

# Syntax and semantics of subordination: the case of če-clauses

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## Abstract

This study examines the Slovenian subordinator *če* ('if') using a qualitative corpus analysis of a sample extracted from the Slovenian Web (slWaC 2.1) corpus. It identifies the types of subordination introduced by *če* and their meanings. The findings reveal that *če* predominantly introduces adverbial clauses with a primary conditional meaning, while also triggering secondary meanings such as time, concession, cause/reason, manner, and comparison. *Če* also introduces nominal clauses functioning as subjects, objects, complements and appositions. A minor group of *če*-clauses can be interpreted as both adverbial and nominal.

**Keywords:** if, subordination, adverbial clause, nominal clause, conditionality, implicature

## Skladnja in pomen podredij: primer odvisnikov s če

Študija z uporabo kvalitativne korpusne analize preučuje slovenski podredni veznik *če*. S pomočjo vzorca, pridobljenega iz slovenskega spletnega korpusa (slWaC 2.1), identificira vrste podredij, ki jih uvaja *če*, in njihove pomena. Ugotovitve kažejo, da *če* pretežno uvaja prislovne odvisnike s primarnim pogojnim pomenom, hkrati pa sproža drugotne pomena, kot so časovni, dopustni, vzročni, načinovni in primerjalni. *Če* uvaja tudi nominalne odvisnike, ki delujejo kot osebki, predmeti, povedkova določila in apozicije. Manjšo skupino odvisnikov s *če* je možno uvrstiti tako med prislovne kot tudi med nominalne odvisnike.

**Ključne besede:** če, podredje, prislovni odvisnik, nominalni odvisnik, pogojnost, implikatura

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## 1 Introduction

In general terms, subordinate clauses are traditionally classified into three major categories based on their potential functions: (i) nominal, (ii) attributive and (iii) adverbial clauses (cf.: Quirk et al. 1999, 1047ff.; Toporišič 2004, 637ff.; Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 1014ff.).<sup>1</sup> Nominal clauses perform functions typically associated with nominal phrases, be it at the sentence level (i.e., as independent sentence elements such as subjects and objects) or the phrase level (e.g., as modifiers like appositives). Attributive clauses function solely at the phrase level, modifying nominal heads. As such, they syntactically resemble adjectives in the adnominal function. Adverbial clauses fill the syntactic position of adjuncts or disjuncts. As adjuncts they are fully integrated into the clausal structure, providing circumstantial information, for example, time, place, and manner. As disjuncts, their syntactic role is more peripheral, providing comment on the propositional content or on the circumstances of the speech act.

By far the commonest means of introducing subordinate clauses is subordinators (Quirk et al. 1999, 997ff.; Biber et al. 1999, 85ff.; Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 949ff.; Toporišič 2004, 636ff.; Pogorelec 2021 [1964], 25ff.). The usage of some subordinators is highly predictable, as they introduce only one type of subordinate clause and establish only one semantic relation. For instance, the English subordinator *unless* (1a) is monofunctional as it exclusively introduces subordinate adverbial clauses of condition, meaning *except if*, or more precisely, *in all circumstances except if* (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 755; Orešnik 2007, 229). On the other hand, the subordinator *if* is polyfunctional as it can introduce both nominal (1b) and adverbial clauses indicating different circumstantial meanings, predominantly condition (1c), but also, among others, time, concession, and cause/reason (see Kortmann 1997; Declerck and Reed 2001). Furthermore, the subordinator *if* together with *as* forms the complex subordinator *as if*, marking adverbial subordinate clauses of similarity/comparison (1d). Of special interest are those polyfunctional subordinators which can either serve as pure subordinators, i.e., introducing subordinate clauses without being

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1 In his classification of Slovenian subordinate clauses, Toporišič (2004, 637) by and large follows this tripartite division, but uses different terminology: content (Slo. *vsebinski*), relative (Slo. *oziralni*) and adverbial (Slo. *prislovni*) subordinate clauses for the three categories listed above, respectively. This fundamental division of subordinate clauses serves as the basis for the contemporary and more detailed classification of Slovenian subordinated clauses as developed by Žele (2016) and Gabrovšek and Žele (2019). It should also be noted that our classification follows the tradition of English linguistics, which names subordinate clauses according to the part of speech they represent within a sentence structure. In contrast, the Slovenian tradition focuses mainly on their syntactic function (for details, see Gregorčič and Gabrovšek 2024; Smolej 2018).

syntactically part of the subordinate clause, or combine their subordinating function with a syntactic role within the subordinate clause. For example, *that* serves solely as a subordinator when introducing nominal object clauses (1e), whereas when introducing subordinate relative clauses (1f), it simultaneously functions as a subordinator and as the direct object in the subordinate clause.

