

16 Conditional constructions

16.1 Hypothetical conditional with dèy ‘if’

The unmarked hypothetical conditional is of the form [S₁ dèy, S₂]. Both antecedent and consequent clauses have main-clause form in the great majority of cases, so their verbs have pronominal suffixes as appropriate. dèy ‘if’ occurs at the end of the antecedent clause, which normally precedes the consequent, though occasional textual examples of postposed antecedent clauses (probably afterthoughts) have turned up. The construction is very common, and often one can often translate dèy as ‘when ...’ instead of as ‘if’. In other words, [S₁ dèy, S₂] can indicate chronological sequencing, as in the description of a complex activity involving multiple sequential actions, as long as there is some connection between these actions (a necessary sequencing, for example). The [S₁ dèy, S₂] construction therefore competes with the explicitly temporal [S₁ (gá:) kân, S₂] construction (§15.xxx).

16.1.1 Regular antecedent clause with pronominal subject suffix

The unmarked AN category for the antecedent is a **perfective-system verb**. The Resultative in suffix *-sà-* is very common with active (non-stative) verbs, though all other perfective-system suffixes (including Perfective *-t ì-* and Recent Perfect *-j è-*) and the unsuffixed Perfective are possible. A pronominal subject is usually expressed as a **pronominal subject suffix** on the verb (see the immediately following section for a distinct pattern with preverbal subject pronominals).

The unmarked AN category for an indicative consequent clause is the **unsuffixed Imperfective**.

- (xx1) a. ñú: [nîm ké] [kó ì: ⁿ-nàrⁿ-ú]
 millet [now Top] [NonhP child-bear-VblN]
 dó: -yè-∅ dèy
 arrive-Perf-3SgS **if**
 ‘the millet now, when the bearing of its ear (=grain spike) has arrived,
 ...’ **2004.3.6**
- b. nî-nǐ: nùm-â: -∅ dèy,
 Rdp-sun fall-Perf-3SgS **if**,
 [àná ǎ: -rⁿù-m] mǎn-sà-bà dèy, ...
 [village male-child-Pl] assemble-Reslt-3PlS **if**, ...
 ‘when the sun has set, (and) when the boys of the village have gathered
 together, ...’ **2004.3.8**

- c. [[àrgà núṅò lè] kò] mà:ná-jè-bà dèy,
 [[side Dem in] be.Nonh] think-**RecPf-3PIS** **if**,
 jìṅìṅé-bà
 drive.ahead.**Impf-3PIS**
 ‘If they think that they (=birds) are on this side (of the village), they
 (=line of villagers) will drive them straight ahead.’ **2004.3.8**
- d. yǎ:-yè-bè dèy [àná ìnè gàrú-m] mòrⁿó-bà
 go-**Perf-2PIS** **if** [village person old-Pl] assemble.**Impf-3PIS**
 ‘When you-Pl have gone (to the village), the village elders will
 assemble.’ **2004.3.10**
- e. [ògò-rò-lú:-Ø déy] [kó tèmè-gó-w]
 [fast-Inch-**Perf.Neg-2SgS** **if**] [NonhO find-**Impf.Neg-2SgS**]
 ‘if you-Sg are not quick, you won’t find (=catch) it.’ **2004.3.16**

The consequent may also be an **imperative**.

- (xx2) [ú nò] é:-sà-w dèy [íné-m lè] té:ré
 [2Sg now] see-Reslt-2SgS **if** [person-Pl Dat] show.**Imprt**
 ‘If you-Sg have seen (it), show (it) to the people!’ **2004.3.6**

dèy is often added to a clause with clitic ≡ỹ (or variant) ‘it is’.

- (xx3) [[[nìṅè-dá:ṅá bérè]≡ỹ] dèy] ñé:-wⁿ
 [[[sauce.L-pot in]≡it.is] **if**] eat.**Impf-2SgS**
 ‘If it’s in the sauce pot, you-Sg will eat it.’

