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TEACHING ENGLISH CONDITIONALS: SYSTEMIC REVIEW OF MODERN METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND TEACHING TECHNIQUES

Abstract. English grammar has always caused certain difficulties for students of secondary and higher educational establishments. Some grammatical phenomena, such as conditional sentences, are highlighted within certain scientific circles, based on various scientific approaches. It arouses scientific interest in their studying and applying in one’s own pedagogical experience. Accordingly, such multifacetedness determines the choice of a method of clarifying grammatical material on the part of the teacher, which, of course, causes a number of questions. In order to outline the teaching-learning algorithm of the topic “English Conditionals” in a certain way, the article attempts to describe the methodological approaches and teaching techniques used by foreign teachers when working with ESL students.

It is noted that nowadays English teachers use different ways of presenting English conditional sentences, for example, a comprehensive listing of possible combinations of an if-clause and a result-clause; a tabular method of summarizing and contrasting the subjunctive forms in tables; the outlining of only three most common types of English conditionals, namely, the predictive, hypothetical and counterfactual conditionals.

The following methodological approaches are described in detail in the paper: contrastive analysis, probability, deductive, inductive, and communicative approaches.

Also, the paper offers an overview of teaching techniques that are focused on the performance of certain types of activities and tasks on the topic “English Conditionals”: Game based learning (GBL), the PPP procedure (Presentation-Practice-Production), Picture Sequences, and teaching conditionals by means of songs.

Keywords: conditional sentences of the English language, grammatical category, methodological approaches, teaching techniques, semantic universals, types of conditional sentences, grammatical skills, communicative approach, contrastive analysis.

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ВИКЛАДАННЯ ТЕМИ «УМОВНІ РЕЧЕННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ»: СИСТЕМНИЙ ОГЛЯД СУЧАСНИХ МЕТОДОЛОГІЧНИХ ПІДХОДІВ І ВИКЛАДАЧЬКИХ ТЕХНІК

Анотація. Граматика англійської мови завжди викликала певні складності для учнів закладів середньої та вищої освіти. Деякі граматичні явища, як, наприклад, умовні речення, висвітлюються у певних наукових колах, базуючись на різноманітних наукових підходах, що викликає науковий інтерес до їхнього вивчення та застосування у власному педагогічному досвіді. Відповідно, така багатоманітність обумовлює вибір способу з'ясування граматичного матеріалу з боку викладача, що, безумовно, викликає низку труднощів. Задля того, щоб певним чином окреслити алгоритм викладання-вивчення теми «Умовні речення англійської мови» у статті робиться спроба описати методологічні підходи та викладацькі тактики, які використовують зарубіжні викладачі, працюючи зі студентами, для яких англійська мова – це друга іноземна мова.

Зазначається, що наразі викладачі англійської мови використовують різні способи представлення англійськомовних умовних речень, наприклад, вичерпний перелік можливих комбінацій підрядних if-речень та головних речень; табличний спосіб узагальнення та зіставлення підрядних умовних речень; окреслення лише трьох найпоширеніших типів умовних речень англійської мови, які вказують на реальні або дуже ймовірні ситуації в теперішньому або майбутньому часі; нереальні ситуації в теперішньому часі та нереальні ситуації та їхні наслідки в минулому часі.

У статті детально описані такі методологічні підходи: контрастивний аналіз, імовірнісний, дедуктивний, індуктивний та комунікативний підходи.

Також, стаття пропонує огляд викладацьких тактик, які зорієнтовані на виконання певних видів діяльності та завдань з теми «Умовні речення англійської мови»: ігрове навчання, методика PPR (Представлення-Практика-Продуктування), техніка послідовності зображень (Picture Sequences) та вивчення умовних речень за допомогою пісень.

Ключові слова: умовні речення англійської мови, граматична категорія, методологічні підходи, викладацькі техніки, семантичні універсалії, види умовних речень, граматичні навички, комунікативний підхід, контрастивний аналіз.

Defining the problem and argumentation of the topicality of its consideration. Mastering English grammar seems to be a common problem for the students while learning the foreign language. The grammatical phenomena of the English language, for example, the system of tenses, are very, and sometimes radically different from those phenomena that students encounter in their native language. In this regard, for some, the process of learning English grammar becomes
difficult, many feel confused and even find it rather boring. Of course, there are those people who will say that you can communicate in a foreign language without knowing the grammar in full, even making grammatical errors. But, looking at it sensibly, it becomes obvious that the students’ formation of grammatical skills is definitely necessary.

