

LESSON 20

Homeric Conditions

20.1. Introduction

In the Homeric poems, Conditional sentences have not yet attained the regularity of the classical period. Some Homeric Conditions have the same form as those of the classical period. Some may be explained as mixed types. But some Homeric constructions no longer appear in the classical period. On the other hand, some classical constructions have not yet developed at the stage of the Homeric poems. The Doric and Aeolic form αἰ may be used instead of εἰ in Homer. And the enclitic κε may be used instead of ἄν. When κε occurs before a word beginning with a vowel, either movable ν may be added, or ε may be elided.

The following sections of this Lesson contain some representative examples of Homeric constructions which differ from the classical standard. At the risk of anachronism, but for the sake of comparison, the same categories are used as in Lesson 19. However, scholars do not always agree in the classification or translation of Homeric Conditions.

20.2. Open Conditions

20.2.1. Open Particular Conditions

Open Particular Conditions normally have the same form in Homer as in the classical period. However, in addition to the usual form of Future Open Particular Condition (εἰ + Indic. in if-clause, Indic. in Main clause), κε may appear with the Indicative in the if-clause in Homer.

σοὶ μὲν δῆ, Μενέλαε, κατηφείη καὶ ὄνειδος
ἔσσειται, εἴ κε Ἀχιλλῆος ἀγαυοῦ πιστὸν ἑταῖρον
τείχει ὑπο Τρώων ταχέες κύνες ἐλκήσουσιν· (Hom. *Il.* 17.556–558.)

For you indeed, Menelaus, there will be dejection and reproach, if swift hounds tear apart the trusted companion of noble Achilles under the wall of the Trojans.

20.2.2. Open General Conditions

20.2.2.1. Present

In Present Open General Conditions, Homer regularly uses εἰ (αἰ) alone and the Subjunctive without ἄν or κε.

εἰ δ' ἄρα τις καὶ μῶνος ἰὼν ξύμβληται ὀδίτης,
οὔ τι κατακρύπτουσιν, ἐπεὶ σφισιν ἐγγύθεν εἰμέν,
ὥς περ Κύκλωπές τε καὶ ἄγρια φύλα Γηγάντων.
(Hom. *Od.* 7.204–206.)

And if, then, any one going alone as a wayfarer meets up with <them>, they do not conceal at all, since we are near to them, just as the Cyclopes and the wild tribes of the Giants.

ξύμβληται is third person singular Aorist Subjunctive Middle of συμβάλλειν.

A classical equivalent of the Homeric construction occurs in the following example.

τέλει γάρ, εἴ τι νύξ ἀφῆ,
τοῦτ' ἐπ' ἡμάρ ἔρχεται. (S. *OT* 198–199.)

For, if night leaves anything out, this day comes on for completion.

(Most editors emend τέλει to τελεῖν, and take τοῦτ(ο) as Acc.: *day comes on to complete this*. On either reading ἐπ(ί) is an adv. not a preposition.)

20.2.2.2. Future

- a. Future Open General Conditions are far more common in Homer than Future Open Particular Conditions. (This tendency continues into the classical period.) Homer most often uses εἰ (αἰ) and the Subjunctive with κε (or occasionally ἄν), equivalent to classical εἰάν and the Subjunctive, in the if-clause, and Future Indicative in the Main clause. For the if-clause, ἦν is also frequent; but the forms εἰάν and ἄν (with long α) do not occur in Homer.

τούτω μὲν γὰρ κῦδος ἄμ' ἔψεται, **εἴ κεν** Ἀχαιοὶ
 Τρῶας δηώσωσιν ἔλωσί τε Ἴλιον ἱρήν ... (Hom.*Il.* 4.415–416.)

*For renown will follow after this <man>, if the Achaeans
 cut down the Trojans and capture sacred Ilios ...*

Future Indicative in Main clause, εἴ κεν with Subjunctive in if-clause.

- b. Instead of the usual Future Indicative of the Main clause of a Future Open General Conditional sentence, the Subjunctive (with κε or ἄν) may occur in Homer. However, this usage is equivalent in function to the Future Indicative, and is to be translated as a Future Indicative.

καὶ δέ κέ τοι **εἴπησι**, διοτρεφές, **αἶ κ' ἐθέλησθα**,
 ὅττι τοι ἐν μεγάροισι κακόν τ' ἀγαθόν τε τέτυκται ...
 (Hom.*Od.* 4.391–392.)

*And he will also tell you, <O man> favoured by Zeus, if you are willing,
 what evil and what good has been done in your halls ...*

εἴπησι (3rd pers. sg. Aor. Subj. Act.) instead of ἐρεῖ (Fut. Indic.) in Main clause. τοι = σοι.

