

# **The Translation of English Conditional Clauses into Arabic: A Pedagogical Perspective**

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## **Abstract**

The present study shades light on one of the most important problems that face advanced Iraqi students of translation. This problem is the translation of English conditional clauses into Arabic .It is hypothesized that advanced Iraqi students commit a number of mistakes in their translations of conditional clauses. The study begins with reviewing and summarizing condition and conditional clauses in both English and Arabic. In order to check the validity of the hypothesis made above, a test has been carried out on fourth year students of translation in the Department of Translation, University of Basra. The students' translations are analyzed to identify the most problematic structures. Finally, the study ends with a number of conclusions.

## **1. Introduction**

When we write in any language it is important to create logical relationships between ideas presented. There are a number of relationships that we can create like addition, contrast, among others, and there are many words and expressions that we can use to express these important relationships. Condition is one of these relationships.

Linguists doing descriptive studies have assumed that every human language has a method of forming conditional sentences and have found that conditionals do exist in many languages(Traugott et al. 1986:3). There are different ways of expressing a condition in English. These ways are different from those in Arabic. To translate an English text into Arabic, translators have

to know that this particular structure indicates a condition and then translate it into its equivalent structure. The following section clarifies these ways.

## **2. Condition in English**

There are many definitions for the word condition but most of these definitions emphasize that it is “*something that has to be fulfilled before something else can happen. If, normally means provided that, is sometimes followed by then. If then is not stated, it is implied: If X happens (then)Y follows*(Alexander, 1988:273).”

A conditional sentence contains two clauses: the condition clause and the subsequent clause that are dependent on each other. A large majority of these statements are introduced by the subordinating conjunction 'if'. A conditional clause is a type of adverbial clauses. It conveys a direct condition (Graver, 1986:89). Grammar books agree that there are three or four main types of conditional clauses. Quirk et al (1985:1091-97) distinguish four main types. These are:

**1. The Zero (Cause and Effect) Conditional:** This form is used to describe universal statements like facts, rules, and certainties. In this conditional, both the condition and the subsequent clauses are in the simple present. For example:

*If we make a promise, we keep it.*

**2. The First (Open) Conditional:** This type is also called potential or indicative conditional. It is used to express a hypothetical situation that is probably true, but the truth of which is unverified. For instance:

*If Ali studies hard, he will pass the exams.*

**3. The Second (Unreal) Conditional:** It is usually used to describe less probable situations and to state preferences and imaginary events. For example:

*If they had time, they would help you.*

**4. The Third Conditional:** It is used to describe impossible (contrary- to- fact) past events. For instance:

*If Ahmad had won a million dinars, he would have started a simple business of his own.*

In the structures above, conditionals are stated, i.e. they are indicated by the use of if – clauses. Sometimes conditionals are implied, i.e. they are not directly expressed by conditional clauses. Conditional (if) clauses have been widely dealt with in grammar books, but there has been little descriptive work on the topic of implied condition. There are different ways of expressing implied condition in English. Dancygier and Sweetser (2005) and Schueler (2008) agree that these ways involve the following:

**1. Noun Phrases:** Adverbial clause of condition can be replaced by a noun phrase as in:

*A man of principles would not do this* (i.e. If he was a man of principles, he would not do this.).

**2. Prepositional Phrases:** A conditional relationship may be expressed by using a prepositional phrase within a sentence. For example:

*Under the governments' control, medicine might be cheaper* (i.e. If medicine is under the government control, it would be cheaper.).

**3. Time and Place Clauses:** The meaning of several subordinators that primarily express time, place, or condition may express implied condition. For instance:

*Whenever (Once) possible, visit the orphans* (i.e. If it is possible, visit the orphans.).

**4. Coordinating Conjunctions:** There are a number of coordinators which can be used with an implied conditional relationship between elements. These coordinators are:

**A. And:** It is used to express a declarative condition. For example:

*Do as required, and you will be respected* (i.e. If you do as required , you will be respected.) .

**B. Or :** Unlike and , it is used to express a negative condition as in :

*Visit us , or we shall be hard to satisfy* (i.e. If you do not visit us , we shall be hard to satisfy. ).

