In case for Kees*

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1   Introduction

The complex grammatical preposition and subordinator *in case* (Hengeveld &
Wanders 2007: 213–214) has existed in English since at least the mid-fourteenth
century. As a preposition it is linked to the following noun phrase by *of*; as a
subordinator it is immediately followed by the subordinate clause:

(1)   In case of emergency, do not use the lift.
(2)   I will take an umbrella in case it rains.

It is complex in consisting of more than one word; it is grammatical in not
accepting any modification or variation of the noun *case*. It thus differs from the
complex lexical preposition *in the case of* (Hasselgård 2020) and from the
sequence *in cases of*:

(3)   In the unlikely case of a loss of pressure, oxygen masks will fall from the
        panel above your head.
(4)   In severe cases of depression, patients experience feelings of
        worthlessness.

Hengeveld (1991: 16), reporting on the EUROTYP theme group on adverbial
relations, operators, and connectives, identifies subordinate clauses introduced
by *in case* as denoting a 'potential circumstance', which differs from a
'condition' in that it "does not affect the validity of the main clause". In later
work, he (1998: 350) identifies 'potential circumstance' as being expressed by a
nonfactual independent-time-reference second-order adverbial clause.
        The purpose of this squib is to review the status of *in case* as a complex
preposition/subordinator of potential circumstance and its occurrence in certain
contexts as a conditional marker. After a short history of *in case* in Section 2,
Section 3 will offer an FDG interpretation of Declerck & Reed's (2001) corpus-
based classification of the main meanings of *in case*. Section 4 will turn to the

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* Mackenzie & Olbertz (2013) was designed as a casebook in Functional Discourse Grammar
but also as a Keesboek compiled in homage to Kees Hengeveld. This squib continues that
paranomastic conceit.

use of *just in case* as a bidirectional conditional marker in formal-syntactic argumentation and of *in case* in non-native written academic prose. Section 5 moves on to a classification of all instances of *in case* in a corpus of spoken non-native academic English, leading to a brief conclusion in Section 6.

2   Brief history of *in case*

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), s.v. *in case*, the oldest attestations of *in case* as a subordinator are conditional in meaning, being defined as equivalent to 'if' or 'in the event of'. The earliest record is from 1357. An example given from a London will of 1418 is (5):

(5)   Yn case I deye.
      'if I die, in the event of my death'

OED's most recent citation of this sense is from 1943, significantly – see §4.1 below – from the *Philosophical Review*:

(6)   In case an A proposition should have a null subject, in the conventional
      sense, and a not-null predicate, it is then a false proposition.

The dictionary finds this sense to be "now *rare*" (emphasis in original).
       The OED attests the potential circumstance meaning from 1588 onwards, originally in Scottish usage:

(7)   Thou sall pay him the price of his labour … incaice he cry to God agains
      the.

This later sense, circumscribed by the dictionary as '[i]n provision against the event that, so as to provide for the possibility that; lest it happen that', persists to this day. The potential circumstance may be favourable or, as in all but one of OED's examples, inauspicious; cf. (8) and (9) respectively.

(8)   She kept looking, in case she might find her watch somewhere in the
      house.
(9)   She made herself a list, in case she forgot anything.

3   Five senses of *in case*; an FDG classification

The most complete account of *in case* to date is found in Declerck & Reed (2001: 21–25), in the course of a thorough corpus-based treatment of conditionals in English. Their data are drawn from the corpora available to them at the time, supplemented with the texts of numerous literary novels; both the corpora and the novels are representative of British English.[1] They distinguish five senses of clauses introduced by *in case*, one of which – and this above all justifies the inclusion of *in case* in their study of conditionals – is the conditional sense, which they find, without further evidence, to be "more common in American English" (2001: 23). The first three of the four remaining senses, which they consider to be "more normal" (2001: 21), develop the notion of an inauspicious potential circumstance outlined in §2.