(1)<sup>2</sup>

- a) *All output signals remain unchanged unless a change is specifically indicated.*
- b) *I wondered if it did him more harm than good.*
- c) *If she had blinked, she would have missed the road.*
- d) *He frowned as if she had done it on purpose.*
- e) *They said that people's civil rights would be decimated.*
- f) *He is grown into the finest young man that I know.*

Similar to English *if*, the Slovenian subordinator *če*, which is the focus of the present investigation, exhibits a polyfunctional nature. Pogorelec (2021 [1964], 68–79) identifies four types of subordinate clauses introduced by *če*: (i) adverbial conditional clauses (2a), (ii) adverbial concessive clauses (2b), (iii) nominal subject/object clauses (2c–d), and (iv) attributive clauses (2e). In addition to these functions, *The Dictionary of the Slovenian Standard Language (Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika – SSKJ)* identifies three additional types of adverbial *če*-subordinate clauses: (i) adverbial temporal clauses (2f), (ii) adverbial causative clauses (2g) and (iii) adverbial comparative clauses (2h). To this array of functions, Ilc and Stopar (2023) also add the adverbial exceptive clauses, in which *če* combined with *razen* forms the complex subordinator *razen če* (2i).<sup>3</sup>

2 Unless marked otherwise, all examples in the paper are taken from two referential corpora: Slovenian Web (slWaC 2.1) for Slovenian, and English Web 2021 (enTenTen21) for English as provided by Sketch Engine.

3 Complex subordinators (e.g., *razen če* ('except'), *kot če* ('as if')) should be kept apart from free combinations such as *da če* ('that if'), *kajti če* ('for if'), etc., as the latter do not function as single units but represent sequences of items with separate functions. In (i) below, *da* ('that') introduces a nominal constituent within which a multiclausal structure is embedded, and *če* ('if') introduces the initial clause in that structure – an adverbial clause expressing condition. In (ii), *kajti* ('for') links the conjoints of a coordinate structure, and *če* ('if') introduces the initial clause in the second, multiclausal conjoint. It follows that the interpretation of the *če*-clause is independent of the preceding subordinator/coordinator, so instances of the kind do not represent a separate category in our analysis.

(i) *Prepričan je, [da [[če bi bilo več vlakov], bi jih ljudje uporabljali]].* 'He believes that if there were more trains, people would use them.'

(ii) *[Svetloba je nevidna], kajti [[če bi jo videli], bi sama zaslepila oči ...].* 'Light is invisible, for if we could see it, it itself would dazzle us ...'

(2)<sup>4</sup>

- a) *Dežnik ne pomaga nič, če zanaša burja od strani.*  
'An umbrella is of no help if the wind is blowing from the side.'
- b) *Veste, baje vsi umetniki umrjejo prezgodaj, tudi če so stari že sto let.*  
'You know, I hear that all artists die prematurely, even if they are a hundred years old.'
- c) *Še dobro, če te orožniki ne dobijo v roke.*  
'It's a good thing if the police don't get their hands on you.'
- d) *Ne vem, če bosta prišla v eni uri.*  
'I don't know if they'll arrive in an hour.'
- e) *Mučila ga je misel, če je ravnal prav.*  
'He was tortured by the thought of whether he had done the right thing.'
- f) *... sam veš[,] kakšne rezultate znajo mladci doseči[,] če imajo ob sebi oporo veteranov ...*  
'... you know yourself what results young men can achieve if they have the support of veterans ...'
- g) *Razumel sem, da moram delati drugače, če hočem rešiti zakon.*  
'I understood that I had to do things differently if I wanted to save my marriage.'
- h) *Kmet če je bolj jezen, bolj pije.*  
'If a farmer is angrier, he drinks more.'
- i) *Ne verjamem v diete, razen če gre za zdravje.*  
'I don't believe in diets unless it's for health.'

A more detailed analysis of the examples in (2) shows that the exact meanings of the adverbial subordinate *če*-clauses oftentimes seem to depend on context, allowing multiple circumstantial interpretations. For instance, (2f) combines both the conditional (i.e., under which condition?) and the temporal reading (i.e., when?). Similarly, (2g) combines the meaning of condition (i.e., under which condition?) and cause/reason (i.e., why?). Furthermore, the examples in (3) illustrate that even more than two adverbial meanings can be observed in the same subordinate *če*-clause, i.e., the conditional, temporal and causative circumstances.