We emphasize not for the first time that teaching as well as learning any grammatical topic by students is accompanied by a lot of questions and troubles. However, there is the solving of the problem and it is deeply connected with the way of explanation the qualified and proficient teacher uses at his/her classes. Moreover, it depends on the teacher’s personal comprehension of the topic and the manner he/she can share it with the students.

Based on our own pedagogical experience, we note that the study of the topic “Conditional sentences” by students is a rather difficult process, not to mention the application of this phenomenon in speech. “Conditional sentences are a significant obstacle to overcome for teachers and students of English as a second or foreign language” [1, P. 134]. “Among the most difficult grammatical structures for students, conditional sentences stand fifth after articles, prepositions, phrasal verbs, and verbals” [2, P. 3]. It is very difficult for a teacher to find the necessary material in order to present such a complex phenomenon correctly. It is very important to build your explanations logically and illustratively. To do this, you first need to develop your own classification or choose a classification from one of the scholars that will help you in explaining this grammatical category.

One of the key grammatical categories of the English language is the system of conditional sentences (Conditionals), “modally coloured” in their structure and indicating the relationship between the circumstance, the speaker and the action itself (phenomenon, state). Conditional sentences in English are studied within the mood system, which includes the Indicative, the Subjunctive and the Imperative types of mood.

Traditionally, in foreign textbooks, English conditionals are broken up into Zero Conditionals, Conditional Type 1, Conditional Type 2, and Conditional Type 3 [3, P. 79]. In addition, there is a mixed type of conditional sentences (Mixed Conditionals), which may include components of the above types, but is usually represented by a mixture of the second and third types. Using traditional domestic textbooks on English grammar would significantly supplement information about conditional mood specifically from the point of view of learning English as a foreign language by Ukrainian learners.

**Previous Research in the Area.** The critical and analytical review of scientific findings points out that the entire arsenal of scientific works can be conditionally divided into those oriented to the theoretical study of conditional sentences within modern grammar studies [3: 4; 5; 6; 7; 8], and those that directly take into account the practical experience of teachers [1; 2; 3; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 14] including individual teaching methods and techniques.
T. Datska, for instance, pays attention to establishing the peculiarities of terminological differences in highlighting the topic “Conditionals” through the analysis of domestic and foreign textbooks and manuals on practical English grammar of different years of publication [3, P. 484].

O. Kkhelil outlines two main approaches to the study of conditionals – “formal and semantic, which complement each other” [4, P. 157]. It is noted that when studying conditional sentences, it is necessary to consider epistemic, temporal, hypothetical, modal and instructive aspects [4, P. 157].

We must admit that the majority of papers made by foreign scholars attempt to outline the similarities and differences of English conditional sentences and those ones of their native language [1; 2; 6; 9; 11]. Most of such works are empirically supported. Moreover, researchers emphasize various problems students face while studying this topic. S. Fatiman, for example, concludes “that students’ problems in understanding and constructing conditional sentences were found in the use of tenses, the forms’ understanding of sentences and the meaning contained in conditional sentences. Another main finding of the study is that there were two strategies used by students in constructing conditional sentences, namely identifying the tenses used in sentences and matching the tenses needed to make it easier for them to construct the sentence required. These findings suggest that in understanding and constructing English conditional sentences, students have to master all aspects needed in conditional sentences and teachers should be aware of the weaknesses and needs of their students” [2]. The search in the Internet system shows that this problem is usually overcome by some teaching techniques [15; 16; 17; 18].

This field is maturing, with a wealth of well-understood methods and algorithms. Thus, the objective of this paper is to review the main methodological approaches and teaching techniques for teachers of secondary as well as higher educational establishments to use them when teaching conditionals.

This paper is organized as follows: the first section gives a brief overview of methodological approaches used in teaching English conditionals. The second section examines teaching techniques which enable students to master the content of the topic, learn how to apply the content in particular contexts.

Results and Discussion. Actually, there are many approaches and teaching methods of training English conditional sentences. These approaches have been influential in the field because of the complexity of the issue, on the one hand, and the teachers’ desire to facilitate the students’ realizing of the matter, on the other hand. This problem has received substantial interest in scientific circles as “there’s no agreed-upon method of teaching English conditionals. Some teachers teach conditional sentences and subjunctive mood side by side, some teachers teach them separately, and teachers use different ways to classify conditional sentences” [6, P. 37]. Nowadays teachers use various ways of presenting English conditionals such as “a comprehensive listing of possible combinations of an if-clause and a result-clause; a tabular method of summarizing and contrasting the subjunctive forms in
tables; the outlining of only three most common types of English conditionals, namely, the predictive, hypothetical and counterfactual conditionals” [6, P. 38]. Thus, to decide in what way to convey this grammar topic at English classes one should come after the following passages, to our mind.