The sequence in the middle of (xx4), literally ‘if that doesn’t happen’ with a negative form of táṅá- ‘happen’, is idiomatic (‘otherwise’).

- (xx4) [wòmó mèyⁿ ↑] [kó dô:-w],
 [weed(verb) and] [NonhO reach.**Impf-2SgS**]
 [kó≡ỹ tàṅà-lí-Ø dèy ↑]
 [Nonh≡Foc **happen-Perf.Neg-3SgS** **if**]
 ñú: bérè-gó-w
 millet get-**Impf.Neg-2SgS**
 ‘You-Sg will weed (the field) until you reach (its end); otherwise, you won’t
 get any millet’ **2004.3.5**

16.1.2 Antecedent with L-toned preverbal subject pronominal

Many examples above illustrate the predominant pattern whereby a pronominal subject in the antecedent clause is expressed as a suffix on the verb. However, the

subject is occasionally expressed by an L-toned preverbal subject pronominal. Such pronominals are elsewhere characteristic of relative clauses (§14.xxx). Arguably, this indicates that such antecedents end in participialized verbs (with Nonhuman -Ø suffix).

The textual examples I have all involve a marked AN suffix, usually Recent Perfect -jè- (three examples), once each Perfective -tì- and Resultative -sà- (xx1).

- (xx1) a. tǐn bè dé: jěs-sà-Ø dèy
 wood **3PIS.L** carry bring-**Reslt**-Ppl.Nonh if
 ‘when they have carried and brought the wood (here)’. (jè : ré-)
2004.3.5
- b. wòmó ù dògó-jè-Ø dèy [ká:ⁿ nè]
 weed(verb) **2SgS.L** finish-**RecPf**-Ppl.Nonh if [even now]
 ‘even when you-Sg have finished weeding (the field)’ **2004.3.6**
- c. kó kò á:-jè-Ø táṅà: dèy, ...
 NonhO **NonhS.L** catch-**RecPf**-Ppl.Nonh happen if, ...
 ‘when it (=trap) has just caught it, ...’ **2004.3.16**
- d. [[ìnè tòyⁿó bè ô:-n] lè]
 [[person.L truth 3PIS.L give.Perf.HL-Ppl.Sg] Dat]
 tòyⁿó bè ó:-tì-Ø dèy,
 truth **3PIS.L** give-**Perf**-Ppl.Nonh if,
 [[tòyⁿó sà:-rá-n kùⁿ] lè] [tòyⁿó-sà:-rá kùⁿ]
 [[truth have-Neg-Ppl.Sg Def] Dat] [truth-have.Neg Def]
 wò-rú bè té:ré-jè-Ø dèy
 3Sg-Dat **3PIS.L** show-**RecPf**-Ppl.Nonh if
 ‘When they have given truth (=haved ruled in favor of) the one to whom they give truth, (and) when they have shown (=explained) to the one who is in the wrong that he was in the wrong, ...’ **2004.4.6**

Informants also accepted versions of these clauses with subject pronominal suffix instead of preverbal subject pronominals, e.g. [tǐn bè jěs-sà-bà dèy] with 3Pl subject suffix -bà in (xxx.a). Conditional antecedents therefore make only unsystematic use of L-toned preverbal subject pronominals, in contrast to their obligatory usage in relatives.

For ... sâ: dèy (accompanied by L-toned subject pronominal), where sâ: appears to be a specialized unsuffixed Perfective with H(H...)L tone overlay, see §15.xxx.

16.1.3 Extensions of dèy (dé nè, dé kè, dèy kâ:, tǎ̀ṅà: dèy)

Certain elements may follow dèy. One such is nè ‘now’, a quasi-topicalizing morpheme (§19.xxx). The combination, usually pronounced dé nè (or déy nè), can be used in a second conditional following on a first if there is some parallelistic logic to the sequence. For example, in (xx1), from the middle of a long text on crop pests, the interviewer changes the subject from grasshoppers to birds.

