LESSON 19
Conditions

19.1. Introduction

In the study of Greek syntax, various schemes of classification have been used for Conditions. The following scheme is intended to be as simple and clear as possible. It classifies the usual practice of the classical period, according to type of Condition, with subdivisions according to time reference. (Homeric Conditions show some differences; see Lesson 20.) The negative in all types of Conditional clause is regularly μή.

Conditional clauses are adverbial clauses, which modify the verb in the clause on which they depend. Most commonly, the leading clause is the Main clause of a sentence. But a Conditional clause may depend on another Subordinate clause, as in §19.4.1 below.

19.2. Open Conditions

Open Conditions leave it 'open' whether the Condition is, or is likely to be, fulfilled.

19.2.1. Particular

Open Particular Conditions refer to 'particular' circumstances and, therefore, use εἰ with Indicative in the if-clause, and Indicative in the Main clause (if the Main clause is a statement).

Present
εἰ τοῦτο ποιοῦσιν, ἁμαρτάνουσιν.
If they are doing this, they are making a mistake.

Past
εἰ τοῦτο ἐποίουν, ἡμάρτανον.
If they were doing this, they were making a mistake.

Past Imperfect Indicative denotes continuous or repeated action.

εἰ τοῦτο ἐποίησαν, ἥμαρτον.
If they did this, they made a mistake.

Past Aorist Indicative denotes momentary action.

Future

εἰ τοῦτο ποιήσουσιν, ἁμαρτήσονται.
If they do this, they will make a mistake.

In English idiom, a Present form is regularly used in the if-clause of a Future Open Condition (so also in §19.2.2 below). Future Open Particular Conditions, with Indicative in the if-clause, are less common but more emphatic than Future Open General Conditions. They are used especially in threats or warnings.

εἰ σ' ἡ 'πιοῦσα λάμπας ὄψεται θεοῦ
καὶ παῖδας ἐντὸς τῆσδε τερμόνων χθονὸς,
θανῇ· (E. *Med.* 352–354.)

If the coming light of god sees you
and your children within the limits of this land,
you will die.

19.2.2. General

Open General Conditions all refer to the circumstances of the Condition in a 'general' or 'indefinite' way. Parallel to other indefinite constructions, they therefore use ἐάν with Subjunctive in Primary sequence in if-clauses, and εἰ with Optative in Past sequence. Alternative forms for ἐάν also occur: ἤν, ἄν (with long α).

Present

ἐὰν τοῦτο ποιῶσιν, ἁμαρτάνουσιν.
If (ever) they do this, they are making a mistake.

ἐάν + Subjunctive in if-clause; Indicative in Main clause.

Past

εἰ τοῦτο ποιοῖεν, ἡμάρτανον.
If (ever) they were doing this, they were making a mistake.

Imperfect Optative and Past Imperfect Indicative denote continuous or repeated action.

εἰ τοῦτο ποιήσειαν, ἥμαρτον.
If (ever) they did this, they made a mistake.

Aorist Optative and Past Aorist Indicative denote momentary action.

In both Past examples, εἰ + Optative in if-clause; Indicative in Main clause.

Future

ἐὰν τοῦτο ποιῶσιν, ἁμαρτήσονται.
If (ever) they do this, they will make a mistake.

ἐάν + Subjunctive in if-clause; Indicative in Main clause.

19.3. Unfulfilled Conditions

Unfulfilled Conditions imply that the circumstances of the if-clause are contrary to fact or 'unfulfilled'. From a chronological point of view, any Future Condition is necessarily unfulfilled. But the term 'unfulfilled' is not applied to other Future Conditions. Future Unfulfilled Conditions are unlikely to be fulfilled. They belong to the same category of Condition as Present and Past Unfulfilled Conditions.

Especially in the scheme of Unfulfilled Conditions, it should be noted that the headings 'Present', 'Past' and 'Future' indicate the time reference of the Conditions, not necessarily the Tense of the Indicative verbs, and certainly not the Aspect of the Optative verbs. The form of the Past *continuous* Unfulfilled Condition is the same as the form of the Present Unfulfilled Condition. In the if-clause of English Present and Future Unfulfilled Conditions, 'were' is a Subjunctive form, not a Past Indicative form.

Present

εἰ τοῦτο ἐποίουν, ἡμάρτανον ἄν.
If they were (now) doing this, they would be making a mistake.