**C. But:** It is used to mean except or however. For instance:

*The hunter would have shot the prey, but the lion had come very fast (i.e. If the lion had not come, the hunter would have shot the prey.).*

**D. Only:** It introduces the reason why something is not possible. For example:

*Sameer would have painted the car, only he had not enough money (i.e. If he had enough money, he would have painted the car.).*

**E. Otherwise :** It indicates a negative condition as in :

*Buy this house; otherwise you will be homeless (i.e. If you do not buy this house, you will be homeless.).*

**5. Restrictive Modifiers:** Modification is divided into two types: restrictive and non- restrictive. Only restrictive modification may express an implied condition. It is either an adjective or a relative clause.

**5.1. Restrictive Adjective:**

*A tough manager is difficult to convince* (i.e. If a manager is tough, 'he' is hard to be convinced.).

**5.2. Restrictive Relative Clause:**

*A student who cheats will be punished* (i.e. If a student cheats, 'he' will be punished.).

**6. Aphoristic Sentence:** This type of sentence may be used as equivalent of an if-clause .It is so common in proverbs. It indicates two equivalent structures which are against each other as in:

*No dinner, no ice-cream (i.e. If you will not eat your dinner, there will be no ice-cream.).*

**7. An Introductory-It Construction:** This construction is a way of delaying a subject clause to a later position. It may express an implied condition. For example:

*It is frustrating that you can not succeed this year (i.e. It would be frustrating if you fail. ).*

**8. Absolute Constructions:** They are attached to other sentences but there is no grammatical relationship between these constructions and the attached sentences. They may express an implied condition. For instance:

*I shall go to visit the Holy Shrines next week, God willing (i.e. If there will be no problem, I shall go to visit the Holy Shrines next week.).*

**9. Infinitive and Participle Clauses:** It is clear that there are two classes of lexical verbs in English: finite and non-finite. So that , there are two types of clauses. The first type is a finite clause because it indicates a finite verb. The second type is a non-finite clause because it indicates a non-finite verb. Only the latter type can express an implied condition.

**9.1. To + Infinitive Clause:**

*To succeed needs hard work ( i.e. If you want to succeed , you have to work hard ).*

**9.2.Ed2 – Participle Clause :**

*Infected, the dove will soon die ( i.e. If the dove is infected , 'she' will soon die. ).*

**9.3. Ing- Participle Clause:**

*Watching T.V. continuously hurts the eyes ( i.e. If you watch T.V. continuously, you will hurt your eyes.).*

**10. Verbless Adjective Clauses:** Adjective clauses may function as Verbless clauses if the verb is omitted. Such combination can be used to convey an implied condition as in:

*Dry, birds fly very high (i.e. If birds are dry, they fly very high . ).*

**11. Mind-Constructions:** The verb mind sometimes is used to express an implied condition. For example:

*Would you mind sending the company your address ( i.e. If you do not mind , send the company your address. ).*

**12. Sentence Adverbials:** This type of adverbials indicates the speaker's comment on the content of what 'he' is saying. For instance:

*Honestly, I do not like to travel (i.e. If you want my opinion , I do not like to travel .).*

### 3. Condition in Arabic

All grammarians emphasize that conditional sentences in Arabic are made of two parts. The first is called *جملة الشرط* (conditional clause) and it indicates *أداة الشرط* (conditional particle). The second provides the outcome of the condition and is called *جواب الشرط* (answer of conditional clause) (Al-Mashtah, 2010:197-198). There are a number of particles which are generally regarded conditionals. Some of these particles are *أدوات شرط جازمة* (jussive conditional particles) and these involve : أن ، من ، ما ، مهما ، أي ، متى ، أيان ، أين ، أذما ، أنى ، كان ، . Other particles are *أدوات شرط غير جازمة* (non-jussive conditional particles) which involve: إذا ، كيفما ، لو ، لولا ، لوما . Below are some examples and their standard translations (Al-Wasety, 1979b:109-113):

إن تأخرت فلن تفهم الدرس.

*If you were late, you would not understand the lesson.*

لو كنت غنيا لاشتريت سيارة جديدة.