- c. A variation of this form is a mixed Condition, which uses εἰ with Optative for the if-clause and κε or ἄν with Subjunctive in the Main clause. The if-clause has the form of a Future Unfulfilled Condition, but is to be translated as a Future Open General Condition (Pres. Indic. in English). And the Main clause, again, is to be translated by a Future Indicative in English. This form occurs especially in threats or warnings; and the negative with the Subjunctive in the Main clause is οὐ, not μή.

... **εἰ** μὲν δὴ ἀντίβιον σὺν τεύχεσι **πειρηθείης**,
 οὐκ ἄν τοι χραίσμησι βιδὸς καὶ ταρφέες ἰοί·
 (Hom.*Il.* 11.386–387.)

... *if indeed in opposition you [were to] make an attempt with
 weapons,
 your bow and dense <shower of> arrows will not protect you.*

Negative οὐ with χραίσμησι (3rd pers. sg. Aor. Subj. Act.) in Main clause.

- d. εἰ alone without ἄν or κε is occasionally used with the Subjunctive in Future Open General Conditions in Homer.

σχέτλιος· εἴ περ γάρ σε κατακτάνη, οὐ σ' ἔτ' ἐγώ γε
κλαύσομαι ἐν λεχέεσσι, φίλον θάλος, ὄν τέκον αὐτή,
οὐδ' ἄλοχος πολύδωρος· (Hom.II. 22.86–88.)

*<He is> cruel. For **if** indeed **he kills** you, I for my part shall no longer lament for you on your deathbed, dear child, whom I myself bore, nor will your gifted wife.*

A classical equivalent of the Homeric construction occurs in the following example.

οὐ τοι μὰ τὴν Δήμητρά γ', εἰ μὴ σ' ἐκφάγω
ἐκ τῆσδε τῆς γῆς, οὐδέποτε βιώσομαι. (Ar.Eq. 698–699.)

*No indeed by Demeter, **if I do not eat you up** out of this land, I shall not even ever live.*

(The reading of the earliest manuscript is given for line 698. Some other manuscripts read ἔάν for εἰ and adjust the metre. But it is unlikely that an original classical construction would have been altered to a Homeric one.)

20.3. Unfulfilled Conditions

20.3.1. Present

There seem to be no Unfulfilled Conditional sentences in Homer, where both the if-clause and the Main clause refer to the present. However, there are mixed Conditions, in which the if-clause is Past Unfulfilled with εἰ and Past Aorist Indicative, whereas the Main clause is Present Unfulfilled with Optative and κε(ν) (not Past Imperf. Indic. with ἄν).

... εἰ μὲν τις τὸν ὄνειρον Ἀχαιῶν ἄλλος ἔνισπεν,
ψεῦδος κεν φαίμεν καὶ νοσφιζοίμεθα μάλλον. (Hom.II. 2.80–81.)

*... **if** any other of the Achaeans **had reported** this dream, **we would be calling** <it> a falsehood and **would** rather **be turning away from** <it>.*

20.3.2. Past

Past Aorist Indicative is used in Past Unfulfilled Conditions in Homer as in classical Attic. But Past Imperfect Indicative in Unfulfilled Conditions in Homer *always* refers to *past continuous* action, and does not express a Present Unfulfilled Condition.

Occasionally, Homer uses Indicative in the if-clause, but Optative with $\kappa\epsilon(\nu)$ in the Main clause of a Past Unfulfilled Condition. (There are further examples of Main clauses of this type, without any if-clause.)

ἔνθα **κε** ῥεῖα **φέρου** κλυτὰ τεύχεα Πανθοῖδαο
 Ἄτρεΐδης, **εἰ** μή οἱ **ἀγάσσατο** Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων ...
 (Hom.*Il.* 17.70–71.)

*Then easily **would** the son of Atreus **have been carrying off** the splendid armour
 of the son of Panthoüs, **if** Phoebus Apollo **had not envied** him.*

20.3.3. Future

For Future Unfulfilled Conditions, Homer does use the same construction as writers of the classical period: $\epsilon\acute{\iota}$ with Optative in the if-clause and Optative with $\acute{\alpha}\nu$ ($\kappa\epsilon$) in the Main clause. But he also uses $\epsilon\acute{\iota}$ ($\alpha\acute{\iota}$) with $\kappa\epsilon(\nu)$ and Optative in the if-clause.

εἴ κ' ἐθέλοις μοι, ξεῖνε, παρήμενος ἐν μεγάροισι
 τέρπειν, οὐ **κέ** μοι ὕπνος ἐπὶ βλεφάροισι **χυθείη**.
 (Hom.*Od.* 19.589–590.)

***If you were to be willing**, stranger, to sit by me in my halls
 and cheer me up, sleep **would not be poured** over my eyelids.*

References

Goodwin (1889), *Syntax of the moods and tenses of the Greek verb*, §§434–443, 450–454, 460–461, 468–471, 474, 488.