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4 Examples (2a-d) are taken from Pogorelec (2021[1964], 68–79). As the author does not provide an example for the final category of attributive *če*-clauses, we found a relevant example (2e) in Toporišič (2004, 645); see also Žele (2016, 90).

(3)

- a) *Ste kdaj čutili, da se vaše ustnice poškodujejo, če preživljate čas na snegu?*  
‘Have you ever felt that your lips get damaged when you spend time in the snow?’
- b) *Nihče mu ne more ničesar očitati, če se kot državna institucija zavzema za slovenske pisatelje, pesnike in umetnike ...*  
‘No one can accuse him of anything if he as [a representative of] a state institution stands up for Slovenian writers, poets and artists ...’
- c) *... dejte mi mir[, ] če vam dam mir.*  
‘... leave me be, if/since/when I leave you be.’

Some studies of Slovenian subordination (Toporišič 2004; Žele 2016; Gabrovšek and Žele 2019) primarily focus on the classification of subordinate clauses, while paying less attention to subordinators, their usage and semantic implications. Since the illustrative examples in some of these sources (Pogorelec 2021 [1964]; Toporišič 2004; also SSKJ) often seem old-fashioned, the present analysis relies on the data from the corpus Slovenian Web (slWaC 2.1), which encompasses more contemporary sources, reflecting the spontaneous use of language that has not been proofread or edited.

Thus, in what follows, we present a corpus analysis of a sample of *če*-subordinate clauses. Firstly, we aim to determine which types of subordination are typically introduced by the polyfunctional subordinator *če*, and, secondly, in the case of adverbial clauses, which primary and secondary semantic interpretations such clauses trigger and whether it is possible to treat secondary meanings as implicatures (cf. Kortmann 1997, 90, also Žele 2016, 92). We expect that despite the different levels of indeterminacy, *če*-clauses are primarily adverbial with the conditional meaning. In addition, we try to draw some parallels between Slovenian *če*-subordinate clauses and English *if*-clauses, which seem *prima facie* near syntactic and semantic equivalents.

## 2 Methodology

The research method employed in this study is qualitative corpus analysis. The corpus used is Slovenian Web (slWaC 2.1), which comprises almost 896 million tokens from Slovenian texts collected from the Internet. The choice of this method enables targeted retrieval and analysis of naturally occurring linguistic phenomena – for instance, we anticipate that a web-based corpus is more likely to contain instances where the subordinator *če* substitutes for *ali* (‘whether’). Moreover, slWaC 2.1 adheres to

standards applied to similar corpora across various languages (Kilgarriff et al. 2010), ensuring greater comparability of extracted data.

The Slovenian Web corpus is tagged for parts of speech and lemmatised. It was accessed using the online Sketch Engine tool: the relevant patterns were retrieved with the CQL string `[tag="V.*"] [] {0,3} [word="če"]` – this query targets structures that include a verb form followed by zero to three words before the word *če* ('if'). Such a pattern was assumed to be conducive to finding both adverbial as well as nominal subordinate *če*-clauses of the type presented in (2a) and (2c-d), respectively. However, the limitation of this query is that the sample comprises only subordinate *če*-clauses in non-initial position.<sup>5</sup>

The query yielded 902,987 hits (1,007.91 per million; 0.008% of whole corpus), from which a representative random sample of 500 hits (0.56 per million; 0.00005581% of whole corpus) was extracted; the sample is generated by Sketch Engine and is reproducible.

The 500 corpus hits were then analysed manually. The size of the sample and the expert linguistic knowledge required for manual analysis made it impractical to obtain judgements from a larger group of speakers. To address this limitation, the analysis was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, each of the three authors, all three native speakers of Slovenian, independently analysed the sample, and in the second phase, a moderation session was held to compare, discuss and align the judgements. Based on the classifications of *če*-clauses presented in the sections above, each instance in the corpus sample was assigned a class and a sub-class, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Classification of corpus hits.

Class	Sub-classes
Adverbial	condition; time; exceptive; manner; comparison; reason; concession; disjunct
Nominal	subject; subject complement; object; apposition; <sup>6</sup> adjective complementation <sup>7</sup>

5 Despite this limitation, the minimal-limitation analysis of a random sample of 500 *če*-clauses in the initial position (CQL string `[word="če"]`) confirms that the conclusions presented herein remain robust, as the majority of these clauses also belong to the adverbial type.

