

Pragmatics, Framing & Rationality

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The psychology of decision-making poses challenges to the view that people make rational decisions and judgments. One central challenge is the framing effect, which occurs when supposedly equivalent information (e.g. 95% fat-free versus 5% fat) prompts different outcomes, apparently violating description invariance. Two principal framing effects – risky-choice and goal framing (Levin, Schneider & Gaeth, 1998) – feature conditionals prominently. In goal framing, for instance, people supposedly should treat sentences (1) and (2) equivalently.

1) If you give up smoking, you will decrease your risk of lung cancer.

2) If you don't give up smoking, you won't decrease your risk of lung cancer.

The framing literature has not considered in depth whether these sentences really should be equivalent, even though equating them is classically fallacious (Corner & Hahn, 2009). The literature has also yielded inconsistent data on whether such sentences are treated equivalently (Gallagher & Updegraff, 2012). Framing effects have, however, entered 'Nudge' policy programs (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). My doctoral project focuses on goal frames. I intend to present data from one part of my PhD, which looks at what people learn from these conditionals when they are uttered by sources of different reliabilities. I am currently collecting data on such testimonial uses of conditionals. These data speak both to philosophical theories of testimony (e.g. Bovens & Hartmann, 2003) and to practical questions about the goal framing.