We differentiate between methodological approaches and teaching techniques in the following way: a methodological approach is a way of looking at teaching and learning conditionals; that is a theoretical view of what conditional sentences are and within what scientific approaches they are investigated whereas teaching techniques are well-defined procedures used to accomplish a specific activity or task [19].

Section 1. Methodological approaches. We are sure the teacher must master all methodological approaches as for the topic discussed to strengthen his/her methodical background. This will enable the teacher to decide what approach to follow.

In this paper, we have already mentioned that a lot of scientific findings try to delineate the similarities and differences of English conditional sentences and those ones of their native language. Hence, contrastive analysis shows such alikenesses and distinctions among languages. Z. Karacaer, extrapolating R. Lado’s ideas, states two basic principles of the contrastive analysis: “describe before comparing” and “compare patterns, not whole languages” [11, P. 11].

The goal of the contrastive analysis is not paying the students’ attention persistently and regularly to contrast features of the languages. Its aim is to assist the textbook author in gathering and grouping the material and to aid the teacher in introducing his/her subject-matter. Both the textbook author and the teacher demand some knowledge of contrastive grammar to be able to foresee, illustrate, correct and get rid of errors due to interference between native and target languages.

Contrastive methods can be used both in the preparation of teaching materials, in finding out which peculiarities of the foreign language are probable sources of errors due to interference, and also in describing these features in such a way as to reduce their unwanted effect. Furthermore, contrastive methods can be used in the explanation of mistakes which the student has made and in the preparation of exercises planned to eliminate mistakes already noticed.

Thus, the method described may be used by English teachers in case of contrastive presentation of conditionals in English and Ukrainian. Besides, the teachers may apply the basics of semantic universals, discovering “that the same semantic categories are operating in different languages” [11, P. 39] and taking into account that there are conditional patterns in every language (probable or improbable) differing in sense and structure.

The Probability Approach offers to present four groups of if-sentences: “the factual conditionals, the predictive conditionals, the hypothetical conditionals, and the counterfactual conditionals” [6, P. 38]. Although there is another well-known classification of conditionals based on three different kinds of semantic relationships: 1) factual conditional relationships, 2) future (or predictive) conditional relationships, 3) imaginative conditional relationships [20, P. 45].
The essence of the Probability Approach is students firstly estimate how probable the event in the main clause will be when they see the condition in the if-clause; then they choose the appropriate conditional sentence type based on the probability. In addition, the matter of the Subjunctive Mood is separated within this approach.

The factual conditionals equal the zero ones where probability is 100% as the event in the main clause is certain to take place up to the condition in if-clause is performed. The predictive conditionals add up to the first conditionals: the event in the main clause is most likely to occur in the future up to the condition in if-clause is performed; thus, the probability is about 50%. In the hypothetical conditionals (i.e. the second conditionals), the event in the main clause is hardly possible to happen up to the condition in if-clause is performed. In this case the probability is nearly 10%. Moreover, is should be noted that this type of conditionals indicates some doubtful desires and wishes. And, at last, counterfactual conditionals (the third conditionals in other terms) show that the event in the main clause is supposed to happen or come true when the situation described in the if-clause, being hopeless in the past, is met (probability = 0%). The detailed information, the methodology and the results of the empirical research is given in the paper [6].

Two more methodological approaches are deductive and inductive ones in teaching English conditionals. “The deductive approach is also often compared with other more traditional methods of grammar teaching. It aims at teaching various grammatical rules one at a time through presentation and explanation by the teacher” [3, P. 80]. We are sure this approach is used by most Ukrainian teachers – firstly, to give the rule, secondly – to practice it by doing certain exercises. This is a simple and quick way for teaching the rules as there will be more time for practicing the structure. “The inductive approach refers to the style of introducing language context containing the target rules where students can induce such rules through the context and practical examples. In other words, the sequence in this approach goes from creating a situation and giving examples to the generalization where students should discover such generalization by themselves or with the teacher’s help” [3, P. 80]. Thus, the presenting of the grammar information is advancing from specific to general. The students are faced with a lot of illustrations of peculiar grammatical patterns in various situations and only afterwards they themselves must reconstruct the rules. Then the students practice such rules in different contexts and see the algorithm of real work in authentic language usage. By the way, some quasi-experimental studies point out the effectiveness of the inductive approach as “students fell secure and attracted when they have to find the rule themselves with teacher’s guidance” [3, P. 89].