*If I were rich, I would buy a new car.*

إذا ذهبنا مشيا على الأقدام فسنأخر.

*If we go on foot, we shall be late.*

كلما\ لما يسافر أخي أسافر معه .

*Whenever my brother travels, I travel with him.*

من يدرس كثيرا ينجح .

*Who studies a lot succeeds.*

ما تزرع تحصد.

*What you sow, you reap.*

### 2. Problems of Translating English Conditionals into Arabic: Discussion of Results

As it has been mentioned earlier, there are different means of expressing a condition in English. Advanced Iraqi students of translation face certain problems while translating these conditionals. To identify these problems, samples of thirty-four students are given twenty-two English sentences. They are asked to translate them into Arabic in sixty-six minutes (three minutes for each sentence). Each sentence indicates certain conditional structure. The results of these translations are statistically analyzed throughout the use of ANOVA Test .They are summarized in Table (1) below.

Table( 1) Results of Student's Translations

<b>No.</b>	<b>Type of Condition</b>	<b>Total Correct Translations</b>	<b>Total correct Translations Percentages</b>	<b>Total Incorrect Translations</b>	<b>Total Incorrect Translations Percentage</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Coordinator( and )</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>17.65</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>82.35</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Restrictive Modifiers(adjective)</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>23.53</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>76.47</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Noun Phrase</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>26.47</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>73.53</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Restrictive Relative Clause</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>26.47</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>73.53</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Mind-Constructions</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>26.47</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>73.53</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Coordinator(but)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>29.42</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>70.58</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Sentence Adverbials</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>32.36</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>67.64</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Absolute Constructions</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>41.12</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>58.82</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Adverb (else)</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>52.95</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>47.05</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Aphoristic Sentence</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>52.95</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>47.05</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Participle Clause (V-ing)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>58.83</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>41.17</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Adverb (otherwise)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>58.83</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>41.17</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>Coordinator(or)</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>64.70</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>35.30</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>Zero Conditional</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>64.70</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>35.30</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>The First Condition</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>73.52</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>26.48</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>The Second Condition</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>76.47</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>23.53</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>Verbless Adjective Clause</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>79.42</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>20.58</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>Participle Clause(Ed2)</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>79.42</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>20.58</b>
<b>19</b>	<b>Participle Clause (to+infinitive)</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>82.45</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>17.65</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>Introductory It</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>85.29</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14.71</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>Only</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>85.29</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14.71</b>
<b>22</b>	<b>Place and Time</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>94.11</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5.89</b>

As it is shown the students commit a number of mistakes in their translations. They do not translate English conditionals into Arabic conditionals. The coordinator (and) , for example , indicates the lowest percentage (17.65%) of the students correct translations while (82.35 %) of the students translations indicate the translation of (and ) as a coordinator without an implied condition. In other conditional structures there is a slight increase of the correct translations accompanied with a decrease of incorrect translations. The highest percentage (94.11) of the correct translations is clearly shown in time and place clauses. Below is an analysis and a commentary on these results:

1. Approximately , most of the Participants translate the coordinating conjunctions (*and* and *but*) only as coordinating devices neglecting the conditions implied. This leads to incorrect translations. This is so clear because the majority (82.35%) translate the sentence (Read your lessons, and no one will blame you.) inadequately. Participant no.1 , for instance, translates this sentence into (اقرأ دروسك ولن يلومك احد.) which does not refer to the condition implied. It should be translated into (ان\اذا تقرا دروسك فلن يلومك احد.).
2. As far as restrictive modifiers ( adjectives and relative pronouns ) are concerned , it can be noticed that most of the students (76.47%) ignore the implied conditions in these modifiers in their translations focussing only on the modifiers primary function which is modification. Notice, for example, Participant no.4 translation of the sentence (Brave solidiers die.) . The Participant translates it into (الجنود الشجعان يموتون.) whereas the corect one ought to focus on the implied condition (اذا كان الجنود شجعانا فانهم يموتون.).
3. It can be seen that the majority ( 73.53 %) of the sample translate the English noun phrase into Arabic disregarding the condition implied. For example, Participant no.7 translates the sentence( An educated man would have answered differently.) into ( الرجل المتعلم ممكن ان يجيب بصورة مختلفة ) where it has to be translated into ( لو كان رجلا متعلما لاجاب بطريقة مختلفة ).
4. The students incorrect Arabic translations of mind-construction compose about (73.53 %) of the sample. This indicates their unawareness of the condition implied. See, for instance, Participant no. 12 translation of the