- (xx1) sà:j-î:ⁿ≡yⁿ dé nè, yǒ:-jîⁿ≡î: kárⁿá-bà
 bird-child≡it.is **if** **now**, how≡Foc do.Impf-3PIS
 ‘Now if it’s (=turning to) birds, what do they (=people) do (about them)?’
2004.3.8

Topic particle ké is attested but uncommon with dèy. The combination is pronounced dé ké (xx2).

- (xx2) [tòyⁿó≡yⁿ dé ké]
 [truth≡it.is **if** Top]
 ‘If it’s the truth (=frankly), ...’

A particle kâ:ⁿ ‘also, too’ is occasionally added to dèy. The contexts are similar to those for dé nè (see above). The dèy kâ:ⁿ sequence is distinct from cases where kâ:ⁿ replaces dèy, where the sense is ‘even if’ (see §16.xxx, just below). In (xx3), the interviewee takes up the new topic (birds) proposed by the interviewer in (xx2) above.

- (xx3) sà:j-î:ⁿ≡yⁿ dèy kâ:ⁿ, ...
 bird-child≡it.is **if** **also**, ...
 ‘If it’s birds too (in addition to grasshoppers), ...’ **2004.3.8**

Another common extension of dèy is tǎ̀ṅà: dèy. The form tǎ̀ṅà: is irregular, but it is certainly connected to the verb tǎ̀ṅá- ‘become, happen’. In other morphological shapes, the verb tǎ̀ṅá- is fairly common with a preceding clause in the sense ‘(it) happen(ed) that ...’. Therefore [S₁ tǎ̀ṅà: dèy, S₂] can be glossed ‘if it happens (to be the case that) S₁, ...’. A common variant is tǎ̀ṅà dèy, with what appears to be an unsuffixed Perfective tǎ̀ṅà with L-tone.

tǎ̀ṅà: dèy (xx4.a) and tǎ̀ṅà dèy (xx4.b) are used in contexts where a protagonist has little or no control over the fulfillment of S₁, as in ‘if the next day happens to be sunny’, or ‘if it happens that the harvest is a good one’.

- (xx4) a. sà:j-î:ⁿ≡yⁿ tǎ̀ṅà: dèy, dà:yá
 bird-child≡it.is **happen** **if**, night
 [é àná]≡y ná:≡kò tǎ̀ṅà: dèy, ...

[2PIP village]=Foc spend.night.Impf=be.Nonh **happen if**, ...
 ‘If it happens to be birds (that are the crop pests), if it happens that they
 (=birds) have been in your-Pl village at night, ...’ **2004.3.8**

- b. àrⁿà-kújú cì-cé:nè-∅ tǎ̀nà dèy,
 year be.good-be.good-3SgS **happen if**,
 kàjú wǎr-sà-w tǎ̀nà dèy, [kàjú kùⁿ]
 calabash farm-Reslt-2SgS **happen if**, [calabash Def]
 [á nì-bàrⁿà bíré ∴ fú: ⇒] mà òjù-ká:
 [2SgP dry.season work all] Poss road
 mà íjé ù-rú íjé bèr'é=kò
 Poss position 2Sg-Dat stand can.Impf=be.Nonh
 ‘If the year happens to have turned out well, if you have raised gourd
 (=calabash) plants, the calabash plants (and) all of your dry-season work
 can stand up (independently) on the road for you (=can fulfill some of
 your needs).’ **2004.3.9**

I have one example where tǎ̀nà: in tǎ̀nà: dèy has the sense ‘become’ and
 takes an NP complement (xx5).

- (xx5) nîŋ nèmné ǎ-n tǎ̀nà: dèy
 now scorpion man-Sg **become if**
 ‘Now if the trigger (of the rifle) becomes a man (=is fearless), ...’ **2004.4.4**

For dèy or H-toned déy in participial adverbial clauses, see §15.xxx, above.