6 We treat appositive clauses as nominal clauses. Apposition is primarily a relation between nominal phrases that are identical in reference (Quirk et al. 1999, 1300ff.). An appositive nominal phrase may be substituted by a nominal clause. In general linguistics, the label 'attributive' usually designates non-appositive modifiers of nominal heads; therefore, *če*-clauses in this framework cannot be analysed as attributive to a nominal head. For details, see Section 3.2.

7 Clauses complementing adjectival heads are also treated as nominal clauses (Quirk et al. 1999, 1048ff.). Although modifiers syntactically, they do not represent attributive clauses since the head is not nominal (see fn. 6). Moreover, the types of clauses appearing in this function can also function as appositive modifiers. Compare, for

### 3 Results and discussion

#### 3.1 Adverbial *če*-clauses

The sample of 500 corpus hits comprises 373 (75%) adverbial clauses introduced by the subordinator *če*. These clauses predominantly function as adjuncts, with a small percentage represented by disjuncts. An analysis of semantic relations introduced by *če* confirms the polyfunctional nature of the subordinator – the identified meanings indicate that *če* (alone or as part of a complex subordinator) introduces clauses of condition, time, concession, exception, cause/reason, comparison, and manner.

##### 3.1.1 *Adjuncts*

Most adverbial clauses in the sample (308 out of 373, or 83%) introduced by the subordinator *če* express conditional meaning. However, alternative interpretations are often possible alongside the conditional one. The sample analysed yielded 133 adverbial clauses in which condition was identified as the sole meaning expressed, see for example (4).

- (4) ... *bi bila srečnejša, če bi imela tudi ona izpit in avto.*  
 ‘... [she] would be happier, if she also had a driver’s license and a car.’

In 175 instances within the sample, the adverbial meaning of condition is one of two (or even three) possible interpretations. The most frequently occurring combination (145 instances) allows for both conditional and temporal interpretations (5a). This typically occurs with predicators in the indicative mood and in contexts that permit an iterative/habitual reading. Such an interpretation is expected because the temporal meaning can be understood as an implicature arising from the dominant conditional meaning, i.e. in cases in which a habitual interpretation of the condition is possible, ‘*if* implies *when*’ (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 743; see also Quirk et al. 1999, 1092, footnote [b], Declerck and Reed 2001, 31-35, for Slovenian Žele 2016, 92). However, the meaning of condition may also co-occur with those of reason, concession, and comparison (5b-d, respectively). Additionally, in our corpus 19

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example: (i) *zaskrbljen, da mi morda ne bo uspelo* (‘worried that I might not make it’) and *strah, da mi morda ne bo uspelo* (‘fear that I might not make it’); (ii) *radoveden, če/ali mi bo uspelo* (‘curious as to whether I will make it’) and *vprašanje, če/ali mi bo uspelo* (‘the question as to whether I will make it’).

adverbial *če*-clauses have been identified that can be interpreted as expressing three meanings: condition, cause/reason, and time (5e).

(5)

- a) ... *če stanja ne zdravimo hitro, napreduje...*  
'... if/when the condition is not treated quickly, it progresses ...'
- b) ... *tokrat tudi ne bo uspelo, če zadnjih 8 mesecev ni ...*  
'... it won't work this time either, if/since it hasn't for the last 8 months ...'
- c) ... *prijave [...] oddate tudi, če ne boste tekmovali ...*  
'... you should hand in your application even if you are not competing ...'
- d) *Delo v programu pri gostovanju ostane enako, kot če bi stranka program kupila...*  
'Using the software in the hosting mode remains the same as if the customer had bought the software ...'
- e) ... *dejte mi mir[,] če vam dam mir ...*  
'... leave me be, if/since/when I leave you be ...'

Thus, similarly to English (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 743), Slovenian adverbial *če*-clauses are primarily associated with condition as an inalienable part of their meaning, while other secondary meanings can be seen as implicatures. However, some rare instances of *če*-clauses have also been identified in which the prototypically conditional subordinator expresses adverbial meanings other than condition. In the examples below, the subordinator *če* introduces adverbial clauses with the meanings of comparison, cause/reason and manner/comparison, see (6a-c), respectively. It is noteworthy that in these cases the subordinator *če* co-occurs with other subordinators.

