A LOGICAL APPROACH TO ENGLISH CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

Attila Imre
Assoc. Prof., PhD., Sapientia University of Tîrgu Mureș

Abstract: The present article describes theoretical issues of the English conditional sentences, including definitions and types, leading to concerns regarding teaching them. We argue that the concept of remoteness developed by Michael Lewis (1986) is much more suitable to describe conditionals, as well as it offers a more logical approach to tackle various less standard types, such as 'mixed', 'zero' or less frequent verb forms (e.g. continuous). A possible way to understand conditionals may start from a non-native speaker perspective, in our case Romanian or Hungarian, making students aware of the challenges represented by the English conditionals. We also offer a popular option to make students discover 'real-life' conditionals with the help of the entertainment industry, while the references contain major English, Romanian and Hungarian sources in the field.

Keywords: conditional types, verb forms, remoteness, Romanian, Hungarian.

INTRODUCTION

Conditional sentences may constitute a considerable problem for non-native speakers, depending on the mother tongue they approach the English conditionals. It is our belief that a thorough re-evaluation of teaching conditional sentences is necessary if we aim at proficient user-experience.

Although conditionals are amply described in all descriptive grammars, their presentation is mostly problematic. One of the reasons is that conditionals "interact extensively with other domains" (Ferguson et al. 1986:4), such as causals, temporals and modals, while the other one is that the semantics of conditionals is more important than their morphosyntactic structure; thus the meaning of the verb phrase is central and less emphasis should be placed on the full conditional sentence containing both the main clause and the subordinate conditional clause (Lewis 1986:153).

In case the syntactic structure is highlighted, the entire category of conditionals is unclear: "the question of what constitutes a conditional construction in a given language has as yet no adequate theoretical answer" (Ferguson et al. 1986:5), as the form does not serve as a clear guide for several reasons:

1. not all sentences containing a formally conditional connector have conditional meaning (Swan 2005:233):
   If*Shrek accomplished his mission,****then*** *he is on his way back.*
2. while the form may not contain a conditional connector, the meaning may still be conditional (cf. *reduced* and *implied* 'conditionals'):
   *One more word, Donkey,****and****you'll end up dead.*
   *Stop talking rubbish! (****Or*** *I'll lock you out, Donkey.)*
3. the logical relation between propositions may be misleading, "because users of natural languages tend to reject the validity of false antecedent implying true consequent and often assume some kind of causal connection between the propositions" (Ferguson et al. 1986:5); to put it simply, knowingly false conditions may be considered as potentially true (cf. *rhetorical* conditionals):
   If *Fiona is happy, then I'll be damned.*

BDD-A27434 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 01:01:40 UTC)

4. a further problem is caused by grammar books by using confusing terminology; in this case, the *subjunctive mood* is used to refer to both conditional and hypothetical structures, but also as "the past tense being used for unreality, especially in conditional sentences", or "simple, uninflected, form of the verb in subordinate clauses" (Palmer 1971:12), resulting in unnecessarily puzzling examples with both I. and II. verb forms, instead of first discussing them separately;
5. certain grammar constructions, such as *reported speech* (discussed in syntax) seem to have little effect upon the condition, as changing the tenses (verb phrases) is based on logic and not compulsory (thus tend to remain), leading to the conclusion that neither conditionals nor reported speech is a 'special case', but "part of the general patterns" (Lewis 1986:32):
   If*Shrek****weren't*** *angry, he* ***wouldn't be mumbling****to himself.*
   They ***knew*** *that* ***if****Shrek****weren't*** *angry, he* ***wouldn't be mumbling*** *to himself.*

After presenting a few introductory remarks, it is worth presenting various definitions of conditionals, which is an important topic in philosophy, linguistics and logic (mathematics) as well.

DEFINITIONS OF CONDITION(AL)

A standard definition of conditional sentences derives from logic: '*if p then q*'[1], which leads us to a syntactic (linguistic) approach: there is a main clause (called *apodosis*) and a subordinate clause (called *protasis,* the *if*-clause), introduced by one of the conditional connectors, without particular restrictions upon the clause order.Thus the logical properties of conditionals "depend on the relation between antecedent and consequent, and that in turn depends on beliefs" and "even where the antecedent specifies completely the state of affairs in which the consequent is to be evaluated, the relation may be an entailment" or a "mutual entailment"(Johnson-Laird 1986:73):

If Shrek is an expert in swamps, he knows how to survive there.
If Fiona has a husband, then she is married.

While speakers usually formulate true conditions (knowing that one false proposition entails another, cf. Palmer 1990:175), this is not always the case:

I'llbedamnedif *I* ***understand*** *this.*
Fiona, ***if*** *you* ***are****a princess, then I****'m*** *the Pope / a Dutchman.*

The two sentences are in fact *rhetorical* conditionals (Zdrenghea & Greere 1999:485), and both propositions are to be understood as false, which is further 'aggravated' by the fact that there is no causal relationship between the main and the subordinate clause; the speaker of the first sentence is sure that (s)he does not understand it, so (s)he is not worried about the self-imposed curse, while the second case is similar: the speaker is sure about the falsity of both parts. And it has been correctly observed that due to the present time reference, it is difficult to distinguish 'hypothetical' from 'conditional'.

