* takes two arguments

- the intension of a property or the intension of a world (proposition);
Proposal: *moshi* modifies the referring speech act

*moshi* takes two arguments
- the intension of a property or the intension of a world (proposition);
- the REF operator

![Diagram](image.png)
Proposal: *moshi* modifies the referring speech act

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It presupposes some worlds in $CS$ disagree w.r.t the extension of *moshi*'s first argument:

$$[[\text{moshi}]^{c}} \left( X_{\langle s, \tau \rangle} \right) (f) \text{ presupposes } \exists u. \exists v \in CS_c [X(u) \neq X(v)]$$
Proposal: moshi modifies the referring speech act

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- the intension of a property or the intension of a world (proposition);
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\[
\left[ \text{moshi} \right]^c \ (X_{(s, \tau)}) \ (f) \ \text{presupposes } \exists u. \exists v \in CS_c [X(u) \neq X(v)]
\]

...and is truth-conditionally vacuous:

When defined, \[\left[ \text{moshi} \right]^c(X)(f) = f(X)\]
Illustrations
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Presupposition: \( \exists u \in CS_c. \exists v \in CS_c[ [XP]^c(u) \neq [XP]^c(v) ] \)
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Presupposition: $\exists u \in CS_c. \exists v \in CS_c [ [XP]^c(u) \neq [XP]^c(v) ]$

Topics
Illustrations

Presupposition: \( \exists u \in CS_c. \exists v \in CS_c. \lnot \left[ \left[ XP \right]^c(u) = \left[ XP \right]^c(v) \right] \)

Topics

\( YP_e \)

\( moshi \)

\( XP_{\langle s, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle} \)

\( \text{REF}_{\langle \langle s, et \rangle, e \rangle} \)

\( NP \)

\(-wa\)

people who want to read newspapers
Illustrations

Presupposition: \( \exists u \in CS_c. \exists v \in CS_c[ [XP]^c(u) \neq [XP]^c(v) ] \)

Topics

\[
\text{moshi} \quad X \quad \text{people who want to read newspapers}
\]

Defined only if some worlds in CS disagree w.r.t. the set of individuals who want to read newspapers.
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**Topics**

$YP_e$

$moshi$

$XP_{\langle s, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle}$

$NP$

people who want to read newspapers

$X$

$-wa$

**Conditionals**

$Y$

$REF_{\langle \langle s, et \rangle, e \rangle}$

Defined only if some worlds in CS disagree w.r.t. the set of individuals who want to read newspapers.
Presupposition: $\exists u \in CS_c. \exists v \in CS_c[ [XP]^c(u) \neq [XP]^c(v) ]$

Defined only if some worlds in CS disagree w.r.t. the set of individuals who want to read newspapers.
Presupposition: \( \exists u \in CS_c . \exists v \in CS_c [ [XP]^c(u) \neq [XP]^c(v) ] \)

**Topics**

- \( YP_e \)
  - \( moshi \)
  - \( XP_{(s,\langle e,t \rangle)} \)
  - \( NP \)
    - people who want to read newspapers
  - \( -wa \)

**Conditionals**

- \( YP_s \)
  - \( moshi \)
  - \( XP_{(s,t)} \)
  - \( VP \)
    - Mary comes
  - \( -tara \)

Defined only if some worlds in CS disagree w.r.t. the set of individuals who want to read newspapers.

Defined only if some worlds in CS disagree w.r.t. the truth-value of the proposition *Mary comes.*
Checking the desiderata

✓ Captured the iffy requirement in conditionals and topics: By the presupposition of moshi.

✓ Ruled out moshi in root clauses: By the compositionality that one of moshi's arguments must be of the same type as ref-operator.

See Appendix 3 for predictions about special root clauses that perform the ref speech act.
Checking the desiderata

✓ Captured the **iffy requirement** in conditionals and topics:
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Checking the desiderata

✓ Captured the **iffy requirement** in conditionals and topics:
   By the presupposition of *moshi*.

✓ Ruled out *moshi* in **root clauses**:
   By the compositionality that one of *moshi*’s arguments must be of the same type as REF-operator.