16.2 Alternative ‘if’ particles (cêw, tǎ̀n, kâ: ⁿ)

Alternatively, a particle other than dèy can be used. The forms regularly used in this
 way are listed in (xx1).

- (xx1) a. cêw ‘all, entirely’
 b. tǎ̀n ‘only’ (<Fulfulde)
 c. kâ: ⁿ ‘even’
 kâ: ⁿ nè ‘also, too’

The nuances are only slightly different from those with dèy. cêw ‘all, entirely’ is
 a strong ending for a clause (or sequence of connected clauses), and is therefore a
 good boundary marker to separate the antecedent from the consequent in a structurally
 complex conditional. The use of ‘all’ in conditionals is a regional phenomenon; it is
 certainly widespread in Songhay languages.

(xx2) òyǒ-n nì-dí:ⁿ yěy-yà-Ø dèy, górⁿò
 chief-Sg here come-Perf-3SgS **if**, means
 yé jîné-m cêw, pé:jú wò-rú cê:ⁿ-m
 exist have.Perf.L-1SgS **all**, sheep 3Sg-Dat slaughter.Impf-1SgS
 ‘If the chief comes here and if I have the means, I’ll slaughter a sheep for him.’

cêw here is optional, and could be replaced by a second dèy.

tán, a Fulfulde borrowing, is confined to use in conditionals. This is not the usual ‘only’ particle in Jamsay, see sǎy ‘only’ in §19.xxx. The construction [S₁ tán, S₂] suggests that the fulfillment of the antecedent eventuality leads immediately to that of the consequent. A translation like ‘as soon as’ is appropriate in some contexts.

(xx3) íné-m yèré mǒyⁿ-yⁿè-bà tán, ...
 person-Pl come be.together-Perf-3PlS **only**, ...
 ‘as soon as they gather together, (they ask each other) ...’ **2004.3.6**

Finally, [S₁ kâ:ⁿ, S₂] can be glossed ‘even if S₁, S₂’, stating that the eventuality S₂ will occur in spite of, rather than because of, the fulfillment of that in S₁. For other uses of kâ:ⁿ ‘also, too, even’, see §19.xxx. This particle is distinct from homophone kâ:ⁿ ‘each, any’.

(xx4) a. tàrá kùⁿ yà:-gó-w kâ:ⁿ
 collective.hunt Def go-Impf.Neg-2SgS **even**
 [àná bérè ké] dègè-gó-w
 [village in Top] spend.day-Impf.Neg-2SgS
 ‘Even if you-Sg don’t go on the collective hunt, you won’t (be able to) spend the day in the village.’ **2004.3.3**

b. [yéy kùⁿ] [mí :. ú :.] nîm tówⁿó≡yⁿ kâ:ⁿ
 [going Def] [1Sg 2Sg] now companion≡it.is.1Pl **even**
 ‘Waling along [topic], even if you-Sg and I are traveling companions, (we keep our distance).’ **2004.5.1** (‘it is’ clitic ≡y here may be the 1Pl conjugated form, or it may be unconjugated)

16.3 Willy-nilly and disjunctive antecedents (‘whether X or Y ...’)

Willy-nilly antecedents are expressed by juxtaposing the positive and negative versions of the pseudo-antecedent, with a final cêw or fú: ‘all’ (xx1).

(xx1) bè-rú ér≡kò ⇒ èl-lá-Ø :. fú:
 3Pl-Dat sweet≡be.Nonh sweet-Neg-3SgS **all**

‘whether it pleases them or it doesn’t please them’ (érù) **2004.3.18**

Other disjunctive antecedents have a similar structure, the two clauses being directly juxtaposed with a concluding cêw (xx2).

(xx2) [jìrⁿé cì-cé:nè-Ø] ñì-ñówⁿò-Ø cêw
 [wet.season Rdp-be.good.Perf-3SgS] Rdp-be.ruined.Perf-3SgS all
 ‘whether the wet season is good, or is ruined (=poor), ...’ **2004.3.9**

For a willy-nilly antecedent involving the reduplicated Perfective cì-cé:nè- ‘be good’ and its unusual negative counterpart cì-cé:nè-lì-, see §10.xxx.