Definitions of *condition* in linguistics are listed below:

1. "a situation that must exist before something else is possible or permitted" (Oxford online)[2];
2. "an arrangement that must exist before something else can happen" (Cambridge online)[3];

[1]Unfortunately, the formula does not say what happens if the truth condition is not true. I am grateful for this remark toPéter Pelyvás, delivering a lecture on *English Grammar Reconsidered* (22. 04. 1999).
[2]https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/condition, 02. 08. 2017.
[3]http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/condition, 02. 08. 2017.

BDD-A27434 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 01:01:40 UTC)

3. "a premise upon which the fulfillment of an agreement depends" or "something essential to the appearance or occurrence of something else", but also "a restricting or modifying factor" (Merriam-Webster)[4];
4. "the prototypical meaning of '*if/?*' is the speaker's uncertainty/uncontrollability of *p* is meant to be an elucidation, and not a denial, of the intuitive insight of the popular characterization of conditionals as 'hypothetical'", even if "conditionals are not necessarily hypothetical" (Akatsuka 1986:344);
5. the meaning of conditionals is "the ability to envisage states of affairs that may or may not correspond to reality" (Johnson-Laird 1986:65);
6. "A condition is something that has to be fulfilled before something else can happen. *If*, normally meaning 'provided that', is sometimes followed by *then*. If *then* is not stated, it is implied" (Alexander 1988:273);

These definitions clearly show that conditionals are connected to time (cf. philosophy) and hypothesis (cf. logic), but they contain new elements as well: for instance, the truth value and causality is not highlighted and conditions may be *implied*, reaching the following summary:

> [conditionals] reflect the characteristically human ability to reason about alternative situations, to make inferences based on incomplete information, to imagine possible correlations between situations, and to understand how the world would change if certain correlations were different. Understanding the conceptual and behavioural organization of this ability to construct and interpret conditionals provides basic insights into the cognitive processes, linguistic competence, and inferential strategies of human beings. (Ferguson et al. 1986:3)

Consequently, we can understand why it has been so problematic for "philosophers, logicians, and linguists to find the common denominator that links" future predictives to counterfactuals or generic conditionals (Bowerman 1986:288), and we do not claim that it is easier after having presented possible definitions. Yet, we tend to think that the semantics of verb phrases will offer valuable insights into the logic of conditionals, even if this will result in more than three types of conditionals, which are typically mentioned in the majority of grammar books. In the following we will discuss various types of conditional sentences taught for non-native speakers.

TYPES OF CONDITIONALS

We have seen that the concept of conditional is connected to two propositions, one of them introduced by a logical connector (*if* or one of its synonyms), while we suppose a necessary and sufficient condition between them (causality), although this may be true or false. However, grammar books introduce new concepts, such as *possibility* or *imaginary*, and tend to focus on only three possible conditional constructions:

> … the contrasting system of actual states, real possibilities and hypothetical states is all relative to the status of the discourse. Hence, the same tripartite division of conditionals applies equally to factual or fictional discourse. There are even conditionals that bridge the gap from the fictional to the real.(Johnson-Laird 1986:66–67)

This 'gap' may be the previously mentioned continuum, as conditionals express "modal, non-factual contexts" (Aarts 2011:279) or hypothetical situations in which we can differentiate 'degrees' regarding the "probability of realization", especially the protasis (Comrie 1986:88). This is manifested through the verb forms (tenses) used in these constructions. At morphological level we talk about *conditional tenses*(Thomson & Martinet 1986:195), referring to the:

[4]https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/condition, 02. 08. 2017.

BDD-A27434 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 01:01:40 UTC)

1. present: *would, should* followed by I. verb form or past: *would, should* followed by *have* + III. verb form:
   *Fiona**would** enjoy a rest.Fiona**would** have enjoyed a rest.*

However, these constructions are often 'completed' with another structure introduced by *if*, and the combination is referred to as a *conditional sentence* (Thomson & Martinet 1986:196). Specialized literature discusses either *if-clauses* or *conditional sentences*, focusing on the three types mentioned before, although further structures may be added easily (cf. 'zero' conditional or 'mixed' types). However, the terms are not satisfactory, which we are going to discuss in the following sections. It has been also mentioned that the conditional clause tends to start the sentence, but this is not a strict rule (cf. Carter & McCarthy 2006:747), as there is "no change in meaning" only a "slight change in emphasis"(Graver 1986:89).

Language learners are most likely to meet three common structures, referred to as conditional sentences Type I, II and III (cf. Woolard 1999:35), but it is important to note from the outset that "there are many more possibilities than those frequently presented in language teaching textbooks."(Lewis 1986:149). This may be one of the reasons why conditionals are introduced to language learners "at a relatively late stage" (Lewis 1986:149), although they are highly important in effective communication.

To avoid the complexity of terminology, we will introduce them as *Type I, II* and *III* (most rooted terms in grammar books), anticipating that we will suggest abbreviations as these terms are not satisfactory either.