εἰ + Past Imperfect Indicative in if-clause; Past Imperfect Indicative with ἄν in Main clause.

Past

εἰ τοῦτο ἐποίουν, ἡμάρτανον ἄν.
If they had been doing this, they would have been making a mistake.

εἰ + Past Imperfect Indicative in if-clause; Past Imperfect Indicative with ἄν in Main clause; continuous.

εἰ τοῦτο ἐποίησαν, ἥμαρτον ἄν.
If they had done this, they would have made a mistake.

εἰ + Past Aorist Indicative in if-clause; Past Aorist Indicative with ἄν in Main clause; momentary.

Future

εἰ τοῦτο ποιοῖεν, ἀμαρτάνοιεν ἄν.
If they were to (be) do(ing) this, they would be making a mistake. Imperfect Aspect; continuous.

εἰ τοῦτο ποιήσειαν, ἁμάρτοιεν ἄν.
If they were to do this, they would make a mistake. Aorist Aspect; momentary.

(Often expressed as: *If they did this, …*)

In both Future examples, εἰ + Optative in if-clause; Optative with ἄν in Main clause.

19.4. Mixed Conditions

19.4.1. Mixed Times and Types

In some Conditional sentences, there may be a difference of time reference or of type of Condition (or both) between the Main clause and the if-clause, as in the following sentence.

καὶ δῆλον ὅτι, εἰ τοῖς πλέοσιν ἀρέσκοντές ἐσμεν, τοῖσδ᾽ ἂν μόνοις οὐκ ὀρθῶς ἀπαρέσκοιμεν … (Th. 1.38.4.)

And <it is> clear that, if we are acceptable to the greater number, we would not rightly be unacceptable to these <people> alone …

Present Open Particular if-clause, Future Unfulfilled Main clause.

19.4.2. General Principles (with Primary Time Reference)

Open General Conditions, expressing a general principle, may sometimes have Optative (rather than Subjunctive) in the if-clause, and Indicative in the Main clause. The Indicative of the Main clause is usually Present (sometimes with Future implications), sometimes Future, or rarely Present Perfect. And sometimes, in the Main clause the verb 'to be' is unexpressed.

καὶ οὐκ ἄδικος αὕτη ἡ ἀξίωσίς ἐστιν, εἰ τύχοιεν πρὸς ἀλλήλους οἵ τε ἀφιστάμενοι καὶ ἀφ᾽ ὧν διακρίνοιντο ἴσοι μὲν τῇ γνώμῃ ὄντες καὶ εὐνοίᾳ … (Th. 3.9.2.)

And this assessment is not unfair, if those who secede <from an alliance> and <those> from whom they are separated [were to] happen to be on an equal footing towards each other in attitude and good will …

In English style, it would be natural to omit the words '[were to]'. But then the distinctive form of the Greek construction is lost in translation.

λυπουμένοις ὀχληρός, εἰ μόλοι, ξένος. (E.*Alc.* 540.)
A visitor, if he were to come, <is> annoying to people who are grieving.

The verb 'to be' is unexpressed in the Main clause in Greek. Again, in English style it would be natural to say 'comes' rather than 'were to come'.

19.4.3. Iterative Past Conditions

There is also an iterative form of Past Open General Condition, using εἰ + Optative in the if-clause, and ἄν with either Past Imperfect Indicative or Past Aorist Indicative in the Main clause. The term 'iterative' indicates repeated action.

… εἰ πολιορκουμένῃ τινὶ τῶν πόλεων τῶν συμμαχίδων εἷς μόνος Λακεδαιμονίων βοηθήσειεν, ὑπὸ πάντων ἂν ὡμολογεῖτο παρὰ τοῦτον γενέσθαι τὴν σωτηρίαν αὐτοῖς. (Isoc. 6.52.)

… if a single one of the Spartans came to help one of our allied cities when it was under siege, it used to be agreed by all that due to this man safety had come to them.

Past Imperfect Indicative in Main clause denotes continuous action.

εἰ δέ τις ὑμᾶς ὑποθωπεύσας λιπαρὰς καλέσειεν Ἀθήνας,
εὕρετο πᾶν διὰ τὰς λιπαράς, ἀφύων τιμὴν περιάψας.
(Ar.*Ach.* 639–640.)

And if anyone, using flattery, called you 'shining Athens',
he obtained everything on account of that 'shining', by surrounding small fry
with honour.

