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Feruza Melikuziyevna Erkulova
EFL teacher of NamSU faculty of English philology

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TEACHING ENGLISH CONDITIONAL CLAUSES THROUGH
LANGUAGE RESOURCES
Feruza Erkulova Melikuziyevna
EFL teacher of NamSU faculty of English philology

Abstract: In this article is discussed about the teaching English conditional clauses through language Resources. The aim is to develop and improve the students’ language competency of conditionals in an English practice class, therefore in this article has been adopted the approach of descriptive linguistics to the categorization of conditional clauses and teach them through the lexical semantic database and available English corpora

Key words: conditional clauses, modal verbs, hypothetical events, classification, subordinate clauses, sentence structure

The linguistic research on the [if p, then q] syntactic frame in English explores particular complex sentence structures (conditional clauses) from different perspectives – descriptive, pragmatic, functional, and cognitive. Our aim is to develop and improve the students’ language competency of conditionals in an English practice class, therefore we
have adopted the approach of descriptive linguistics to the categorization of conditional clauses and teach them through the lexical semantic database FrameNet and available English corpora such as The British National Corpus (BNC), The Corpus of Contemporary American (COCA), The News on the Web Corpus (NOW), etc.

The descriptive approach is based mostly on formal categorization of the linguistic units both in the subordinate clause (p) that sets up the conditions and the main clause (q) that expresses the consequences. The classification runs along two criteria – the time reference and the nature of the conditions – real/unreal denoted in the subordinate clause. These criteria determine the usage of a particular tense-aspect verb form in the subordinate clause, which in turn evokes the usage of a particular modal verb phrase in the main clause. The formal categorization is then highlighted through the meaning and implicatures of the conditional types.

**Theoretical Background**


**Sentence Structure**

The basic type of a conditional sentence follows the syntactic pattern of a complex sentence with initial subordinate clause (protasis) most often introduced by the subordinating conjunction if.

1) If Abbos reads the book carefully, he will acquire some knowledge of metaphysics.

The subordinate clause is not restricted to initial position only but may also follow the main clause (apodosis).

2) We won’t go bankrupt, if we budget carefully.

The subordinate clause can be introduced with other subordinating conjunctions besides if, such as in case, provided, supposing, unless, assuming, etc.

3) Unless they can get people in the organization to do what must be doing they will not succeed.

4) The meeting will start at 5:30, provided (that) there is a quorum.

5) Assuming (that) everybody agrees, the project will get, the project will get under way next month.

An issue to mention here that will be discussed later on is that parallel to the S-V-O structure of the subordinate clause we can distinguish alternatives with subject-verb inversion that lack a subordinating conjunction.

6) Had I not seen it with my own eyes, I would not have believed it.

Example 6 is an alternative to the basic type “If I had not seen it with my own eyes, I would not have believed it.”

**Types of Conditional Sentences**

Conditional sentences are categorised into open and remote conditionals as regards the time reference both in the *protasis* and the *apodosis* and the respective tense-aspect-modality verb phrases that denote present, future, and past time in the discourse.
Open conditionals

Open conditionals are also considered as ‘real’ as the main clause does not specify whether the condition set up in the subordinate clause is fulfilled or not, though in quite a number of cases the interpretation is that it is inevitable or already decided. The matrix of an open conditional requires present simple or present progressive in the subordinate clause and either present simple or a linguistic unit denoting future-time reference in the main clause – Future simple will do being one of the possibilities.

(7) If Lolal is here, she is/will be in her office.
(8) If it rains tomorrow, we are going to take a taxi.
(9) If you touch that wire, you will get an electric shock.

The semantic categorization of open conditionals is often related to cause and effect as in example (8) or inference as in example (9).

A point to draw attention to is the alternative variant with the modal verb should substituting the conjunction if in a subject-verb inversion word order pattern.