TYPE I

Conditional sentence *type I* is relatively 'simple', as it combines Present Simple in the *if*-clause and Future Simple in the main clause; however, the present form in the *if*-clause does not express 'present' time, but a real, probable or possible condition or situation (Vince 1996:33, Hewings 1999:198), so it can refer to *possibilities*:

***If** Shrek **buys** flowers for Fiona, she **will be** happy.*

This type is also termed as "future real" (Palmer 1971:151), simple future "predictive" or "casual conditional" (Bowerman 1986:288), as the situation "is true" (cf. type I refers to "actual states", (Johnson-Laird 1986:65) or "may become true" (Hewings 1999:198). It signals that chances to become true are anywhere between 50 – 100% ("quite probable" (Thomson & Martinet 1986:196), reflected by the choice of tenses; *will* expresses that the speaker takes it as "psychologically immediate" and "inevitable" at the moment of peaking (Lewis 1986:122).

It is also important to note that the subordinate clause may be translated into other languages with future time, but English takes no future tense in subordinate clauses; however, *will* may appear in the conditional clause, which also signals that *will* is a modal verb and not the auxiliary for future. Although temporal and conditional clauses may overlap, the may considerably differ (*if* tends to be baleful combined with the verb meaning):

***If**Shrek**survives** the mission to rescue Fiona, he **will return** to his beloved swamp.*
(He might not survive it.)
***If / After** Shrek**returns** home, he**will take**a nap.*

A further difference is that temporal clauses should turn true with the passing of time (the truth value is but a matter of time), while this is not the case with conditionals. Certainty is only associated with type III conditionals (unfulfilled conditions, detailed in 3.3.).

Any change in the verb phrases of conditional *type I* (either clauses) will result in different meanings, leading to further sections:

BDD-A27434 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 01:01:40 UTC)

- *will* may not be present in the main clause, known as the *zero conditional*;
- *will* may be present in the subordinate conditional clause;
- *should* may be used in type I, leading to a sense a doubt, and "the inverted forms are the more literary" (Stannard Allen 1974:153):
  ***If** you **should** see Shrek, try to avoid him.*
  ***Should** you see Shrek, try to avoid him.*

Although *will* (or *shall*) is often associated with future time, it is also connected to an (often implicit) conditionality, resulting in an expectation of fulfilment (Palmer 1971:138); the fact that other modals may also be used in the main clause, makes it necessary to discuss them separately.

TYPE II

We can distinguish *real* and *unreal* conditions; while type I mainly expresses real ones (or *open*), type II is associated with unreal, hypothetical, imaginary, not true, contrary to fact or *remote* conditions(Palmer 1990:169, Huddleston & Pullum 2002:46–47), expressing doubt about the truth of the proposition of the *if*-clause or inviting us "to consider, not the actual … but a hypothetical alternative" (Johnson-Laird 1986:66).

These hypothetical conditions have been further labelled as 'closed', 'rejected', 'non-factual', 'counterfactual', and 'marked' conditions, as they convey "the speaker's belief that the condition will not be fulfilled (for future conditions), is not fulfilled (for present conditions), or was not fulfilled"(Quirk et al. 1985:1092), because *hypothetical* means "true in certain circumstances, not those currently prevailing"(Lewis 1986:122).

Grammar books refer to this type as expressing improbable, unlikely conditions, but even "real possibilities" (Johnson-Laird 1986:65) or "future unreal" (Palmer 1971:171), although "unreality and its relation to conditionality is a difficult problem" (Palmer 1971:44).

The **standard form** of type II typically requires the II. verb form in the *if*-clause, although its meaning is 'conditional' present or future, and non-native speakers struggle hard to understand that the II. verb form combined with *if* does not refer to the past, as up to this stage whenever a II. verb form was used it expressed past time[5]. An important remark is that the II. verb form headed by *if* expresses the "attitude of the speaker towards the condition; it does not represent time, which is indicated (if at all) by other elements in the context or situation" (Graver 1986:93).The **standard form** of type II typically requires *would* in the main clause, although other modal verbs are also possible:

***If** Shrek **bought** flowers for Fiona, she **would be** happy.*

The sentence clearly indicates that greater hypotheticality leads to 'backshift' in tenses (Quirk et al. 1985:1010,Greenbaum 1996:340). While grammar books refer to this as using the 'past simple tense' in the conditional clause and the 'past form' of *will* (*would*) with future time reference (cf. (Comrie 1986:92), this approach is confusing, as neither the II. verb form nor *would* has anything to do with the past time in this structure. However, not all II. verb forms preceded by *if* are to be interpreted as conditionals, proving the utmost importance of context-based meaning:

***If**Shrek**stopped**fighting, he left for home, I'm afraid.*

In this case we can see that the *if*-clause meets the formal requirements, but the meaning indicates that it is closer to temporal clauses (past time reference).

The time referred to in conditional clauses is *now* or *any time from now on* (future), and the situation is unreal. They are not based on fact (hence non-factual), especially that future time indicators perfectly fit into the sentence:

[5]Although it has been also referred to as 'modal past tense' (Aarts 2011:250), we consider the term unnecessarily confusing.

