

Conditional Constructs Across World Languages
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Grammatical Encoding of Restrictiveness and Referentiality in Conditionals in Standard Japanese and the Saga Dialect

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ENGLISH

One form

if



Morphological
coding
(tense, mood)

JAPANESE

Several forms

-ba -tara -nara



Different coding
strategies for
conditionality

X-marking/O-marking
(von Fintel & Iatridou 2023)

The Core Problem of *if*

- The English *if* despite being a single form, gives rise to a theoretical controversy between the Restrictor Analysis and the Referential Analysis.
- Japanese conditional forms explicitly encode a distinction between these two semantic functions (**Restrictiveness and Referentiality**).

Two Approaches to Conditional Semantics

Approach 1: The Restrictor Analysis

- *If*-clause acts as a restrictor on the domain of an operator (quantifier or modality) in the consequent clause

The Restrictor Analysis:

Core Idea

The *if*-clause doesn't express its own conditional meaning. Instead, it serves to restrict the domain of other operators, such as quantifiers (always, never) or modal operators (would).

This idea originated with Lewis's (1975) work on adverbial quantification.

Generalization by Kratzer

Kratzer (1986) took the logical step of applying this idea to all conditional constructions.

She famously stated: "The history of the conditional is the story of a syntactic mistake. There is no two-place *if...then* connective in the logical forms for natural languages."

According to Kratzer, when there is no overt operator in a sentence, a covert one must be posited (e.g., a covert epistemic necessity or generic frequency operator).

This explanation is based on the work of Kai von Steg (2011).

Approach 2: The Referential Analysis

- *If*-clause functions like a definite description, referring to a set of possible worlds where the antecedent holds

The Referential Analysis

The *if*-clause is a definite description that refers to a plurality of possible worlds. (Stalnaker 1968, Ebert et al. 2014)

In Normal Conditionals, in which the truth of the consequent depends on the truth of the antecedent, the antecedent refers to this "set of worlds," and the consequent is evaluated for truth in each world within that set.

(1) "If Peter went shopping, then there is pizza in the fridge." → The *if*-clause refers to the set of worlds where Peter went shopping. *Then* acts as a **proform** that anaphorically picks up this set of worlds.

In Biscuit Conditionals (Austin 1956), in which the truth of the consequent is independent of the antecedent and the antecedent merely signals relevance, the antecedent merely establishes a "context of relevance" and is semantically detached from the consequent's truth.

(2) "If you are hungry, there is pizza in the fridge." → The statement that there is pizza is asserted regardless of the listener's hunger; the *if*-clause makes it relevant.

This approach aligns with the view that ***if*-clauses function as topics**.

This explanation is based on the work of Christian Ebert et al. (2014).

Conditionals in Standard Japanese (SJ)

SJ Conditionals: *-ba*, *tara*, *nara*

- The Standard Japanese conditional forms *-ba*, *-tara*, and *-nara* are historically related and can all be categorized under the ‘*-ba*’ **series**, though they are distinguished in their specific functions as conditional markers.

~*-ba*
~*-tara*
verbal endings

non-past form
past-form

-nara
clitic

Restrictiveness Standard Japanese: *-ba*

The *-ba* form encodes Restrictiveness.

It restricts **proposition-bearing operators**, leading to **constraints on modality**.
Therefore, it is **unnatural with performative expressions**, such as commands or requests, **which lack a truth value**.

The Modality Constraints of **-ba**: Unnaturalness with Performative Modality

Unnatural with command / request (lack truth value)

(3) ??駅に着けば、電話してください。

??*Eki-ni tsuke-ba, denwa-shite kudasai.*

station-LOC arrive-do.COND telephone-do please

‘If (you) arrive at the station, please call.’