(10) Should you need further information, don’t hesitate to contact us. (standard official letter ending)

(11) Should things go well, it would be nice to see the likes of Darren Patterson and Keith Rowland getting a run.

Examples (10) and (11) illustrate formal context in which that pattern is widely used.

The types of open conditionals are not constrained only to a parallel time-reference in the protasis and the apodosis. Various combinations determined by the respective implicatures can pop up in a natural discourse.

(12) If he knows the answer, he got it from you.

The condition set up in the subordinate clause is regarded as real and is expressed by present simple. The time reference in the apodosis is past, but the condition is interpreted as fulfilled. [CGEL: *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (2003). Cambridge University Press: 743 for details].

Remote conditionals

Remote conditionals are often referred to as unreal as the condition set up in the subordinate clause is hypothetical and evokes a hypothetical consequence in the main clause. Unlike with the open conditionals remote conditionals specify explicitly that the condition is not fulfilled. The hypothetical conditions set up in the subordinate clause are counterfactual to reality, but the distinction between the two types is the time-reference. A hypothetical condition with present and future time reference is grammatically expressed by past simple or past progressive in the subordinate clause, and a past modal verb in the main clause. That usage of past tense is regarded as modal because it does not express temporal meaning. Instead it signifies that the condition is hypothetical.

(13) If she tried harder next time, she would pass the examination.
(14) If he paid the fare, I could/might/would/ should take a taxi.

The interpretation of the condition in sentence (14) is that it is not likely for him to pay the fare. The choice of the past modal depends on the degrees of likelihood within the domain of non-factuality.

(15) If they were alive, they would be moving around.
(16) If they were alive, they could be moving around.

Would in sentence (15) denotes certainty about the event’s occurrence in the non-factual reality, whereas could denotes just a possibility of moving around. In both sentences the interpretation of the condition is that they are not alive.

(17) If she were trying harder, her parents wouldn’t be so anxious. [ACGEL: A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language (1995). Longman Group Limited. : 1010]

The hypothetical indicative was for 1st and 3rd person singular is often substituted for the subjunctive were.

(18) If she was/were still in Paris, she would call on him this evening.

The alternative to the conjunction if is a subject verb inversion with were and should.

(19) Were she still in Paris, she would call on him this evening.

(20) Should she be still in Paris, she would call on him this evening.

The construction be + infinitive (were to) often occurs in hypothetical conditional clauses with present-time reference either with subject verb inversion or introduced after the conjunction if.

(21) But were he to come, he would most likely be invited before the summit starts.

(22) If he were to come, he would most likely be invited before the summit.

A hypothetical conditional with past time reference is grammatically expressed by the hypothetical past perfect or past perfect progressive in the subordinate clause and a past perfective modal in the main clause.

(23) If they had invited him to the conference, he would have attended.

(24) If they had invited him to the conference, he might have attended.

Instead of would, another past perfective modal could be used as regards the degrees of likelihood and the meaning implied. If we substitute might for would in example (24), the interpretation is slightly different.

The perfective modal with might suggests that the speaker speculates about a possibility he/she is not that certain about in the domain of non-factuality as he/she is when using would.

A subject-verb inversion is frequent with remote past conditionals.

(25) Had I had any inkling of this, I would have acted differently.

Example (25) is an alternative to the basic type (26).

(26) If I had had any inkling of this, I would have acted differently.

Just like the case with the open conditionals, remote conditionals are not restricted to parallel time-reference in the protasis and apodosis.

The most distinct and frequent types are the combinations illustrated in examples (27) and (28).

(27) If I had followed your advice, I would be rich now.

The hypothetical condition in the subordinate clause is set up in the past expressed by past perfect, and the hypothetical consequences in the main clause refer to present time and are expressed by a past modal.

(28) If I were ill, I would have stayed at home.

The hypothetical condition is set up at present expressed by the modal past simple, whereas the time-reference in the main clause is past, expressed by past perfect. In both clauses, the hypothetical situation is counterfactual to the designated reality.
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