Past Aorist Indicative in Main clause denotes momentary action.

19.5. The Negative in If-Clauses

The negative in if-clauses is regularly μή (as noted in §19.1 above). In particular circumstances, οὐ may occur:

- οὐ negates an individual word, for example, οὐκ ἐθέλειν, 'to be un-willing'
- the factuality of a condition is emphasised
- οὐ negates one of two contrasted clauses, which are introduced by a single εἰ with Indicative
- with expressions of emotion, οὐ may occur in a clause where 'if' is equivalent to 'that' (Lesson 34.4)
- οὐ may negate a clause, in which 'if' is virtually Causal, meaning 'since', 'because' (Lessons 23.1 and 1.1).

References

Goodwin (1889), *Syntax of the moods and tenses of the Greek verb*, §§162, 378–513.

Smyth (1956), *Greek grammar*, §§2280–2368, 2696–2698, 2701.

The analyses of Goodwin (1889) and Smyth (1956) are more complex than that which has been attempted here, and their terminology is different in part.

EXERCISE 19

Translate the following passages.

1. εἰ δ’ ἔστιν ὅστις δαιμόνων ὑπερφρονεῖ,
   ἐς τοῦδ’ ἀθρήσας θάνατον ἡγείσθω θεούς.

ὑπερφρονεῖν	*to look down on, to despise* (+ Gen.)
ἀθρεῖν ἐς (+ Acc.)	*to look at, to observe*
ἡγεῖσθαι	*to believe in* (+ Acc.)

2.   εἰ δ’ ἐργάσῃ
   μὴ ταῦτα, λύπην πᾶσιν Ἀργείοις βαλεῖς.

3. εἰ γὰρ τὰ τοῦδε τόξα μὴ ληφθήσεται,
   οὐκ ἔστι πέρσαι σοι τὸ Δαρδάνου πέδον.

τόξα, -ων, τά	*bow*
πέρθειν	*to ravage, to sack*
Δάρδανος, -ου, ὁ	*Dardanus* (mythical ancestor of kings of Troy)
πέδον, -ου, τό	*land*

4. εἰ δ’ αὖ τι πράξαιτ’ ἀγαθὸν ἀττικωνικοί
   κἄλθοιεν οἱ Λάκωνες εἰρήνης πέρι,
   ἐλέγετ’ ἂν ὑμεῖς εὐθύς· ἐξαπατώμεθα …

δ’ αὖ	*and/but again* (often enumerating)
ἀττικωνικοί	οἱ Ἀττικωνικοί, ‘*the Atticononians*’ (coined to rhyme with Λακωνικοί, *Laconians*)
κἄλθοιεν	καὶ ἔλθοιεν
Λάκωνες, -ων, οἱ	*Laconians*
ἐξαπατᾶν	*to deceive* (here Pass., and beginning direct speech)

5. ἢν δ᾽ αὖ γένηται ξυμφορά τις ἐς λέχος,
   τὰ λῷστα καὶ κάλλιστα πολεμιώτατα
   τίθεσθε.

λέχος, -ους, τό	(*bed*, often referring to) *marriage*
λῷστος, -η, -ον	*best*
τίθεσθαι (Mid.)	*to regard (as)* (here Indic.)

6. εἰ παρῆσθα, τὸν θεὸν τὸν νῦν ψέγεις
   εὐχαῖσιν ἂν μετῆλθες …

τόν (2nd instance)	ὅν
ψέγειν	*to criticise*
εὐχή, -ῆς, ἡ	*prayer*
μετελθεῖν (Aor.)	*to approach* (*someone*: Acc.) *with* (*something*: Dat.)

7. ἐγὼ μὲν ἄν, ἔφη ὁ Κῦρος, εἰ σὺ εἴην, ὡς τάχιστα ὅπλα ποιοίμην
   πᾶσι Πέρσαις τοῖς προσιοῦσιν …

προσιέναι	*to approach, to come (here)* (in friendly sense)

8. And perhaps I would have been put to death because of this, if the
   government had not been quickly dissolved.

perhaps	ἴσως
to be put to death = to die	ἀποθνήσκειν
government	ἀρχή, -ῆς, ἡ
to dissolve	καταλύειν

9. For I would not be speaking, if I did not care greatly for the whole
   of Greece.

to care (for)	κήδεσθαι (Mid.; + Gen.)