(6)

- a) *Boš več naredila [na tak način], kot če mu najedaš za malenkosti.*  
'You'll do more [in this way] than if you nag him about little things.'
- b) *Kako naj sploh pridobim izkušnje, če vendar vsi zaposlujejo le izkušene?*  
'How am I supposed to gain experience if everyone only hires experienced people?'
- c) *Tili je odletel približno, kot če skočite v morje.*  
'Tili flew away almost as if you were jumping into the sea.'

### 3.1.2 Disjuncts

Adverbial *če*-clauses as disjuncts provide commentary on the propositional content or on the circumstances of the speech act.<sup>8</sup> Within our corpus sample, 24 sentences can be identified as containing clear-cut examples of this metalinguistic use, for example (7).

- (7) ... *ta parlament tudi na nek način vršil pritisk, če hočete, moralni pritisk na vodstvo* ...  
 ‘... this parliament would also in some way exert pressure, if you will, moral pressure on the management ...’

Despite the semantic and syntactic differences between adjuncts and disjuncts, there are three instances in the sample that we classify as borderline cases, (8a-c).

- (8)
- a) ... *če zanje ne veste, se boste bali, pa če hočete ali ne.*  
 ‘... if you don’t know about them, you’ll be afraid, whether you want to be or not.’
- b) *Pa tudi ena zadeva je kočljiva, če gledam z drugega vidika.*  
 ‘But one thing is also tricky, if viewed from a different perspective.’
- c) ... *specifične verzije [...] se ne razlikujejo dosti, če pogledamo osnovne sestavine.*  
 ‘... the specific versions do not differ much if looking at the basic ingredients.’

If the example in (8a) is not analysed as a comment on the situation, but rather as an adjunct, it expresses the adverbial meaning of concession (‘although you don’t want to be afraid’). Similarly, example (8b) can be interpreted as having a conditional meaning (‘if you view it from a different perspective, then ...’), while example (8c) may be interpreted as expressing conditional and temporal meanings (‘if/whenever you look at the basic ingredients’).

## 3.2 Nominal *če*-clauses

The sample of 500 corpus hits comprises 121 (24%) nominal clauses introduced by the subordinator *če*. These clauses predominantly function as sentence subjects and

8 For a detailed analysis of Slovenian clauses as disjuncts see Gregorčič and Gabrovšek 2024; Smolej 2018 a.o.

objects (together 109 out of 121, or 90%). Other syntactic functions are rare: a small number of *če*-clauses in the sample have been identified as subject complements, appositions, or complements to adjectival heads.

### 3.2.1 Subject function

Subject *če*-clauses represent 41% of the sample (i.e., 50 out of 121). One third of them are indirect questions (i.e., interrogative), with the subordinator *če* corresponding to *ali* ('whether'). In most instances, the indirect question is the subject of the verb *zanimati* (*koga*) 'wonder/want to know', as in (9).

- (9) *Zanima me[,] če imajo tudi ostali podobne težave ...*  
 'I wonder if similar problems are encountered by other people as well ...'

The majority of subject clauses in the sample (i.e., two thirds of them) are not interrogative. They cannot be introduced by *ali*; moreover, in several of them, *če* can be replaced with *da* (cf. English *that*), pointing to their statement-like status.

- (10) ... *bolje bo, če jih sami preverite ...*  
 '... it will be better if you check them out for yourself ...'

What is interesting about these clauses is that despite clearly being syntactically nominal, they frequently also carry adverbial meaning, with *če* triggering a conditional interpretation. To illustrate, example (10) reads as 'if you check them out for yourself, that will be better'. This phenomenon is discussed in more detail in section 3.2.4.

### 3.2.2 Object function

*Če*-clauses in the object function represent 49% of the sample (i.e., 59 out of 121). They are mainly indirect questions, with the subordinator *če* corresponding to *ali*. They appear with 20 different verbs, among which the most frequent one is *vprašati* 'ask' (ten instances; with an additional six if *povprašati* and *spraševati* (*se*) are included), followed by *ne vedeti* 'not know' (eight instances) and *preveriti* 'check' (five instances). For example:

- (11)  
 a) ... *in sem ga vprašala, če rabi pomoč ...*  
 '... and I asked him if he needed help ...'