In (xx3), fú: ‘all’ at the end of a manner adverbial implies an unexpressed disjunctive antecedent (‘regardless of whether ...’). The context involves someone who flees the area to avoid paying an indemnity and comes back only years later.

(xx3) dàyà-lú:-Ø déy kâ:ⁿ nè,
 leave-Perf.Neg-2SgS if too now,
 [dì:ⁿ èné jòwó-sà-Ø ∴ fú:]
[manner.L LogoS run-Reslt-Ppl.Nonh all]
 yěy-yà-Ø dèy tójô:-Ø
 come-Perf-3SgS if pay.Impf-3SgS
 ‘If you have not left off (=forgiven the indemnity owed you), regardless of the fact that he fled, when he does (finally) come (back) he will pay.’
2004.3.10

16.4 ‘Unless’ antecedent (≡y là: dèy)

An ‘unless’ conditional has an antecedent ending in ≡y là: dèy, literally ‘if it is not (the case that ...)’. This is just dèy ‘if’ added to the regular negation of clitic ≡y ‘it is’.

- (xx1) a. [[ú≡y kó jíré-n]≡î: là: dèy,
 [[2Sg≡Foc NonhO tend-Ppl.Sg]≡it.is **Neg if,**
 [kó êm] [ù cé≡y là:]
 [NonhP milk] [2SgP property≡it.is Neg]
 ‘Unless you-Sg are the one who tends them (=cattle), their milk doesn’t belong to you.’ **2004.3.10**
- b. hâl [[àⁿà-kùjù làyá]≡y là: dèy]
 until [[year.L other]≡it.is **Neg if],**
 wó è:-gó-w
 3SgO see-Impf.Neg-2SgS

‘(He will flee) to the extent that you won’t see him, unless it is (=until) some other year.’ **2004.3.10**

For more on the $\equiv \hat{y}$ $l\grave{a}$: $d\grave{e}y$ construction, see §11.xxx.

16.5 ‘Supposing that’ antecedent ($g\acute{a}$: - $j\grave{e}$ - $b\grave{a}$ $d\grave{e}y$)

The phrase $g\acute{a}$: - $j\grave{e}$ - $b\grave{a}$ $d\grave{e}y$, literally ‘if they have said’ can occur after a sentence functioning as conditional antecedent. Here the nuance is ‘supposing that ...’. $c\hat{e}w$ ‘all’ can replace $d\grave{e}y$ ‘if’.

- (xx1) $n\acute{e}y^n$ $y\grave{e}r\acute{e}$ $m\grave{e}y^n$
 now come and
 $\check{o}:\grave{g}$ $k\acute{a}y^n-y^n\grave{e}-\emptyset$ $g\acute{a}$: - $j\grave{e}$ - $b\grave{a}$ $c\hat{e}w$
 sweat(noun) happen-Perf-3SgS say-RecPerf-3PlS all
 $[c\grave{e}:$ $[k\acute{o}$ $b\check{a}:$] $\grave{e}m\grave{e}$ $l\hat{e}:-\emptyset$ $k\hat{a}:\grave{n}]$ $k\grave{o}:-r\acute{o}$
 [thing [Nonh equal] 1PlS.L fear.Impf-Ppl.Nonh also] be.Nonh-Neg
 ‘Now if it (=hot weather) has come, supposing that the hot season has happened. Then there is nothing that we fear more than it (=cobra).’ ($\grave{o}:\acute{g}\acute{u}$, $k\acute{a}r^n\acute{a}$ -) **2004.3.5**

16.6 Truncated antecedent

A type of reduced conditional occurs in a construction where the content of the antecedent and that of the consequent are identical.