These remaining senses are: (a) precautionary, (b) preventative, (c) apprehensional and (d) relevance-creating, exemplified by the following sentences respectively:

(10)   a.   He prepared notes for his speech in case he was nervous.
       b.   I kept talking to him in case he passed out.
       c.   She worked long hours in case she lost her job.
       d.   In case you're curious, we are not getting married.

All of Declerck & Reed's five senses, including the conditional sense, can be usefully interpreted in terms of the layered structure of FDG, initially developed by Hengeveld (1989) and refined and augmented in later work. The precautionary sense invokes a negatively evaluated possible situation; in FDG terms (Hengeveld & Olbertz 2018), this negatively evaluated situation is formulated as an episode implicitly bearing objective epistemic modality, which can become explicit through the addition of *might* (in (10a), *in case he might be nervous*). The preventative sense is oriented to bringing about the (desirable) non-actualization of a state-of-affairs; in FDG terms, this state-of-affairs thus implicitly carries boulomaic e-modality, which may be reflected in the addition of subjective-equivalent *should* (Boyd 1986; in (10b), *in case he should pass out*).[2] The apprehensional sense is associated with the fear experienced by one of the participants in the state-of-affairs, and (10c) can consequently be

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[1] Only the Brown Corpus and the *Wall Street Journal* corpus represent US English in their study.

[2] The association of precautionary *in case* with the episode layer and preventative *in case* with the state-of-affairs layer is supported by Declerck & Reed's (2001: 22) observation that any (absolute) tense can occur in the former, while only the relative tense 'posterior' applies to preventatives.

paraphrased as *She worked long hours for fear of losing her job*, intimating that the *in case*-clause here involves participant-oriented f^c-modality.[3] The relevance-creating sense operates at FDG's Interpersonal Level, providing a justification for issuing what is always a declarative illocution, and thus is an example of illocutionary modification. The conditional sense, finally, involves a relation between two propositional contents, each with its own truth value.[4] The proposed classification is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Declerck & Reed's (2001) taxonomy of *in case* and an FDG classification

Declerck & Reed	FDG Level	FDG Layer	Modality type
Relevance-creating	Interpersonal	Illocutionary	–
Conditional	Representational	Propositional content	–
Precautionary	Representational	Episode	Epistemic
Preventative	Representational	State-of-affairs	Boulomaic
Apprehensional	Representational	Configurational property	Participant-oriented

4 Recent uses of *in case*

Two new uses can be identified as having revived the conditional sense: (a) *just in case* occurring in formal-syntactic argumentation to indicate bidirectional conditionality; (b) *in case* introducing a conditional clause in non-native academic English.

4.1 Just in case *as a biconditional*

Consider examples such as the following:

(11) An apparent contrast appears just in case the same verb may appear sometimes with and sometimes without a locative (or directional) complement. (Fillmore, 'The case for case', 1968: 12)

(12) [W]hy in Ouhalla's account does Agr project just in case the verb is finite? (Tallerman 1997: 631)

This usage is confined to the genre of formal logic and syntax, as observed by Pullum (2006), who attributes it originally to American scholars and to others under their influence, and May (2009), who describes US graduate students'

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[3] The distinctions among the three senses precautionary, preventative and apprehensional are certainly less watertight than is proposed here; nevertheless, the correspondences with FDG Representational Level layers are striking and illuminating.

[4] *Pace* Kaltenböck & Keizer's (2022: 684) assumption that prototypical conditional clauses are to be analysed as episodes on the basis of their refusing modifiers such as *possibly* or *probably*.

initial confusion and subsequent induction into the recognized jargon. Given the prior existence of 'if and only if' (or 'iff') as fully adequate expressions of biconditionality, this register-specific use of *just in case* has a sociological function as a badge of in-group belonging.