- b) ... *ne vem, če je še kaj, ker pač nisem strokovnjak na tem področju ...*  
 ‘... I don’t know if there’s anything else – I’m not an expert in the field ...’
- c) *Še enkrat preverite, če imate napisane vse osnovne informacije ...*  
 ‘Check one more time if you have all basic information written down ...’

A small number of object clauses in the sample are not interrogative. For example:

(12)

- a) ... *zato še toliko težje razumemo, če mu ravnatelj, Ministrstvo za šolstvo in njegova komisija mame ne podprejo.*  
 ‘... so it is even more difficult for us to understand if the principal, the Ministry of Education and the committee don’t back his mother up.’
- b) *Bom lažje prenesel, če se bo odzvala hladno ali burno?*  
 ‘Will I be able to bear it better if her reaction is cold or strong?’

### 3.2.3 Other functions

The other syntactic functions identified in the sample are that of subject complement (13a), apposition (13b), and complement to an adjectival head (13c). They are represented in the sample to a very small extent.

(13)

- a) *Vprašanje je, če bodo dovolj pametne, da bodo priložnost tudi izkoristile.*  
 ‘The question is if they’ll be smart enough to take advantage of the opportunity.’
- b) *Po SMS lahko vsak dobi informacijo, če je njegovo zdravstveno zavarovanje urejeno!*  
 ‘Anyone can get information by text message as to whether their health insurance is active.’
- c) *Nisem bil povsem prepričan, če bom zmogel ...*  
 ‘I wasn’t quite sure if I would make it ...’

The *če*-clauses above are indirect questions, with *če* corresponding to *ali*. In (13b) and (13c), a *da*-clause is, in principle, also possible (cf. *information that ..., be sure that ...*); nevertheless, replacing the question with a statement would affect the semantic implications of the sentence.

Conversely, the *če*-clauses in (14) cannot be interrogative:

(14)

- a) *Enako kot me zmoti to, če nekdo napiše takšno traparijo ...*  
'Just like it annoys me if someone writes such nonsense ...'
- b) *Kdo je pa kriv, če je Zupan edini aktivni občinski svetnik.*  
'It's not our fault if Zupan is the only active municipal councillor.'

### 3.2.4 Nominal clauses with adverbial meaning

Nominal *če*-clauses are often associated with an adverbial circumstance (condition in particular, but also time, cause and concession). The phenomenon is most prominent in *če*-clauses in the subject function (see section 3.2.1). To illustrate:

- (15) ... *je izredno praktično, če sveže začimbe gojimo kot lončnice.*  
'... it is extremely practical if one grows fresh herbs in pots.'

The *če*-clause appears as the syntactic subject of a sentence whose predicate contains the copula *be* and a subject complement in the form of an adjectival phrase. The quality expressed by the adjective is predicated of the propositional content of the subject clause. The subordinator *če* triggers a conditional-temporal interpretation: 'if/when one grows fresh herbs in pots, that (i.e., their growing fresh herbs in pots) is extremely practical'.

This pattern is mostly used with adjectives which semantically present the action or state in the *če*-clause as suitable and desirable (*good, fair, right, appropriate, nice, useful, beneficial, practical, convenient, fun, favourite*), or the opposite (*bad, harmful*), (16a). Word classes other than adjectives are rare (16b-d):

(16)

- a) *Bo pa pošteno, če bodo vsaj takrat pesimisti rekli BRAVO!*  
'It will only be fair if at least then the pessimists say Bravo!'
- b) *Zakaj bi bil greh, če [mestne parcele] postanejo javne?*  
'Why would it be a sin if urban plots were made public?'
- c) *Bo prezgodaj, če jih sejem že jutri?*  
'Will it be too early if I sow them tomorrow?'
- d) ... *kako mora biti, če spiš na londonskih ulicah noč za nočjo ...*  
'... what it must be like if you sleep on the streets of London night after night ...'

In several instances the conditional mood is used. The *če*-clauses in these cases resemble conditional clauses expressing a hypothetical (17a-b) or rejected condition (17c). Such sentences tend to express recommendations or wishes.

(17)

- a) *Koristno bi bilo tudi, če bi dodatno omejili plačevanje z gotovino ...*  
 ‘It would also be useful if additional cash payment restrictions were introduced ...’
- b) *... bi bilo prav, če bi vsaj povrnili stroške potovanja ...*  
 ‘... it would be appropriate if at least the travel expenses were reimbursed ...’
- c) *... popolnoma drugače bi bilo, če bi ga [policisti] ustavili na cesti ...*  
 ‘... it would have been totally different if the police had stopped him while driving ...’

