

Adnan Bujak

Historical overview of conditionals

SAŽETAK

Engleski kondicionali kao takvi su nezaobilazan dio u nastavi engleskog jezika. Veoma često u toku obrazovanja nailazimo na različita tumačenja i objašnjenja engleskih kondicionala i njihovih tipova. Kondicionali kao takvi se proučavaju sa različitih stajališta i veoma često imamo sasvim različite interpretacije istih vrsta kondicionala.

Međutim, veoma su rijetki radovi koji se bave prikazom historijata i razvoja engleskih kondicionala. Cilj ovog rada je bio da se u kratkim crtama prikaže razvoj jezičke strukture engleskih kondicionala kroz historiju pa sve do danas, pružajući istovremeno i pregled najčešćih glagolskih oblika u najranijim kondicionalima.

Ključne riječi: kondicionali, klasifikacija, pregled, historijat, glagolski oblici.

ABSTRACT

English conditionals as such, are an unavoidable part of English language teaching. Very often during our education we may come across different interpretation and explanation about English conditionals and their typology. Conditionals as such are studied from various standpoints and rather frequently we may encounter different interpretations of the same types of conditionals.

However, there are few papers dealing with the historical background and development of English conditionals. The aim of this paper was to briefly explain the development of language structure of English conditionals through history, until present day. It also provides the most common verbal forms used in those early conditionals.

Key words: conditionals, classification, review, history, verb forms

Introduction

For the purpose of this paper, one of the best resources available was the PhD dissertation written by Nils Rotingen (1972) entitled *On the Classification of Conditional Structures in English*. Rotingen provides, for the time period he lived in, a very modern analysis or overview of the theory of classification of the conditionals along with comments for each of the theories. His overview is organized according to individual authors he used and it includes an overview of the works by Henry Sweet, Charles Talbut Onions, Hendrik Poutsma, George Oliver Curme, Etsko Kruisinga and Johannes Meyer Myklestad.

Overview

In the second chapter of his dissertation Rotingen provides a tentative classification of conditional constructions. In his opinion conditional clause is —any adverbial clause introduced by structural signals: *but, but that, but only that, except, if, if ...not, in case, on condition that, only, so, so long as, suppose, supposing, unless, without, verb inversion*. In his work he used textbooks dating from 1891 to 1967, which from today's perspective provides excellent insight into old literature on conditionals.

Sweet (1871) perceives two categories of conditional constructions depending on the type of condition they express: open condition and rejected condition. Open conditions are —those which do not imply anything as to the fulfillment of the condition.

1) *If you are right, I am wrong.* (Sweet, p. 305)

Rejected conditions are —those which imply the rejection of the hypothesis:

2) *If you were right, I should be wrong....* (Sweet, p. 305).

Onions (1904) also introduced a formal criterion in his definitions of conditional clauses. According to him, there are two main classes of conditional clauses. He based his division on both the form and the meaning of the Principal clause.

Therefore, in the first category, the principal clause does not explain what would be or would have been, and the *If* clause implies nothing with respect to the fulfillment of the condition.

This definition in its nature is very much similar to Sweet's open conditional and the example can be the same:

3) *If you are right, I am wrong.*

In the second category, the principal clause explains what would be or would have been, while the *if* clause implies negative to what is said in

principal clause. This is just like with the first category, similar to Sweet's rejected condition because we see the negative implication of the *if* clause:

4) *If wishes were horses, beggars would ride.*

There is also a rule that says that the principal clause should be expressed through the use of *should* or *would* in order to show remoteness of the supposition as in the example:

5) *If you were right, I should be wrong.*

Onions went even further and introduced a third class of conditional sentences in which the principal clause is similar to the first category but the *if* clause expresses action that is contemplated or in a way expresses speaker's reserve on certain matter:

6) *If this be so, we are all at fault.*

It is also important to mention that none of the authors so far mentioned hypothetical conditionals.

Poutsma (1929) proposed a division of conditionals which was very much similar to Sweet. He mentions two classes of adverbial clauses of condition:

- a) Those that express the idea of mere condition with use of *if*
- b) Those that express the idea of condition and exception combined (*unless*)

Those that express the idea of mere condition with the use of *if* can be further divided into:

- Open condition – *If you are right, I am wrong.*
- Rejected condition.