BDD-A27434 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 01:01:40 UTC)

If*Shrek****bought*** *flowers for Fiona****tomorrow****, she* ***would know*** *that he cares for her.*

As for *would,* it is a mistake to consider it 'the' conditional auxiliary (cf. (Lewis 1986:149–150), as – similarly to *will* – it is a modal verb, and its use is not an automatic indicator of conditionals (cf. *politeness* and conditionals):

Would *you like to meet Shrek?*

Questions of this type (*Would you …?*)are associated with "polite forms", but it is more than that, especially when we contrast it with *Do you…?*in order to see the remote attitude of the speaker (Lewis 1986:122–123).Nevertheless, *would* is the "most commonly used" modal verb in conditionals, and it refers to a "hypothetical implication, without necessarily any other modal implications" (Quirk et al. 1985:1010). Thus it does not refer to the past, as it is a modal verb, and – compared to *will* – it expresses a more remote situation from truth (tentative or hypothetical *would*). When using *would* in conditional sentences, "the speaker creates a hypothetical quality to the situation and, in doing so, automatically distances himself from the factual quality of the statement" (Lewis 1986:122), thus combining the notions of *'inevitability'* associated with *will* and (psychologically) 'remote', thus hypothetical (Lewis 1986:123). The way it is to be taken true is encoded in the subordinate clause marked by a multitude of conditional connectors.

This leads us to conclude that *would* – as a modal verb – has multiple functions, including both conditional and expressing politeness, not to mention its possibilities in storytelling (cf. Past Simple). It has been noted that *would* is "clearly the tentative form of *will*" and this "also accounts for the tentativeness as a kind of conditional" (Palmer 1971:58).

The **meaning** of type II conditionals is rich, due to the nature of hypotheticality, as – although sometimes subjectively – degrees may be differentiated. We have seen that the II. verb headed by *if* (or a synonymous word) indicates remoteness or unreality(cf. (Hughes 2001:166), but there is a scale with at least three grades (cf. (Graver 1986:93):

- ***tentative****, possible,probable, suppositional, polite* or *unreal past,* being close to type I conditional, when the speaker thinks there is a 50–100% chance; the choice between type I or II "often depends on how possible we believe an event to be" (Foley & Hall 2012:168–169):
  If Shrek plucked the chicken, Fiona would / could / might cook the meal.
- ***hypothetical****, improbable, imaginary* or *unlikely*, when the speakers "don't expect the action to take place" (Thomson & Martinet 1986:199) or are unlikely to happen (Foley & Hall 2012:168); however, this may express a kind of hope (cf. 'remote conditionals', (Huddleston & Pullum 2002:1003), as it "is a form of day-dreaming in which we all indulge at times" (Graver 1986:93); it is felt closer to impossible, thus the speaker may use it when 0–50% chance is felt; it has been suggested that the "present and future reference the meaning may be merely one of negative expectation or assumption, the positive not being ruled out completely" (Quirk et al. 1985:1010):
  If*Shrek****defeated*** *the Dragon, he* ***would*** *still* ***return*** *to the swamp.*
  (He probably won't, cf.Quirk et al. 1985:1092)

Certain constructions belong to this type of conditional:

a. a rather imaginary, suggestive, polite (e.g. ask for help) meaning is expressed by the *If … were (to)* construction (Hewings 1999:200, Alexander 1988:279) expressing greater improbability (Stannard Allen 1974:153), where *were* signals the Subjunctive Mood, although it may be concessive as well:
   If *you* ***were to****meet Shrek, what* ***would*** *you* ***do****?*
b. a highly improbable *supposition* is rendered by the *If you should* construction:
   If you should*meet Shrek,* ***would*** *you* ***be scared****?*

BDD-A27434 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 01:01:40 UTC)

Desires, regrets, polite requests, suggestions, giving advice (Foley & Hall 2012:168–169) may belong here, as they are less direct (Soars 2008:155); still, depending on the speaker or situation, they can be listed under the next option:
If *we* ***were*** *in Shrek's swamp, we* ***would expect*** *to meet Donkey as well.*

- ***unreal***, *totally imaginary*, so contrary to present or known facts (Gălățeanu-Fârnoagă 1994:300, Graver 1986:93, Foley & Hall 2012:168); thus there is a certain "expectation that the condition will not be fulfilled" (Quirk et al. 1980:747) or "impossible to fulfil the condition" (Foley & Hall 2012:168–169); in these cases the sentence "automatically suggests" the contrary of the conditional statement (Lewis 1986:71):
If *I* ***knew*** *where Shrek is, I* ***wouldtell*** *you.* (but I don't know)
If *you* ***met****Dragon,* ***would*** *you* ***bescared****?* (however, children visualize it as possible)

Although the past forms of *be* are *was* and *were*, only *were* is used in grammatically 'well-formed' conditional clauses. This structure is further supported by certain stock phrases (*If I were you …, If I were in your shoes...*), although *was* is common in colloquial speech (Palmer 1990:174), thus we would not recommend its use before language examinations. Yet, there are cases when *was* is fully justified (signalling temporal rather than conditional senses):
If*Shrek****was*** *there, he must have left a footprint…*

At this stage it is clear that conditional type I (**open**) and type II (**remote**) differ formally (I. verb form versus 'backshifted' or 'remote' II. verb form), but their meanings are rather close as neither of them is related to time (Soars 2008:154). Instead, we have to deal with more and less possible and probable cases, reaching the unreal or imaginary in the case of type II.