(Hasunuma, Arita, Maeda 2001)

Neither **-tara** nor **-nara** shows this restriction

(4) 駅に{a 着いたら/b 着いたなら}、電話してください。

Eki-ni {tsui-tara/tsui-ta-nara} denwa-shite kudasai.

station-LOC arrive-COND telephone-do please

-tara vs. *-ba*

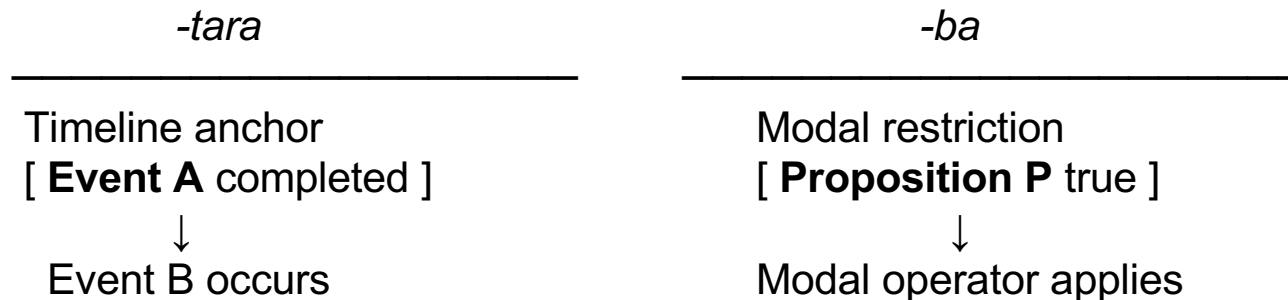
-tara: **Temporal sequencing** → “upon the completion of A, do B”

- Compatible with commands/requests (no modality clash)

-ba: **Restrictive conditional** → operates on **propositions**

- Sensitive to modality (incompatible with performatives)

(Arita 2020)



Theoretical Implications

Constraint relaxed with Stative predicates: Non-eventive, less tied to real-time

(5)時間があれば、電話してください。

*Jikan-ga are-**ba**, denwa-shite kudasai.*

time-NOM exist.COND telephone-do please

‘If you have time, please call.’

Constraint relaxed **Moshi**: *moshi* highlights **hypotheticality**, reducing real-time reading

(6)(?)もし駅に着けば、電話してください。

(?)**Moshi**, *eki-ni tsuke-**ba**, denwa-shite kudasai.*

if station-LOC arrive-do.COND telephone-do please

‘If you arrive at the station, please call.’

Key distinction: performative vs. non-performative

-ba restricts **proposition-bearing operators**

Strong support for the restrictor approach to conditionals

Referentiality in SJ: *-nara*

The *-nara* form encodes Referentiality and Topicality.

It can follow not only verb phrases but also **noun phrases**. Functionally, it topicalizes **a speaker's supposition or a discourse-anchored situation** to refer to a discourse-grounded or presupposed world.

Uses of Nara

Conditional use: following predicate

(7) ビールを飲むなら、サッポロがいい。

Biiru-o nom-u nara Sapporo-ga i-i. (Conditional Use)

beer-ACC drink-NPST COND S-NOM good-NPST

'If you drink a beer, I recommend you Sapporo.'

Topical use: following NP

(8) ビールなら、サッポロがいい。

Biiru nara Sapporo-ga i-i. (Topical Use)

beer COND S-NOM good-NPST

'Speaking of beer, Sapporo is good.'

Not only generic → can mark specific, discourse-grounded topics.

Hypothetical vs. Discourse-Grounded *nara*

Hypothetical assumption (speaker's supposition):

(9) もし山田さんが家にいないなら、会社にいるはずだ。

Moshi Yamada-san-ga ie-ni i-na-i-nara, kaisha-ni i-ru hazu da.
if Y-NOM home-at be-NEG-NPST-COND office-at be-NPST must
'If Yamada is not home, he must be at the office.'

Discourse-grounded / presuppositional (based on prior discourse):

(10) A: I hear that the house next door was burgled.

B: そうか、隣に泥棒が入った（の）なら、うちも注意しよう。

Soo-ka. Tonari-ni doroboo-ga hait-ta (no-)nara uchi-mo chuui.shi-yoo.

'I see. Since the house next door was burgled, we should be careful too.'

→ Neither *-ba* nor *-tara* can be used for discourse-grounded/presuppositional antecedent.