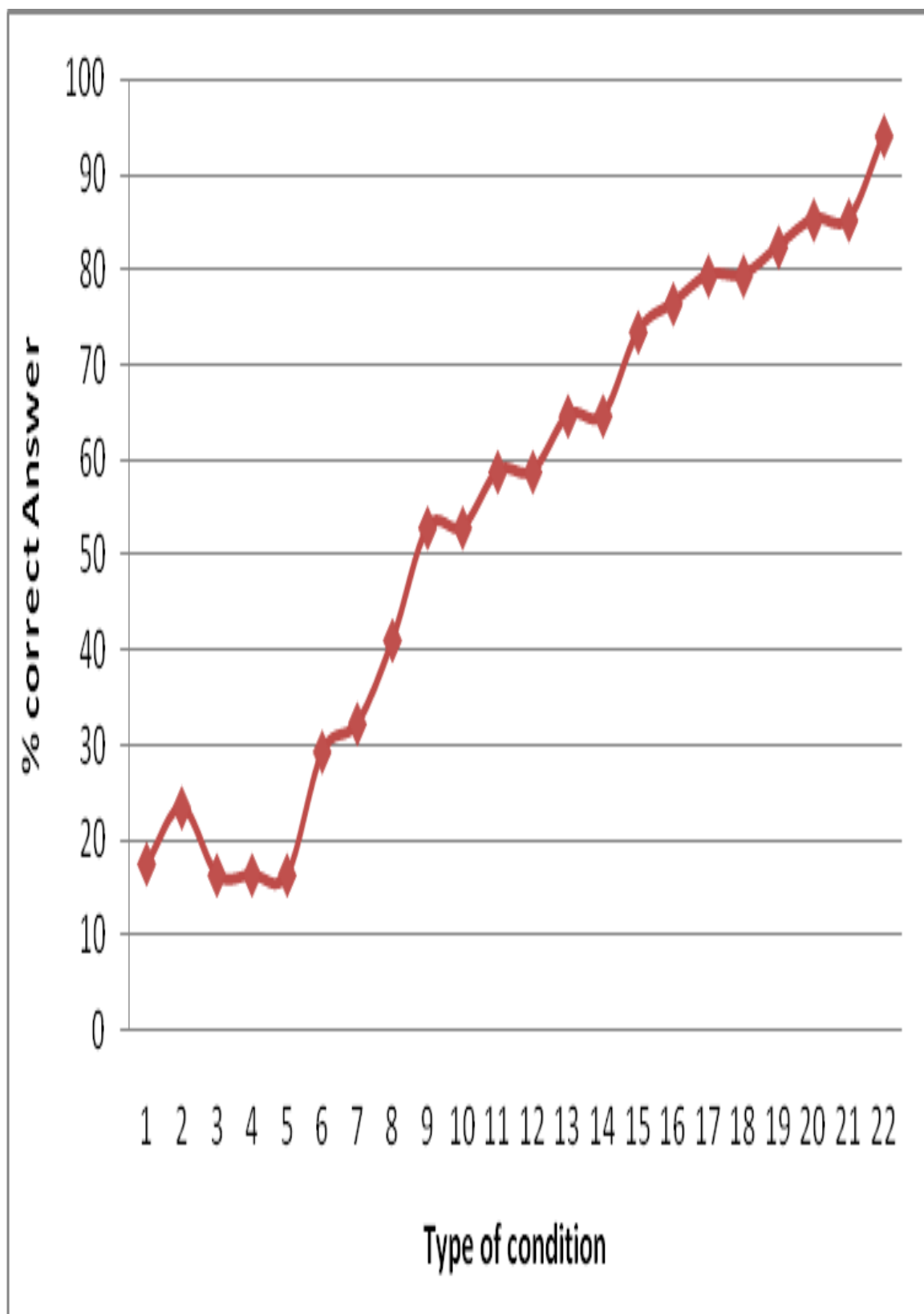
sentence ( Our teacher does not mind being late.) . The Participant translates it as ( أيا ن تتأخر فان مدرسنا لا ) while it must be translated into ( لا يمانع مدرسنا في التأخير. ) ( يمانع. )

in which the condition is clear. The same is true in the translation of sentence adverbials (67.64 %) and aphoristic sentence (47.05 %).