It is also worth mentioning that "there is no difference in the truth conditions of the two sorts of conditional when they refer to future events" (Johnson-Laird 1986:66, similarly formulated in (Quirk et al. 1985:1091), as there is no temporal difference between them (Soars & Soars 1998:158):

- real condition, normal course of events (repeated actions, habits, general truths, etc.):
If *Shrek* ***decorates*** *the house, something will go wrong.*
- imaginary condition, unusual circumstances:
If *Shrek* ***decorated*** *the tree, he would clip floating toads to the branches, inflated with his rancid breath.*

There are reasons to consider type II conditionals as *open*, because the question whether they are "fulfilled" (Huddleston & Pullum 2002:46–47) or not is "unresolved" (Graver 1986:90). Open conditions have also been called as 'real', 'factual' and 'neutral' conditions; in these cases, even the protasis may contain *will* (Comrie 1986:91):
If*Donkey* ***needs*** *help, Shrek****willshow*** *up.*
If*Donkey* ***needed*** *help, Shrek****wouldshow*** *up.* (more remote possibility)
If *it* ***won't*** *help, it* ***won't*** *harm either.*

Thus open conditions are rather realistic (Aarts 2011:253), while 'remote' means that the possibility is weakened as "the fact of knowing is remote from the speaker" (Lewis 1986:71).

TYPE III

We tend to think that type III conditionals embody the proverb 'It is no use crying over spilt milk', as they describeboth past and hypothetical unreal conditions, which is why it needs to

BDD-A27434 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 01:01:40 UTC)

be marked twice (Palmer 1990:170). Definitions and explanations connected to type III are the following:

1) a completely *hypothetical* (Graver 1986:97), *unreal, impossible, imaginary* condition, which is impossible to happen as it was "once possible, but now imaginary event" (Johnson-Laird 1986:65) as the "necessary conditions were not met in the past"[6]; nevertheless, it is something "wished for" (Graver 1986:97); even if the known facts are different, the structure is used for nostalgia, criticism, regret, etc. (Foley & Hall 2012:169):
   If *Shrek had wanted it to, he could have killed the soldiers.*
2) the situation is not true, contrary to a past fact[7](cf. Gălățeanu-Fârnoagă 1994:316, Woods 2006:179) or the present reality, so the facts it is based on is "the opposite of what is expressed" (Hughes 2001:167); more technically, this is called "counterfactual" (Bowerman 1986:288), a term that "refers normally to the consequences of acts which are not performed, and seems by this very fact to belong at the irrealis extreme" (Greenberg 1986:257);
3) the possibility of the action was true in the past but it was unfulfilled; as a consequence, we are faced with an "implied rejection of the condition" (Quirk et al. 1985:1010), so there is 0% chance for it to become true, but we still "speculate about possibilities in the past that didn't happen (Prodromou 1998:162).

The form may be deduced by analogy from type I and type II forms; as this is type III, the III. verb forms are used:

1. the subordinate conditional clause contains *had* + III. verb form (which is identical in form with Past Perfect Simple);
2. the main clause most typically uses *would have* + III. verb form:
   If *Shrek* ***had bought*** *flowers for Fiona, she* ***would have been****happy.*

Once again, as *would* is a modal verb, it may be replaced by other modal verbs: *could*, *might* or *should*(Hewings 1999:198). The perfect forms grammatically ensure us that the action is consumed (hence it is unreal or imagined in the past), so we can express criticism, regret (Foley & Hall 2012:169) or daydreaming about past events (cf. bridging "the gap from the fictional to the real", (Johnson-Laird 1986:66–67) with this type:

If Shrek had listened to Donkey, it would have been better for both.
If Shrek hadn't met Donkey, he would have been killed by Dragon.
If Dragon hadn't liked Donkey, they wouldn't have had Dronkeys.

TEACHING CONDITIONALS

Whatever the level, it is our firm belief that a thorough understanding of English conditionals should stem from a native language perspective. We will exemplify this through the prism of Romanian and Hungarian.

In the case of Romanian, the understanding of conditionals involves the connector *dacă* (if), the present tense, the future tense and the present and past conditional-optative mood[8] indicators: *aș, ai, ar, am, ați, ar* followed by the infinitive verb form (present conditional optative) and *aș fi, ai fi, ar fi, am fi, ați fi, ar fi* followed by the participle verb form.

In the case of Hungarian, the understanding of conditionals involves the connector *ha* (if), the present tense, the future tense (which is often replaced by the present tense) and the

[6]http://www.usingenglish.com/glossary/mixed-conditionals.html, 17.01.2017.
[7]An unnecessarily confusing term we would not recommend to use is *past unreal*(Palmer 1971:171).
[8]http://limba-romana.ucoz.ro/index/modul_conditional_optativ/0-229, 24. 10. 2017.