7) *If he were present, I would speak to him* – expressing contrary-to-fact supposition of a speaker.

8) *If it should rain, we had better stay in-doors.* – expressing future supposition for the sake of argument.

Kruisinga (1925) did not differ significantly from the previous authors: He simply kept the binary division into open and rejected conditions. Curme (1931) introduces practical condition comprising both open and uncertain conditionals. According to him, theoretical conditional is equivalent to hypothetical conditional. Meyer-Myklestad (1967) also distinguishes between two classes of conditionals, open, and rejected or contrary-to-fact conditionals. Open conditionals are further divided into practical and theoretical.

When it comes to Rottingen, in his dissertation he used verbal pattern in

conditional clauses to pinpoint various types of conditionals. He used P for protasis and A for apodosis which in a way resembles contemporary markings of the P and Q. Furthermore, in his classification he provides a detailed overview of all possible verbal structures in the protasis and the apodosis that he found in his corpus.

The following table lists all the verbal combinations he mentions in his work:

Table 1 – Verbal combinations in Rottingen's work

	Protasis	Apodosis
1.	Present Simple Tense Indicative	Present Simple Tense Indicative
2.	Present Simple Tense Indicative	Can/do/may/must/need/shall/will/had as leave/had best/would + plain infinitive
3.	Present Simple Tense Indicative	The imperative
4.	Present Simple Tense Indicative	The Passive voice present tense
5.	Present Simple Tense Indicative	Present tense of BE + prepositional infinitive
6.	Present Simple Tense Indicative	Should in emotional question
7.	Can/ do(does)/may/shall/ will + the plain infinitive	Present Simple Tense Indicative
8.	Can/ do(does)/may/shall/ will + the plain infinitive	Can/do(does)/may/must/need/shall/ will/had rather/might/would + the plain infinitive
9.	Can/must/shall/will + the plain infinitive	The imperative
10.	Can/do/does + the plain infinitive	The Passive voice present tense
11.	Can/shall/will + the plain infinitive	Past simple tense
12.	Will + the plain infinitive	Did
13.	Does + the plain infinitive	Should in emotional questions

14.	The Passive voice present tense	Present Simple Tense Indicative
15.	Present Simple Tense Indicative	Present Simple Tense Indicative
16.	Present Simple Tense Indicative	Can/do/may/must/need/shall/will/had as leave/had best/would + plain infinitive
17.	Present Simple Tense Indicative	The imperative
18.	Present Simple Tense Indicative	The Passive voice present tense
19.	Present Simple Tense Indicative	Present tense of BE + prepositional infinitive
20.	Present Simple Tense Indicative	Should in emotional question
21.	Can/ do(does)/may/shall/will + the plain infinitive	Present Simple Tense Indicative
22.	Can/ do(does)/may/shall/will + the plain infinitive	Can/do(does)/may/must/need/shall/will/had rather/might/would + the plain infinitive
23.	Can/must/shall/will + the plain infinitive	The imperative
24.	Can/do/does + the plain infinitive	The Passive voice present tense
25.	Can/shall/will + the plain infinitive	Past simple tense
26.	Will + the plain infinitive	Did
27.	Does + the plain infinitive	Should in emotional questions
28.	The Passive voice present tense	Present Simple Tense Indicative
29.	The Passive voice present tense	May/shall/will + the plain infinitive
30.	The Passive voice present tense	The imperative
31.	The simple perfect tense	Present Simple Tense Indicative
32.	The simple perfect tense	Can/must/will + the plain infinitive
33.	The simple perfect tense	The imperative
34.	The simple perfect tense	The Passive voice present tense