A few instances exhibit a non-copular pattern with a full lexical verb in the predicator. The two instances from the sample in (18) involve a concessive relationship.

(18)

- a) *... nič vam ne pomaga, če niste privrženec pitja alkohola, saj tega preprosto ne bodo razumeli ...*  
 ‘it’s hardly of any help if you’re against alcohol, as they simply won’t understand it’  
 (Implicature: Although you’re against alcohol, that’s hardly of any help: they simply won’t understand it and will expect you to drink and get drunk like everybody else.)
- b) *... jih ni vznemirjalo, če smo si zaradi [...] gneče kar preko njih utirali pot naprej ...*  
 ‘... it didn’t seem to disturb them if we were pushing our way through the crowd right over them ...’  
 (Implicature: Although we were pushing our way through the crowd right over them, that didn’t seem to disturb them.)

Adverbial meaning is also expressed by *če*-clauses that function as objects and appositives. The object clause in (19a) expresses concession, the appositive clause in (19b) condition.

(19)

- a) *Ne zameri torej, če se bom oglasil šele takrat, ko mi bo “čas ostajal” ...*  
 ‘So I hope you’ll understand if I post a comment only when I have “time to spare” ...’
- b) *Enako kot me zmoti to, če nekdo napiše takšno traparijo ...*  
 ‘Just like it annoys me if someone writes such nonsense ...’

The fact that these *če*-clauses carry adverbial meaning makes them difficult to distinguish from adverbial adjuncts. Nevertheless, they are still nominal constituents. If they appear as answers to questions, they correspond to *kaj* (English *what*) rather than to *v katerem primeru/kdaj*, etc. (English *in which case/when*, etc.), compare (20 a-b) and (20c-d):

(20)

- a) *Kaj je praktično? – Če sveže začimbe gojimo kot lončnice.*  
 ‘What is practical? – If one grows fresh herbs in pots.’
- b) *Kaj vam nič ne pomaga? – Če niste privrženec alkohola.*  
 ‘What isn’t of any help? – If you’re against alcohol.’
- c) *\*V katerem primeru/kdaj je praktično? – Če sveže začimbe gojimo kot lončnice.*  
 ‘In which case/when is it practical? – If one grows fresh herbs in pots.’
- d) *\*V katerem primeru/kdaj vam nič ne pomaga? – Če niste privrženec alkohola.*  
 ‘In which case/when isn’t it of any help? – If you’re against alcohol.’

### 3.2.5 Nominal or adverbial?

The analysis has also shown that there are a few instances in the sample that can be analysed either as nominal or as adverbial clauses, as can be observed in examples like (21a-b). This double nature becomes evident if we use such clauses as answers to questions, in the object versus the adjunct position, respectively, (21c-f). As such, these examples differ markedly from cases reported and discussed in section 3.2.4 (see examples (20)).

(21)

- a) *... so naveličani, če jim drugi govorijo[,] kaj naj naredijo.*  
 ‘...become annoyed if others tell them what to do.’

- b) *Sem vesela, če pride kateri na vrt na obisk.*  
'I'm happy if any of them come to visit in the garden.'
- c) *Česa so naveličani? – Če/Da jim drugi govorijo, kaj naj naredijo.*  
'What annoys them? – If/that others tell them what to do.'
- d) *V katerem primeru/kdaj so naveličani? – Če/ko jim drugi govorijo, kaj naj naredijo.*  
'In which case/when are they annoyed? – If/when others tell them what to do.'
- e) *Česa sem vesela? – Če/Da pride kateri na vrt na obisk.*  
'What makes me happy? – If/That any/some of them come to visit in the garden.'
- f) *V katerem primeru/kdaj sem vesela? – Če/Ko pride kateri na vrt na obisk.*  
'In which case/when am I happy? – If/When any/some of them come to visit in the garden.'

Our corpus also yielded an example that seems to allow three interpretations: statement-like (*da* 'that'), indirect question (*ali* 'whether'), and adverbial (*če* 'if'), (22).

- (22) *Slušalke so tako pametne, da zaznajo tudi, če si jih delite s prijateljem ...*  
'These earbuds are so smart that they also detect that/whether/if you share them with a friend ...'

In contrast to (21), however, the *če*-clause in (22) cannot appear as the answer to *in which case/when* (23c), so it cannot be analysed syntactically as an adverbial adjunct. It remains a nominal constituent (23a-b), its adverbial meaning emerging as an implicature (23d).