BDD-A27434 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 01:01:40 UTC)

conditional mood suffixes for present *(-na, -ne, -ná, -né*) and the past conditional *volna* preceded by the past tense verb form:

I. Ro.***Dacă*** *Shrek* ***vede*** *Balaurul, va ști că ...*
Hu. ***Ha*** *Shrek* ***meglátja*** *Sárkányt,* ***tudni fogja****, hogy…*
If *Shrek* ***sees*** *Dragon, he* ***will know*** *that …*

II. Ro.***Dacă*** *Shrek* ***arvedea*** *Balaurul, el* ***ar ști*** *că ...*
Hu. ***Ha*** *Shrek* ***meglátná*** *Sárkányt,* ***tudná****, hogy…*
If *Shrek* ***saw*** *Dragon, he* ***would know*** *that …*

III. Ro.***Dacă*** *Shrek* ***arfi văzut*** *Balaurul, el* ***ar fi știut*** *că ...*
Hu. ***Ha*** *Shrek* ***megláttavolna*** *Sárkányt,* ***tudtavolna****, hogy…*
If *Shrek* ***had seen*** *Dragon, he* ***would have known*** *that …*

The highlighted parts reveal that the three Romanian and Hungarian sentences can perfectly reflect English conditionals, even if one of them is an Indo-European language, while the latter is a Finno-Ugric one.

An important remark is necessary: these three sentences are 'not set in stone', as it is safer to talk about three possibilities for the sub-clause and three possibilities for the main clause, anticipating and avoiding the necessary term of 'mixed' conditionals. Thus *if* may be followed by the I., II. or *had* + III. verb form, while the main clause may contain *will* + I., *would* + II. and *would have* + III.

While some grammar books overlook the importance of native languages, we cannot deny that we have to explain students why we need these forms, starting from the purpose of communication, offering them a bunch of sentences to translate into English:

1) Ro. *Aș dori să fiu acasă.*
Hu. *Otthon szeretnék lenni.*
(I would like to be at home.)

2) Ro. *Dacă m-ai fi iubit, am fi deja soț și soție.*
Hu. *Ha szerettél volna, már férj-feleség lennénk.*
(If you had loved me, we were already husband and wife.)

3) Ro. *Dacă m-ai iubi, deja ți-aș fi cumpărat o limuzină.*
Hu. *Ha szeretnél, már vásároltam volna egy limuzint neked.*
(If you loved me, I would have already bought you a limo.)

The term *mixed conditionals*, however vague and unnecessary, is deeply rooted in grammar books. It refers to the fact that the previously discussed type I, II and III conditional clauses may be 'mixed', resulting in almost any combination (cf. Walker & Elsworth 2000:89).Yet, we would not call them 'mixed', as this is a natural possibility, also having in mind that *will* and *would* may be substituted by other modals as well (cf. all modal verbs contain both present and future time reference(Palmer 1990:138,Lewis 1986:100). While the three most common types of conditionals are referred to as *probable* (*shall, will*), *improbable* (*should / would* + I.) and *impossible condition* (*should / would + have* + III., cf.Budai 1994:136–141), their combinations have no particular terms.Once we accept that "the apodosis of an unreal conditional, future or past, must contain a modal verb" (Palmer 1990:172), multiple variations are possible for type II and type III conditionals, which may be further varied as continuous tenses also appear in conditionals, leading to a multitude of 'mixed' conditionals (cf. Walker & Elsworth 2000:85–86, Gălățeanu-Fârnoagă 1995:188):

If *you* ***are*** *free on Saturday, we* ***could go*** *to the spa.*
If*Shrek****had*** *ever* ***kissed*** *Donkey, then I****'m*** *the Pope.*

BDD-A27434 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 01:01:40 UTC)

If *Dragon****was blowing*** *fire, she* ***must have had*** *a reason.*
If *it****'s not going to rain****, why bother about a mac?*
If*Shrek appears, there****'s going to be****trouble.*

The conclusion we have drawn is that the context determines the choice of verb phrase (tense), thus any meaningful combination is a valid option: "there are no restrictions on the tense of either, though there are certain preferred combinations of tense, and the choice of tense may determine the interpretation" (Palmer 1990:168–169). This is rather alarming, as much more tenses are involved this way in the interpretation of conditionals, not to mention the modal verbs with various meanings (modal, tentative, polite). Thus type I., II. and III. represent only the 'tip of the iceberg': type I refers to present or future possibilities, type II expresses tentative or more hypothetical present, while type III describes an unfulfilled past condition.

As such, students must recognize the 'internal' logic of conditionals: the further from factual truth, the more remote past forms we use: the *if*-clauses start with Present Simple form (50–100% chance), then turn to Past Simple form (0–50% change) and Past Perfect Simple form (0% chance).

The main clauses start with a basic modal, then its remote pair[9] ('past') is used – most typically *will* and *would* –, which is followed by either the I. form (cf. Present Simple) or the only 'tense' with 'present' form but past meaning (*have* + III., cf. Present Perfect Simple). Although we know that these are not 'tenses' as tenses were discussed in previous chapters, formally they still are, although with different meanings, expressing *real* and *unreal* (remote) cases in the present, future and past.This is why language learners need a gradual understanding of conditionals, ultimately reaching the conclusion that virtually any verb form and tense may be combined with any other one in any clause; the only really important thing to follow is meaning, deriving from the combination of *if* (or any other synonym), verb form and modal verb.