4.2   **In case** *as a conditional in non-native academic English*

The now almost universal use of English as the language of scientific communication, both written and spoken, has triggered the gradual emergence of Non-Native Academic English (NNAE) with its own nascent conventions. These exist in a complex cognitive forcefield involving a multi-dimensional interplay of (a) imperfect knowledge of native norms, these themselves being subject to variability (saliently, 'British' vs 'American' English), (b) the influence of the scientist's own mother tongue, and (c) prior exposure to a variety of non-native inputs, notably in the respective discipline. Consider the following NNAE examples from published sources, anonymized to avoid any stigmatization:

(13)   In case the verb cannot engage in the formation of a coherent construction, some kind of reanalysis is called for.
(14)   In case of a decay deficit, units lose their activation abnormally fast.

The meaning of *in case* is in each instance conditional: in (13), *in case* can be replaced by *if*, and in (14) *in case of* can be replaced by *if there is*. Edwards & Lange (2016) discuss the trigram *in case of*, arguing that examples like (14) involve a blend of contributions from Standard English *in the case of*, such fixed expressions of conditionality as *in case of emergency* (cf. (1) above), the structurally similar but semantically distinct *in case it rains* (cf. (2) above), and – ironically enough – native-language structures such as Dutch *in het geval van*, where the very opportunity for positive transfer is overridden by the other factors (Edwards & Lange 2016: 270).

5   *In case* in spontaneous NNAE

Whereas published Non-Native Academic English is subject to self-editing, copy-editing and proofreading, the spoken English of non-native academics is likely to reveal their unreflective use of *in case*. I have conducted an examination of all instances of *in case* in the English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings corpus (ELFA 2008), containing transcriptions of a million words of English spoken by non-native students and academics in such contexts as doctoral defences, conference papers, and seminar discussions. The speakers, of both sexes and all age groups, came from multiple European countries,

excepting the United Kingdom and Ireland. The events at which they were recorded involved international communication, with English as the lingua franca.

The corpus contains 31 relevant instances of *in case*. Of these, 13 take the form *in case of*,[5] while 18 show *in case* followed by a finite clause; of those 18, there are three instances of the complex subordinator taking the form *in case that*, not acceptable in native English. There are possible indications of linguistic insecurity about the use and syntax of *in case* in such examples as (15)–(17):

(15)   … refer them then in just in case either or in in the case of, the disease getting more severe …

(16)   … in case of because I'm talking about going down to Costa Rica …

(17)   … I maintained that the pool size quite small that in case if I get sterile mutants …

Of the 13 instances of *in case of*, 10 function as topic identifiers (Hasselgård 2020) similar in function to *with regard to*. The remaining 3 take the form *in case of conflict (with Russia)* and are understood as hypothetical conditionals (co-occurring with the auxiliaries *would* or *could*). In Standard English, these forms would appear as *in the case of* and *in the event of* respectively. A likely additional factor here is the influence of speakers' mother tongues: among the academics producing *in case of*, there are native speakers of Lithuanian, Finnish, Russian, Czech and Polish, none of which have articles.

Of the 18 cases where *in case (that)* functions as a complex subordinator, 12 have a conditional sense, as in (18), 4 have a relevance-creating sense, as in (19), and 2 have a precautionary sense, as in (20):

(18)   … there is the problem of er disposal of used oil in case that the the manipulator has been in a radioactive environment …

(19)   … this is stated on page 25 in case you're interested …

(20)   … it's kind of diagnosis er he provides in case the client hasn't had any training …

Analysis of the corpus thus confirms that in spontaneous NNAE, *in case* has a predominantly conditional meaning, which co-exists in the corpus with meanings also encountered in native-speaker usage (the relevance-creating and precautionary senses).

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[5] This includes one instance of *in case on*, which is likely to be a pronunciation or transcription error.

6   Conclusion

The preceding discussion has sketched how, for analysts and learners alike, *in case* is a tricky item to track down, moving as it does through a semantic space that involves such notions as precaution, prevention and apprehension, but also conditionality, evaluation, emotion, negation, purpose, tense and modality; there are multiple opportunities for more probing exploration.

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