Smyth (1956), *Greek grammar*, §§2311, 2327, 2334.

EXERCISE 20

Translate the following passages.

1. εἰ δέ τις ἐσσι βροτῶν, οἱ ἀρούρης καρπὸν ἔδουσι,
ἀσσον ἴθ'...

ἐσσι (enclitic)	εἶ (Attic)
ἄρουρα, -ας, ἡ	<i>earth, land</i>
καρπός, -οῦ, ὁ	<i>produce, harvest</i>
ἔδειν	<i>to eat</i> (Attic: ἐσθίειν)
ἀσσον (adv.)	<i>earer</i> (comparative of ἄγχι)
ἴθ'	ἴθι

2. εἰ δ' αὖ τις ῥαίησι θεῶν ἐνὶ οἴνοπι πόντῳ,
πλήσομαι, ἐν στήθεσσιν ἔχων ταλαπενθέα θυμόν·

ῥαίειν	<i>to cause a shipwreck</i>
ῥαίη-σι	3rd pers. sg. Imperf. Subj. Act. with suffix
ἐνὶ	ἐν
ταλαπενθήs, -ές	<i>long-suffering</i>

3. εἰ δέ κε μὴ δώωσι, ἐγὼ δέ κεν αὐτὸς ἔλωμαι
ἢ τεὸν ἢ Αἴαντος ἰὼν γέρας, ἢ Ὀδυσῆος
ἄξω ἑλών·

δώωσιν	Attic: δῶσι(ν)
δέ (2nd instance)	<i>then</i> (apodotic after preceding Conditional clause)
τεός, -ά, -όν	Attic: σός, σή, σόν
Αἴας, -αντος, ὁ	<i>Ajax</i>

4. οὐδὲ πόλινδε
 ἔρχομαι, εἰ μὴ πού τι περιφρῶν Πηνελόπεια
 ἔλθέμεν ὀτρύνησιν, ὅτ' ἀγγελίη ποθὲν ἔλθη.

πόλιν-δε	-δε, adv. suffix: motion towards
πού τι	<i>perhaps</i>
ἐλθέμεν	ἐλθεῖν (Attic)
ὀτρύνειν	<i>to urge</i>
ὀτρύνη-σι	3rd pers. sg. Aor. Subj. Act. with suffix
ὅτ'	ὅτε

5. καὶ νύ κεν ἔνθ' ἀπόλοιτο Ἄρης ἄτος πολέμοιο,
 εἰ μὴ μητρυιῆ περικαλλῆς Ἑρίβοια
 Ἑρμῆα ἐξήγγειλεν·

νυ (enclitic)	<i>indeed</i>
ἄτος, (ἄτος) -ον	<i>insatiable (in) (+ Gen.)</i>
μητρυιά, -ᾶς, ἡ	<i>stepmother (of the sons of Aloeus, just mentioned)</i>
περικαλλῆς, -ές	<i>very beautiful</i>
Ἑρμῆς, -οῦ, ὁ	<i>Hermes (here Dat. uncontracted)</i>

6. εἰ χ' ἕτερον ἄξαις, ἕτερον κ' ἐπὶ βουσὶ βάλοιο.

ἀγνύναι	<i>to break</i>
ἕτερον	Refers to one of two ploughs (τὰ ἄροτρα)

7. ἀλλά μοι αἰνὸν ἄχος σέθεν ἔσσεται, ὦ Μενέλαε,
 αἶ κε θάνης καὶ πότμον ἀναπλήσης βίοιο.

αἰνός, -ά, -όν	<i>terrible</i>
ἄχος, -ους, τό	<i>distress</i>
σέθεν	σοῦ (as Objective Gen.)
ἔσσεται	ἔσται (Attic)
βίοτος, -ου (-οιο), ὁ	<i>life</i>

8. τόν γ' εἶ πως σὺ δύναιο λοχησάμενος λελαβέσθαι,
ὅς κέν τοι εἴπησιν ὁδὸν καὶ μέτρα κελεύθου
νόστον θ', ὡς ἐπὶ πόντον ἐλεύσει ἰχθυόεντα.

τόν	<i>him</i>
λοχᾶν	<i>to ambush</i>
(λε)λαβέσθαι	reduplicated Aor. Mid. Infin.
ὅς	<i>he</i>
τοι (Epic)	σοι (Attic)
εἴπη-σιν	3rd pers. sg. Aor. Subj. Act. with suffix
ὡς	<i>how</i>
ἐπί	<i>over</i>
ἐλεύσει	ἐλεύση (Attic)
ἰχθυόεις, -εσσα, -εν	<i>fish-filled</i>

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