Once the affirmative forms are clear, specific negative conditional structures should be discussed, depending on the students' level: *unless, if it weren't for, if it hadn't been for* (often parts of stock phrases) or*wouldn't*;similarly, emphatic conditional structures are worth mentioning, involving the inversion of subject and predicate (auxiliary verb):

Had it not been for*Shrek, Donkey****would be sitting*** *in jail now.*
Should *you* ***find*** *Fiona, beware of her martial arts skills.*
Were *you* ***to meet****Shrek's family, make peace with God!*

At all levels, students may meet or translate specific types of conditionals:

- *reduced conditionals* are conditional sentences in which either the *if*-clause or the main clause is reduced by omitting various grammatical categories:
  If possible, *listen to your instincts.*
  If *you****'d*** *just open the door, Sir.* ('I'd tell you a secret.')
- *implied conditionals* (Newbrook & Wilson 2001:103)are conditional sentences in which the conditional sub-clause is "not directly introduced by *if*" (Alexander 1988:282); certain *if* substitutes may also function as reduced conditionals ((Walker & Elsworth 2000:92), their conditional meaning deriving from the context:
  With *luck, Shrek will escape from Dragon.*
  Without*Shrek, Donkey is lost.* ('if John is not to support us')
  Once in, *Shrek could hardly escape from Dragon.*
  But for *Shrek, Donkey wouldn't have survived.* (stock phrase)

[9]Basic modals are *can, may, will,* and *shall*; remote modals are *could, might, would, should*; *must* may be both basic and remote (cf. Lewis 1986).

BDD-A27434 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 01:01:40 UTC)

- *indirect conditionals* are related to speech acts (Greenbaum 1996:340), as they express the speaker's uncertainty or signal that the actual words are not to be taken literally (cf. Quirk et al. 1985:1095), asking for the hearer's agreement:
  Shrek is an extremely skilled fighter, ***if you know what I mean****…*

More polite formulas also belong to indirect conditionals, but they may contain an air of irony; while the *if*-clause is an 'adjunct' in direct conditions, the *if*-clause in indirect conditions is called a "style disjunct" (Quirk et al. 1980:746, Carter & McCarthy 2006:757):

I'd be grateful ***if we may drop*** *this conversation.*
If I may say so*, this is not the best option.*

However, some formally polite conditionals may reflect hidden orders (cf. (Ferguson et al. 1986:7), clearly signalling that the non-conditional purpose is more important:

Shout the door, ***if you please****.*
Show me your homework, ***if I may ask so.***
Would you like it if *she disappeared?*

We have seen that the theoretical background of conditionals is not simple; yet, teachers might select, which are the minimal requirements for each level (e.g. type I for beginners, type II and III for intermediate and advanced students), occasionally highlighting the importance of meaning over form; a more desired way is to encourage students to collect instances of conditionals from their favourite cartoons, films or TV series. For instance, *Shrek*[10]belongs to animation, and we would expect to be grammatically simple; it contains 23 instances of *if* in type I and type II conditionals, but we can find negative, indirect, imperative and polite structures as well, combined with temporal meanings (the last two examples):

You'll never shine if you don't glow.
Donkey, if it was me, you'd be dead.
I don't know if it'd work out if you're gonna blow smoke rings.
What's the point of being able to talk if you gotta keep secrets?
It's a little late for that, so if you'll excuse me…
Well, if I treated you so bad, how come you came back?
Look, if you wanted to be alone, all you had to do was ask.

More than that, we can find Americanisms (*gonna, gotta*) in these structures, even conditional-like structures (the last two), signalling again that meaning is more important than form. Even if learners are not familiar with grammar terms, they are able to grasp the meaning of these sentences, and it would be a real challenge for them to translate and compare their versions with the official Romanian and Hungarian subtitles or dubbings.

Last but not least, a gradual introduction of other conditional connectors is needed, such as *and, or, as long as, assuming that, except that, even if, given that, no matter how, otherwise, provided that, suppose that, unless, what if, whether … or not*.

CONCLUSIONS

We have seen that conditionals are very diversified, making use of a multitude of verb forms, tenses, modal verbs, with rich and overlapping names. Hence we conclude that the mainstream conditional theory is hard to accept, as it is rather limited and not functional. Instead of focusing on types, meaning should be highlighted, disregarding explanations with the help of the English tenses and highlighting verb forms (I, II, III). Yet, non-native speakers

[10]http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0126029/, 03. 08. 2017.

BDD-A27434 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 01:01:40 UTC)

should dedicate enough time to discover the continuum of hypothetical meanings along the line of possible to impossible, which is a challenging task for various reasons:

- conditionals prove that previous forms (e.g. II. verb form) combined with *if* gain a completely different meaning with various shades, due to the lack of conjugation in English;
- conditionals imply the use of modal verbs, whose meanings is yet to discuss, so at this stage only a partial discussion is possible;
- non-native speakers may end up completely puzzled, discovering the immense richness of conditionals ranging from 'zero' conditional to conditionals that even lack *if* or any of its convenient alternatives (cf. implied ones); nevertheless, they only need to understand them, without learning their grammatical names;
- the ultimate list of the conditional 'mix' contains almost any verb form and tense as well as modal verbs, so a solid foundation of verb and tense meanings, completed with modal ones takes us further in effectively using conditionals than trying to remember their names and types, although the initial stage starts from identifying them based on forms and types.

Due to restraints of space, we do not deal with conditionals and *concessive* sentences ('alternative' conditionals, cf. Quirk et al. 1980:750)or *implicit conditionals*(Palmer 1990:172,Magyarics 1997:438), which contain a main clause only, and an implicit conditional subordinate clause, which is not stated, so – technically speaking – these are non-conditionals (see the last two examples from *Shrek*). Similarly, *hypothetical constructions* should be discussed separately.