- (23)
- a) *Kaj zaznajo? – Če/Da si jih delite s prijateljem.*  
'What do they detect? – If/That you share them with a friend ...'
  - b) *Kaj zaznajo? – Če/Ali si jih delite s prijateljem ali ne.*  
'What do they detect? – If/Whether you share them with a friend or not ...'
  - \*c) *V katerem primeru/Kdaj zaznajo? – Če/Ko si jih delite s prijateljem.*  
'In which case do they detect? – If/When you share them with a friend ...'
  - d) *Če si jih delite s prijateljem, slušalke to zaznajo.*  
'If you share them with a friend, the earbuds detect that (i.e., that you share them with a friend).'

Nevertheless, the example is noteworthy as it brings together interrogative and adverbial interpretations. As pointed out by Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 975), the formal overlap between conditional and interrogative markers (in our case *če* ‘if’) reflects an obvious semantic connection between conditions and questions. As shown in (24) below, the fulfilment of a condition in fact relies on the affirmative answer to a polar question (2002, 970).

- (24) *Ali si slušalke delite s prijateljem? Če da, potem slušalke to zaznajo.*  
 ‘Do you share the earbuds with a friend? If so, the earbuds detect that.’

#### 4 Conclusion

The present study investigates the usage and semantic implications of the Slovenian subordinator *če* (‘if’). To examine a sample of contemporary uses, relevant instances were extracted from the corpus Slovenian Web (slWaC 2.1).

A manual analysis of the instances in the sample reveals that the subordinator *če* exhibits both structural and semantic polyfunctionality. It is predominantly employed to introduce adverbial clauses with the primary meaning of condition. However, several other meanings have been identified among the corpus examples, including time, concession, cause/reason, exception, manner, and comparison. These additional meanings are considered to be implicatures of the primary, conditional one. The most prevalent implicature is the temporal one, wherein the verb in the conditional clause typically expresses an iterative action in the indicative mood. Furthermore, the corpus also contains instances of *če*-clauses that convey only one of the secondary meanings, a phenomenon observed when *če* is combined with other subordinators.

Nominal *če*-clauses, on the other hand, occur in the sample as indirect questions and statements. They primarily function as subjects and objects, to a lesser extent also as complements and appositions. A distinct subset in the sample is represented by *če*-clauses that are clearly nominal but at the same time highly reminiscent of adverbial clauses by virtue of their meaning. Another minor group consists of *če*-clauses that can be interpreted both as adverbial and as nominal clauses.

The sample contains only a few attributive clauses, all of which postmodify adjectival heads. We show that these clauses are structurally attributive but nominal in nature (i.e., they are indirect questions). It should be noted that our analysis of such cases diverges from the traditional Slovenian analysis of subordinate attributive clauses

(Toporišič 2004, Žele 2016, Gabrovšek and Žele 2019, Pogorelec 2021 [1964]), which treats cases like apposition as attributive clauses.

The research has identified cases of subordinate *če*-clauses that clearly demonstrate that the traditional syntactic and semantic classifications of subordinate clauses should be viewed as a cline rather than a set of independent, unconnected categories. Semantically, there are evident overlaps between circumstantial meanings such as condition, time, and concession. Syntactically, some subordinate clauses are indeterminate regarding their status, allowing both adverbial and nominal analysis. What is more, there is a clear overlap between semantics and syntax, as some subordinate *če*-clauses with an uncontested nominal status give rise to adverbial interpretation.

Due to space limitations, the paper has only briefly addressed the parallel usage of English *if*. Nevertheless, by comparing the descriptions from general (Quirk et al. 1999, Huddleston and Pullum 2002) and specialised sources (Declerck and Reed 2001) with those from our own research, we can conclude that the two subordinators are indeed highly comparable in both syntax and semantics. Both introduce adverbial clauses with a predominantly conditional meaning; however, they can also convey some secondary adverbial meanings such as time, concession, exception, cause/reason, comparison, and manner as a result of implicature. Additionally, *če* and *if* introduce nominal clauses functioning as subjects, objects, subject complements and appositive clauses. While in English these nominal clauses are typically indirect questions, our analysis has shown that Slovenian *če*-nominal clauses – though by and large indirect questions – can also occur as indirect statements in contemporary and spontaneous language use, i.e., being semantically and syntactically equivalent to subordinate *da*-clauses rather than subordinate *ali*-clauses.

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