- (xx1) $[b\grave{e}r\equiv\hat{i}:$ $c\hat{e}:\grave{n}-w^n]$ $c\hat{e}:\grave{n}-w^n$,
 [goat \equiv Foc slaughter.Impf-2SgS] slaughter.Impf-2SgS
 $[p\acute{e}:\acute{j}\equiv\hat{i}:$ $c\hat{e}:\grave{n}-w^n]$ $c\hat{e}:\grave{n}-w^n$,
 [sheep \equiv Foc slaughter.Impf-2SgS] slaughter.Impf-2SgS
 ‘If you-Sg are going to slaughter a goat, you slaughter (it); if you’re going to slaughter a sheep, you slaughter (it).’ **2004.3.19**

This is a typically Jamsay way of saying ‘you’ll (perhaps) slaughter either a goat or a sheep’.

16.7 Counterfactual conditional

Counterfactuals are characterized by the use of the Past particle $j\grave{a}:\grave{n}$ (§10.xxx) in both antecedent and consequent clauses. Occasionally $j\grave{a}:\grave{n}$ is omitted in the antecedent (xx1.d). The antecedent ends in the usual ‘if’ particle $d\grave{e}y$, which follows

jì:ⁿ. A regular verb in a positive antecedent is typically in the **Resultative** (suffix -sà-), as in (xx1.a-b). A quasi-verb (wò- ‘be’, sà- ‘have’) or defective stance verb appears in its usual L-toned unsuffixed Perfective form (xx1.c-d). A regular verb in the consequent normally appears in the unsuffixed Imperfective form.

- (xx1) a. [má î-n] mí bãs-sà-∅ jì:ⁿ dèy,
 [1SgP child-Sg] 1SgO help-**Reslt**-3SgS **Past if**,
 ógù bèr é j è r é - m̄ jì:ⁿ
 fast get harvest.**Impf**-1SgS **Past**
 [kì-ká: mà y é r é - w è l è]
 [Rdp-grasshopper Poss come.H-Caus.L in]
 ‘If my son had helped me, I would have (gotten and) harvested quickly,
 before the locusts came.’ (bàrá-)
- b. nì-dî:ⁿ yěs-sà-bà jì:ⁿ dèy,
 here come-**Reslt**-3PlS **Past if**,
 bé w ǒ ò - m jì:ⁿ
 3PIO kill.**Impf**-1SgS **Past**
 ‘If they had come here, I’d have killed them.’ (yèr é-)
- c. lù:ró wó c é r è - ∅ kùⁿ, [àná b é r è]
 snake 3SgO bite.Perf.HL-Ppl.Nonh Def, [village in]
 wò-∅ jì:ⁿ dèy, bàyá:-∅ jì:ⁿ
be.Hum.L-3SgS **Past if**, be.cured.**Impf**-3SgS **Past**
 ‘When the snake bit him, if he had been in a town, he would have survived.’
- d. bú:dù yé sà-m dèy, wò-rú ô:-m jì:ⁿ
 money exist **have.L**-1SgS **if**, 3Sg-Dat give.**Impf**-1SgS **Past**
 ‘If I had had any money, I’d have given it to him/her.’

Examples involving **negation** are in (xx2). A negative antecedent has a Perfective Negative verb (xx2.a), while a negative consequent has an Imperfective Negative verb (xx2.b).

- (xx2) a. jòŋ-jóŋó-n yèl-lì-∅ dèy,
 healing.L-heal-H-Ppl.Sg come-**Perf.Neg**-3SgS **if**,
 núwⁿ ó - m̄ jì:ⁿ
 die.**Impf**-1SgS **Past**
 ‘If the healer had’nt come, I’d have died.’ (yèr é-)
- b. màbîl yěs-sà-∅ jì:ⁿ dèy,
 vehicle come-**Reslt**-3SgS **Past if**,
 yè-dî:ⁿ nà:-gó-m jì:ⁿ

there spend.night-**Impf.Neg-1SgS Past**
 'If the vehicle had come, I would not have spent the night there.'
 (yêrɛ-)

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