See Appendix 3 for predictions about special root clauses that perform the REF speech act.
Conclusion
Learning from *moshi*:

Iffiness = unsettledness in the context; *moshi*’s iffiness is a property shared by conditionals and topics; this lends support to the view that likens conditionals and topics (Haiman 1978; Bittner 2001; Schein 2001; Schlenker 2004; Bhatt and Pancheva 2006; Ebert et al. 2014 a.o.)

Remaining issue: Aboutness topics do not allow *moshi*-marking: (20)

(20) *moshi*terewaaku telework suru do hito-wa undoubusoku-ni nari-yasui.

‘People who work from home are hard to get enough exercise.’

Un-unify conditionals and topics, or un-unify the conditional *moshi* and the topic *moshi*?

English *if* is still strange (and possibly other conditional markers, too):

(21) ?If Caesar woke up, he usually had tea. (Lewis’s example)

(22) A: John came. (Factual conditional)

B: If John came, Mary probably also has come.

Is English *if* not ‘iffy’ at all, or do we need polysemy for iffiness?
Learning from *moshi*:

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  \[ (#moshi) \text{terewaaku suru hito-wa undoubusoku-ni nari-yasui.} \]
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  \[ ?\text{If Caesar woke up, he usually had tea.} \]  
  (Lewis’s example)
  (22)  
  A: John came. \hspace{1cm} (Factual conditional)  
  B: If John came, Mary probably also has come.

  Is English *if* not ‘iffy’ at all, or do we need polysemy for iffiness?
Thank you!
And thanks to Teruyuki Mizuno, Magda Kaufmann, Nadine Theiler, Yoshiki Fujiwara, and the audience at the Semantics Colloquium, Goethe University Frankfurt (Jan 2021) and UConn Meaning Group (Feb 2021) for discussions.
Appendices
Appendix 1: German conditional connectives in Lewis’s example

German iffy candidates: *falls* (Hinterwimmer 2014), *sollte* (Sode and Sugawara 2018)

(23) {??Falls / Wenn} Peter aufwacht, trinkt er meistens erst mal eine Tasse Kaffee.  
     (Hinterwimmer 2014: (15))

(24) #Sollte Peter aufwachen, trinkt er meistens erst mal eine Tasse Kaffee.  
     ‘When Peter wakes up, he always drinks a cup of coffee first.’  
     (Magda Kaufmann p.c.)

But the iffy elements identified solely by Lewis’s test may come apart in other environments, e.g. *if* vs. *sollte:*

(25) According to the schedule, the train leaves at 8:00...  
     a. *If* the train leaves at 8:00, we have to be at the station at 7:50.  
     b. ??Sollte der Zug um 8 Uhr abfahren, dann müssen wir spätestens um 7.50 Uhr am Bahnhof sein.  
     (Sode and Sugawara 2018: (23))
Appendix 2: Additional evidence from unconditionals

Unconditionals have antecedents that jointly exhaust all possibilities:

(26) Whether or not Alfonso goes to the party, it will be fun. (Rawlins 2013: 112)

Prediction: Iffy markers should be incompatible with such antecedents.

_moshi_ is incompatible with unconditionals:

(27) (#moshi) M-ga ki-temo ko-naku-temo, J-wa kuru darou.
     MOSHI   M-NOM come-COND come-NEG-COND J-TOP come MOD
     ‘Whether or not Mary comes, John will probably come.’

(28) (#moshi) dare-ga ki-temo, watashi-wa ik-imas-en.
     MOSHI   who-NOM come-COND I-TOP go-POL-NEG.NPST
     ‘Whoever comes, I will not go.’

_moshi_ is ok in antecedents that raise multiple options but do not jointly exhaust all possibilities:

(29) (moshi) shippai shi-temo baka-ni sare-temo, kanojo-wa akirame-nai darou.
     MOSHI  fail do-COND idiot-DAT do.PASS-COND she-TOP give.up-NEG MOD
     ‘Even if she fails, even if ppl. laugh at her, she’ll probably not give up.’
Our account predicts *moshi* to be ok in declaratives that perform the REF speech act.

This prediction is borne out, e.g. *suppose*-sentences that set up contexts for modal subordination:

(30) (moshi) dorobou-ga kita to suru. terebi-ga to-rareru kamoshirenai.

‘Suppose a burglar broke in. The TV might be taken.’


References III


von Fintel, K. and Iatridou, S. (2002). If and when if-clauses can restrict quantifiers. Ms., MIT.