Sentential homophony: A case study of Russian *if*-clauses

There is ongoing debate in the linguistic literature concerning the syntactic status of "complement-like" *if*-clauses across languages, as in (1) for English, (2) for German, and (3) for Russian.

(1)   I hate it [**if** he snores].

(2)   Ich liebe (es), [**wenn** er lacht].
        I   love   (it)   if   he laughs
        'I love (it) if he laughs.'

(3)   Мне   нравится, **если** она использует блеск для губ...
        Mnie   nravitsia, **esli** ona ispol'zuet   blesk dlia gub
        me.Dat   like   if   she uses   lip   gloss
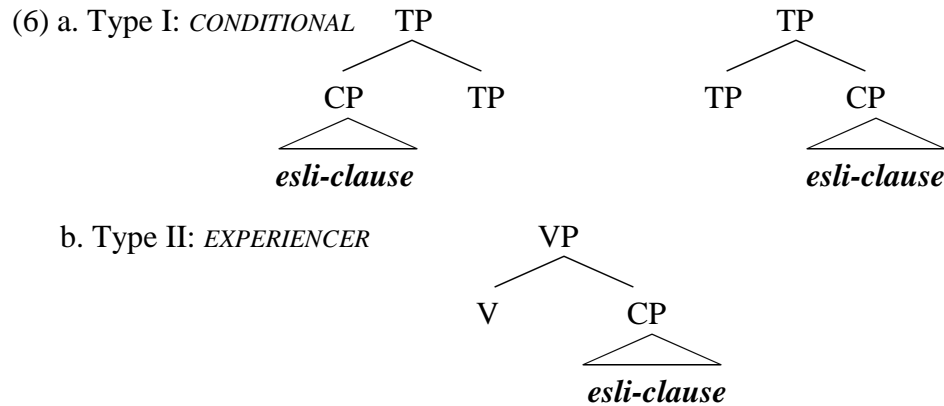   'I like if she uses a lip gloss.'   [Russian National Corpus]

The discussion mostly concerns the English language (Carstairs 1973; Hinterwimmer 2010; Lakoff 1968; McCawley 1988; Noonan 1985; Pesetsky 1991; Pullum 1987; Rocchi 2010; Steriade 1981; Williams 1974, among others), but there are also studies of German (Fabricius Hansen 1980; Schwabe 2013, 2015, forthcoming) and Spanish (Quer 2002), as well as one cross-linguistic study (Schwabe et al. 2012).

The question arises: What is the syntactic status of complement-like *if*-clauses in Russian? Although much work has been devoted to Russian complement clauses in general, little work has been done specifically on complement-like *if*-clauses (Letuchiy 2014, 2015).

I propose to distinguish between two different types of *if*-clauses (*esli*-clauses) in Russian: (i) conditional clauses, as in (4); and (ii) experiencer clauses, as in (5).

(4)   Я беру   зонт,   **если** идет   дождь.   (conditional)
        Ja beru   zont,   **esli** idiet   dozhd'.
        I take.PRES umbrella if   go.PRES rain
        'I take an umbrella if it rains.'

(5)   Я   люблю, **если** мне   приносят цветы.   (experiencer)
        Ja   lubliu, **esli** mnie   prinosiat cvety.
        I.NOM   love   if   me.DAT   bring   flowers
        'I love if (people) bring me flowers.'

I argue that these clauses differ syntactically: Conditional clauses are syntactic adjuncts, as in (6a), while experiencer clauses are syntactic complements, as in (6b). Evidence is drawn from valence of the main predicate, word order, a comparison with complement *that*-clauses, negation and time-reference dependency tests. I also propose that there are two homophonous conjunctions *esli* in Russian: (i) conditional *esli* and (ii) experiencer *esli*. The homophonous conjunctions *esli* introduce syntactically distinct types of clauses: adjuncts vs. complements.

(6) a. Type I: *CONDITIONAL*

b. Type II: *EXPERIENCER*

I also draw a comparison between Russian and German complement-like *if*-clauses, which shows that they are different syntactically. This means that complement-like *if*-clauses do not have a uniform syntax across languages.

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