Quasi-causal 'already' conditionals

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Several European languages and Modern Hebrew possess a peculiar type of conditional construction that is characterized by i) an already' adverbial in the antecedent clause and ii) a pragmatic presupposition that the antecedent proposition holds true. Example (1, 2) are illustrations from Polish and German. Here, the presence of *już* (1) and *schon* (2) make it explicit that the respective statements, although conditional in nature, are comments on a premise that has been accepted by the speaker.

The relevant constructions are fairly well described for some languages (i.a. Karlík 1988 on Czech, Gornik-Gerhardt 1981 on German, Shefer 2020 on Hebrew, Pekelis 2017 on Russian). In other cases, descriptive materials and specialized treatises of conditionals or discourse particle only mention them in passing, at best. In the same vein, the available analyses thus far have focused on individual varieties, with brief observations of cross-linguistic parallels being confined to bi-lingual pairings (Dahl 1988, Hentschel 2013 on German and Serbian-Croatian-Bosnian; Rüütmaa 2012 on Estonian and Hungarian).

In our talk we show that these 'already' conditionals are found in a geographically coherent area of western Eurasia that encompasses languages from different genera of Indo-European and Uralic, plus Modern Hebrew (Afro-Asiatic) as a synchronic, but historically motivated, outlier. After laying out how the meaning of the constructions in question is non-compositional, we give diagnostic evidence that they pragmatically presuppose the truth of the antecedent proposition in the same way that 'since' conditionals do, while remaining conditionals at heart (i.e., the material implication forms part of the at-issue content). They thus constitute a specific type of what has been referred to as "quasi-causal" (Pasch 1994), "factual" (Iatridou 1991) or "premise" conditionals, among other names.

Making use of both natural and elicited data, we then turn to some fine-grained differences between individual varieties. To give just one example, in several languages these constructions can signify 'if (assuming that), against all odds *p*', such as in the Modern Hebrew example (3). This use is, however, not available in German, presumably due to blocking effects from dedicated counter-to-assumption markers like *doch* and *überhaupt*.

Lastly, we discuss the origins of the 'already' conditionals. We suggest that, on the system-internal level, recurrent configurations of the type 'while we're [already] at it', as in (4), played the role of a bridging context. At the same time, the areal and genealogical distribution, as well as the etymologies of the elements involved, strongly point to language-contact as an important factor in the contructions' rise and spread.

In describing quasi-causal 'already' conditionals and tracing down their origins, we aim to not only advance the descriptions of language-specific discourse devices, but also to contribute to our understanding of the interplay between language-internal factors and contact phenomena in the rise and spread of constructions across languages.

Examples

(1) Polish (found online)

Jeżeli	***już***	*chcesz*	*biegać*	*koło*	*moj-ego*
if/when	ALREADY	want.IPFV.2SG	run.IPFV.INF	Around	POSS.1SG-GEN.SG.M

domu	*to*	*przynajmniej*	*się*	*ubierz.*
house(M).GEN.SG	then	at_least	REFL.ACC	dress.PFV.IMP

'If you insist on jogging around my house, at least dress [decently].'

(2) German (Gornik-Gerhardt 1981: 113)

Wenn	*wir*	***schon***	*Polster*	*kauf-en,*	*dann*	*auch*	*ordentlich-e.*
if/when	1PL	ALREADY	cushion.ACC.PL	buy-1PL	then	also	decent-ACC.PL

'If [as is given] we're going to be cushions, then [let it be] decent ones.'

(3) Modern Hebrew (Shefer 2020: 287)

Vilot lehaskara kaše limtzo hazom be-ʔilat
'Houses for rent are very difficult to find today in Eilat,|

*ve-**ʔim***	***kvar***	*mutzaʔim*	*bayit*	*hu*	*meʔod*	*yeker.*
and-if	ALREADY	find.SG.M	house(M)	3SG.M	very	expensive.SG.M

'And if you do (against all odds) manage to find a house, then it is very expensive.'

(4) Serbian-Croatian-Bosnian (Croatian National Corpus)

Hrvatske vlasti trebaju ustrajati na njegovoj zaštiti, bez nepotrebnih pritisaka na domaće ribare te velike popustljivosti spram talijanskih interesa…
'The Croatian authorities should be persisting in protecting it [fishing] without unnecessary pressure on local fishermen or great leniency towards Italian interests…'

Kad	*smo*	*već*	*kod*	*naš-ih*	*prekomorsk-ih*
if/when	COP.1PL	ALREADY	at	POSS.1PL-GEN.PL	overseas-GEN.PL

susjeda…
neighbour.GEN.PL

'And speaking of (lit. and while we're already at) our overseas neighbours…'

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