5. The intensity of the problems generated by the non-finite clauses differ. The (v-ing) participle clause incorrect translations (44.17 %) is greater than the past participle (20.28) and the to+infinitive (17.65 %) clauses . This means that the non-finite (v-ing) clause is the most problematic type of participles as far as implied condition is concerned. For example, examine Participant no. 18 translation of the following sentence indicating v-ing participle clause ( Thinking deeply leads to successful steps.) . The Participant translates it into ( التفكير اذا ان ) (العميق يقود الى خطوات ناجحة.) whereas the adequate one should be ( كان التفكير عميقا فانه سيؤدي يقود الى خطوات ناجحة. ).

6. It is clear that if-clauses convey a condition . But the problem is that the students are unaware of the specific uses of each type of if-clause. They mix between these types. This confusion leads to inaccurate Arabic translations (zero conditional 35.30%, 1<sup>st</sup> conditional 26.48 %, 2<sup>nd</sup> conditional 23.53 %) . Notice , for instance, Participant no. 20 translation of the sentence ( I shall call you, if I work late. ) which is ( اتصل بك عند عملي متاخرا. ) . Of course , this translation lacks condition so it has to be translated into ( سأتصل بك اذا عملت لوقت متاخر. ).

7. Place and time clauses record the highest percentage (94.11) in the students correct translations. This may be justified by stating that the meanings of these clauses are close to the meanings of Arabic conditional particles. Diagram (1) below shows the trends in the students' translations.



**Diagram (1) The Trends in the Students' Translations**

## 4. Conclusions

Out of the present findings , the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The most important conclusion that the study arrives at is that the students do commit certain mistakes in their translation of English conditional clauses into Arabic. These mistakes range from most influential as in the coordinating conjunction 'and' to the least influential ones as in 'place and time clauses'.
2. This deficiency can be traced back to the inadequate knowledge that they possess of the structures and functions of conditional .Although the students study three grammar courses but they are still incapable of identifying conditional clauses. This is solely because the courses themselves are poor enough to draw the students' attention to such structures. This emphasizes the urgent need to revise these courses and design them in a way which enables the students to identify problematic structures , conditionals at least.
3. The deeply-rooted claim that conditional clauses are represented by if-clauses only needs to be emphasizingly modified . This modification should take place through practical examples presented to the students in their Translation into Arabic or Translation into English courses during their second and third stages.

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## **Appendix**

### **Test Sheet**

**Q. Translate the following into Arabic in no more than sixty-six minutes:**

- 1. I take my umbrella if it rains.**
- 2. I shall call you if I work late.**
- 3. If the bus did not arrive on time, I would drive you to the airport.**
- 4. An educated man would have answered differently.**
- 5. In another situation, your opinion might be right.**
- 6. When you are tired, go home.**
- 7. Basil will complete his Ph.D. in England, circumstances permitting.**
- 8. Frankly, I do not like to see you.**
- 9. No work, no money.**
- 10. To be healthy requires some physical exercises.**
- 11. Insulted, the student will hate the lecture.**
- 12. Thinking deeply leads to successful steps.**
- 13. Our teacher does not mind being late.**
- 14. It is shameful that you could not discuss your research paper.**
- 15. Read your lessons, and no one will blame you.**
- 16. Stop smoking, or you will be ill.**
- 17. The player was about to target, but the referee whistled.**
- 18. We would have defeated the enemy, only we did not have modern weapons.**
- 19. Close your nose, else you will be infected.**
- 20. Brave solders die.**
- 21. A cat which bit is dangerous to children.**
- 22. Our people have to be united; otherwise terrorism dominates.**