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35.	The simple perfect tense	The simple perfect tense
36.	The simple perfect tense	Should in emotional questions
37.	The Passive voice perfect tense	Will + the plain infinitive
38.	The present tense of BE + the prepositional infinitive	Present Simple Tense Indicative
39.	The present tense of BE + the prepositional infinitive	Shall + the plain infinitive
40.	The present tense of BE + the prepositional infinitive	The Simple past tense
41.	Am going to	Will + the plain infinitive
42.	The Simple past tense	The Simple past tense indicative
43.	The Simple past tense	Shall + the plain infinitive
44.	The Simple past tense	The imperative
45.	The Simple past tense	The Simple past tense
46.	The Simple past tense	Should in emotional questions
47.	Did	Shall + the plain infinitive
48.	The past tense of BE + the prepositional infinitive	The Simple past tense
49.	Should/would/could + the plain infinitive	Present Simple Tense Indicative
50.	Should/would/could + the plain infinitive	Can/do(does)/may/must/need/shall/ will + the plain infinitive
51.	Should/would + the plain infinitive	The imperative
52.	Should + the plain infinitive	The Passive voice present tense
53.	Should + the plain infinitive	The simple perfect tense
54.	BE (all persons present tense)	Present Simple Tense Indicative
55.	BE (all persons present tense)	May/must/shall/will + the plain infinitive

56.	BE (all persons present tense)	The imperative
57.	BE (all persons present tense)	The simple perfect tense
58.	Ø ending in 3 p.sg. present tense	Present Simple Tense Indicative
59.	Ø ending in 3 p.sg. present tense	May/shall/will + the plain infinitive
60.	Ø ending in 3 p.sg. present tense	The imperative
61.	Ø ending in 3 p.sg. present tense	The simple perfect tense
62.	Past tense of BE + the prepositional infinitive	Present Simple Tense Indicative
63.	Past tense of BE + the prepositional infinitive	May/shall/will + the plain infinitive
64.	The Simple past tense or did + the plain infinitive	Could/might/should/would + the plain infinitive
65.	Past simple tense	Would + the perfect infinitive
66.	could/might/should/would/ + the plain infinitive	Could/had rather/might/should/would + the plain infinitive
67.	Would + the plain infinitive	Should + the perfect infinitive
68.	Paste tense of BE +the prepositional infinitive	Should/would + the plain infinitive Could/had
69.	The pluperfect	rather/might/must/ought/should/ would + the perfect infinitive
70.	The pluperfect	Could/would + the plain infinitive
71.	The pluperfect	The pluperfect
72.	The Simple past tense or did + the plain infinitive	Could/must/should/would + the plain infinitive
73.	The Simple past tense or did + the plain infinitive	Could/must/should/would + the perfect infinitive

74.	Past tense passive voice	Past tense passive voice or Past simple tense
75.	Could/might/would (+ the perfect infinitive)	Could/might/would + the perfect infinitive
76.	Could + the perfect infinitive	The pluperfect
77.	Past tense of BE + the prepositional infinitive	Might/would + the plain infinitive
78.	Could/would (+ the plain infinitive)	Could/would + the plain infinitive

When it comes to the history of the English language, it is also important to note the types of conditional clause that we can find in Medieval English. This issue was discussed by Mitchell and Robinson (1992) and summarized by Inchaurrealde (2005). In Old English the distinction among conditional types is created by the following principles:

I. Conceded and denied conditions

AI. Open conditions

III. Unfulfilled or rejected or imaginary conditions.

In all the three the common conjunction is *gif* (*if*) while *þæ r* (*if, there, where*) can be used in the third type of conditionals. Therefore we have the following examples of three basic conditional types (Inchaurrealde 2005):

a) Type I conditional (indicative): *Ne þurfe we us spillan, gif ge spedap to þam.* (ModE: *No need to slaughter each other, if you be generous with us.*-translated by Douglas B. Killings)

b) Type II conditional: *...Gyf þu þat gerædest, þe her ricost eart...*

...on flot feran, and eow friþes healdan.

(ModE: *If you believe which of these is the noblest path...*

...Depart on the sea and keep peace with you. – D.B.Killings)

c) Type III conditional (preterite subjunctive): *sec, gif þu dyrre.*

(ModE: *seek, if you dare.* – Beowulf, 1.1379-translated by Benjamin Slade)

Apart from *if*, as the most common conditional conjunction in modern day English, there are also some other ways to mark the conditionality in Old English such as *būtan*, *nymþe*, *nemne* or *nefne* which are used to express the

terms such as *on condition that*, VS order, hypothetical comparisons etc., but their use was rather scarce. The use of subjunctive was rather popular in Old English and even used a different conjunction *þæ r* was used for it.

Having in mind all things previously mentioned, we may conclude that English conditional have truly undergone remarkable transformation and they deserve the position they cutrrently have among the language structures in English.

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