(Akatsuka 1983, Hasunuma et al. 2001)

Conditionals in the Saga Dialect (Saga)

Saga Prefecture



Restrictiveness in the Saga Dialect: The Role of *-gi*

The most notable conditional form in Saga is *-gi*, which covers the extensive functions of both *-ba* and *-tara* in Standard Japanese (SJ).

-gi is derived from the noun *giri* ('limit' / 'restriction'), clearly indicating its semantic root in **Restrictiveness**.

non-past form
past-form

-gi
clitic

Dialectal Variation of **-gi**

Significant dialectal variation of **-gi** exists between **West and East Saga**.

In **West Saga**, the use of **-gi** is **wider**. Specifically, it can appear in the antecedent of **commands or requests**, where SJ's **-ba** form is unnatural.

Conversely, in **East Saga**, the **-gi** form retains the same **modality constraints** as SJ's **-ba** form.

Compatibility with performative expressions

(11) ダイコロバ ツカウギ アトカタツケ センバヨ

Daïdokoro-ba tsukau-gi atokataduke sen-ba-yo

kitchen-ACC use-COND cleanup do-must SFP

‘If you use the kitchen, clean it up afterwards!’

✓ Natural in West Saga

?? Marginal / unnatural in East Saga

Referentiality and Topicality in Saga: The Role of *-naiba* and *-ya-gi*

The forms *-naiba* and *-ya-gi* assume the referential and topical functions corresponding to *-nara* in Standard Japanese (SJ).

Both forms follow **Noun Phrases**. However, *-ya-gi* requires the **nominalizer -to** when following a verb.

-naiba is cognate with the root *nari*, similar to *-nara*.

-naiba, -ya-gi
clitic

-ya-gi is composed of the copula root *-ya* and the conditional suffix *-gi*. The copula *-ya* functions identically to the root of *-nara* in encoding referentiality. This form is preferably used in **West Saga**.

-ya-gi and *-naiba*

Noun phrase

(12) オンセンヤギ／ナイバ タケオガヨカヨ

Onsen {-ya-gi/-naiba}, Takeo -ga yoka-yo.

“As for hot springs, Takeo is the best.”

Verb Phrase

(13) オンセンバ イクトヤギ／イクナイバ／イクトナイバ タケオガヨカヨ

Onsen-ba iku-{to-ya-gi/-naiba/-to-naiba} Takeo-ga yoka-yo.

“If you go to hot springs, Takeo is the best.”

Hypothetical vs. Discourse-Grounded nara

Hypothetical assumption (speaker's supposition):

- (14) モシ ヤマトサンガ ウチニ オラン{ギ／トヤギ} カイシャニ オッハズ
Moshi Yamamoto.san-ga uchi-ni ora-n-{-gi/-to-ya-gi} kaisha-ni oQ-hazu.
if Y-NOM home-at be-NEG-NPST-COND office-at be-NPST must
'If Yamada is not home, he must be at the office.'

Discourse-grounded / presuppositional (based on prior discourse)

- (15) A: I hear that the house next door was burgled.
B: トナリニ ドロボウノ ヒャーッタト{ナイバ／トヤギ} ウチモ キヲツケンバイカンネ
Tonari-ni doroboo-no hait-ta-to-{-naiba/-ya-gi} uchi-mo kiotsuke-n.ba.ikan-ne.
the house next door-to enter-NML-COND our.house-too be.careful-must
'If the house next door was burgled, we should be careful too.'