REFERENCES

Aarts, Bas. 2011. *Oxford Modern English Grammar*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Akatsuka, Noriko. 1986. Conditionals are discourse-bounds. In Elizabeth Closs Traugott, Alice ter Meulen, Judy Snitzer Reilly & Charles A. Ferguson (eds.), *On Conditionals*, 333–352. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Alexander, Louis G. 1988. *Longman English Grammar*. Longman.

Bowerman, Melissa. 1986. First steps in acquiring conditionals. In Elizabeth Closs Traugott, Alice ter Meulen, Judy Snitzer Reilly & Charles A. Ferguson (eds.), *On Conditionals*, 285–308. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Budai, László. 1994. *English Grammar. Theory and Practice*. Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó.

Carter, Ronald & Michael McCarthy. 2006. *Cambridge Grammar of English: A Comprehensive Guide*. Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Comrie, Bernard. 1986. Conditionals: A Typology. In Elizabeth Closs Traugott, Alice ter Meulen, Judy Snitzer Reilly & Charles A. Ferguson (eds.), *On Conditionals*, 77–99. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ferguson, Charles A., Judy Snitzer Reilly, Alice ter Meulen & Elizabeth Closs Traugott. 1986. Overview. In Elizabeth Closs Traugott, Alice ter Meulen, Judy Snitzer Reilly & Charles A. Ferguson (eds.), *On Conditionals*, 3–20. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Foley, Mark & Diane Hall. 2012. *MyGrammarLab*. Harlow, Essex: Pearson Longman.

Gălățeanu-Fârnoagă, Georgiana. 1994. *Exerciții de gramatică engleză*. București: Omegapres.

Gălățeanu-Fârnoagă, Georgiana. 1995. *Sinteze de gramatica engleză: Exerciţii şi teste de evaluare*. Bucureşti: Cruso.

BDD-A27434 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 01:01:40 UTC)

Graver, B. D. 1986. *Advanced English Practice: With Key*. 3rdedition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Greenbaum, Sidney. 1996. *The Oxford English Grammar*. London: Clarendon Press.
Greenberg, Joseph H. 1986. The realis-irrealis continuum in the classical Greek conditional. In Elizabeth Closs Traugott, Alice ter Meulen, Judy Snitzer Reilly & Charles A. Ferguson (eds.), *On Conditionals*, 247–264. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Hewings, Martin. 1999. *Advanced Grammar in Use with answers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Huddleston, Rodney & Geoffrey K. Pullum. 2002. *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press.
Hughes, Anthony. 2001. *Online English Grammar*. Anthony Hughes.
Johnson-Laird, P. N. 1986. Conditionals and mental models. In Elizabeth Closs Traugott, Alice ter Meulen, Judy Snitzer Reilly & Charles A. Ferguson (eds.), *On Conditionals*, 55–77. New York: Cambridge University Press.
Lewis, Michael. 1986. *The English Verb: An Exploration of Structure and Meaning*. Hove: Language Teaching Publications.
Magyarics, Péter. 1997. *Gyakorlati angol nyelvtan*. 2nded. Budapest: Akkord & Panem.
Newbrook, Jacky & Wilson. 2001. *Proficiency Gold*. Harlow: Longman.
Palmer, Frank. 1971. *Grammar*. Middlesex & New York: Penguin Books.
Palmer, Frank Robert. 1990. *Modality and the English Modals*. London and New York: Longman.
Prodromou, Luke. 1998. *First Certificate Star: Student's Book*. Oxford: Macmillan Education.
Quirk, Randolph, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech & Jan Svartvik. 1980. *Grammar of Contemporary English*. Longman.
Quirk, Randolph, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech & Jan Svartvik. 1985. *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. 2nded. London; New York: Pearson Longman.
Snitzer Reilly, Judy. 1986. The acquisition of temporals and conditionals. In Elizabeth Closs Traugott, Alice ter Meulen, Judy Snitzer Reilly & Charles A. Ferguson (eds.), *On Conditionals*, 309–332. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Soars, John & Liz Soars. 1998. *New Headway: Upper-Intermediate: Student's Book*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Soars, Liz. 2008. *New Headway Advanced Student's Book: English Course*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Stannard Allen, William. 1974. *Living English Structure: A Practice Book for Foreign Students*. 5th ed. London: Longman.
Swan, Michael. 2005. *Practical English Usage*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Thomson, A. J. & A. V. Martinet. 1986. *A Practical English Grammar*. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Vince, Michael. 1996. *First Certificate Language Practice*. Oxford: Macmillan Heinemann.
Walker, Elaine & Steve Elsworth. 2000. *Grammar Practice for Upper Intermediate Students. New Edition*. Essex: Longman.
Woods, Geraldine. 2006. *English Grammar Workbook for Dummies*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing, Inc.
Woolard, George. 1999. *Grammar with Laughter*. Hove: Language Teaching Publications.
Zdrenghea, Mihai Mircea & Anca Luminița Greere. 1999. *A Practical English Grammar*. Cluj-Napoca: Clusium.

BDD-A27434 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 01:01:40 UTC)