Conclusion and Implications

Summary: Functional Differentiation

Japanese Conditional Forms are functionally differentiated along two major axes:

Restrictiveness:

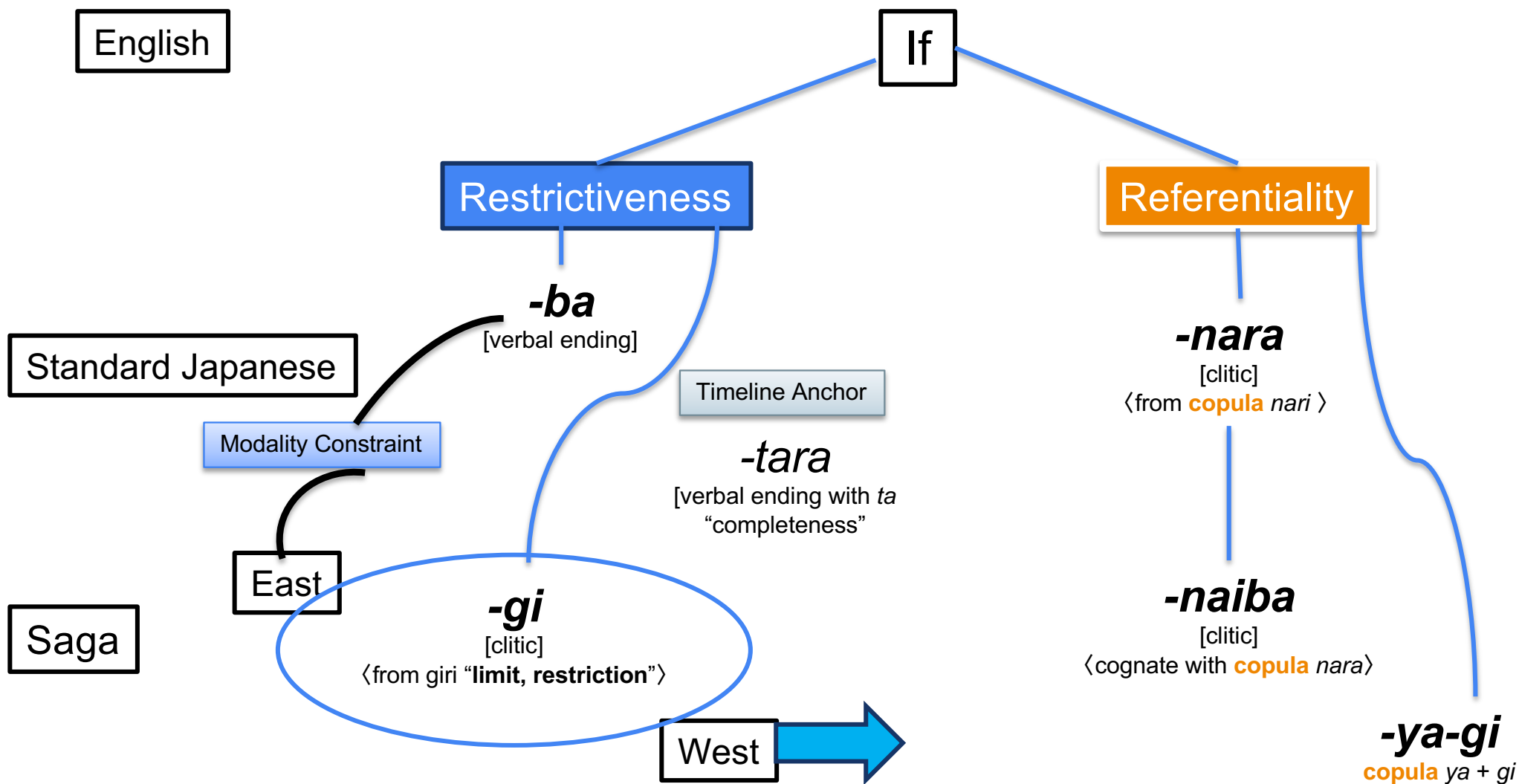
Forms: **SJ** *-ba* and **Saga** *-gi*.

Function: **Restrict proposition-bearing operators**, leading to constraints on modality.

Referentiality / Topicality:

Forms: **SJ** *-nara* and **Saga** *-naiba / -ya-gi*.

Function: Function as a discourse marker, **referring to a discourse-grounded or presupposed world..**



Theoretical Implications:

In the analysis of English *if*-clauses, conflicts often arise between the restrictive and referential approaches.

In contrast, the Japanese conditional system demonstrates that these two approaches capture fundamental and independent functions, which are clearly differentiated by distinct grammatical forms.

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