Another approach within the matter discussed is communicative. There is still considerable controversy surrounding the issue of which type of grammar teachers should teach to language learners: product or process [9, P. 156]. Consciousness-Raising (C-R) features are in the focus of attention. “Consciousness-raising, also
known as awareness-raising, is part of the process a learner can go through with new language. They first become aware or conscious of the new language, then recognize and distinguish it, then produce it” [21]. One must also take into account that C-R assignments can be both inductively and deductively presented. “The inductive approach is based on the learners themselves to notice and interpret the form and the meaning associated to it. Alternatively, the deductive one widely depends on the teacher to explain the target structure explicitly without any pressure to produce it” [9, P. 160].

It is stated that in accordance with the task C-R focuses on, only product process can be explicitly conducted. N. Aboghunaim cites that “to be ‘product teacher’ or a ‘process teacher’ is not the issue. Rather, it is based on the goal of each perspective” [9, P. 157]. The first step of teaching product is observing grammar characteristics before students can build any grammatical form whereas teaching grammar as process stimulates them to use grammar significantly in communication as the teacher gives students chances to practice their language.

The ultimate goal of the communicative approach is to develop students’ communicative competence. It, in its turn, demands the teacher’s efforts, on the one hand, and the choice of the textbook/textbooks “presenting the grammatical items and the focus on the communicative competence with reference to the form as well” [9, P. 165], on the other hand. Such textbooks must display a great deal of exercises (embracing reading, speaking, listening, writing) before plainly beginning to indicate the form to allow students to clarify their understanding by themselves.

T. Datska believes “the student must clearly understand how the system of the language works in communication. For teaching students optimally one must select only those elements of the grammatical structure of the language that are communicatively relevant in order to achieve the maximum level of students’ foreign language communicative competence development. Therefore, it is also important to use the latest textbooks, in which significant attention is paid to the functions of language units” [4, P. 487].

D. Larsen-Freeman thinks that the aim of this approach is enlarging all the components of communicative competence. Fluency is meaningful but students make linguistic mistakes while trying to communicate. The teacher sets up communicative situations and then functions as an instructor during the activities. “Communicative approach has turned out well at developing communicative competence; however, it has been criticized for its failure to develop grammatical competence” [20, P. 127].

Section 2. Teaching techniques. Teachers also must get acquainted with some teaching techniques having used by modern teachers all over the world. Game based learning (GBL) is one of teaching techniques used by contemporary teachers while dealing with English conditionals. It is “a type of game play with defined learning outcomes. Usually it is assumed that the game is a digital game, but this is not always the case” [22, P. 4]. GBL is grounded on the beliefs of active learning which considers students to be the center of their own learning development [13, P. 8].
The main object of GBL is to strengthen students’ motivation with the help of videos, scores, graphics, group activities which may foster them.

The digital material can be presented by the usage of: 1) “Genially” (an online platform helping the creation of interactive and cheerful presentations and infographics, among many other formats); 2) “Quizizz” (an online software letting teachers work out questionnaires to inspect or check any type of content); 3) “Flippity” (an online platform converting spreadsheets into interesting resources to attract students’ attention); 4) “Mentimeter” (a simple system that helps students to construct free interactive surveys, questionnaires and presentations) [13, P. 17-18].

Among non-digital materials one can find the course textbook (it will be better to have its online version for it to be projected on the digital whiteboard) and traditional games (the Card Game, Four-in-a-row, Board Game, etc.). The detailed description of gradual implementation of the methodological approach with the illustrated results as for teaching English conditionals may be found here [13].

The next teaching technique that deserves attention is the PPP procedure (Presentation-Practice-Production). J. Anderson confirms that PPP is a productive way to teach grammar in the schoolroom [7, P. 218]. Such a technique motivates and stimulates the students. In addition, the implementing of PPP contributes to students’ vocabulary enrichment. What is more, there are several supremacies of using the PPP method. It is stated, for instance, that “students can develop their ability to learn conditional sentences, their interest in the learning process, their extensively understanding of the material, and lastly, PPP is relatively straightforward and structured enough to be easily understood by both students and new or emerging teachers” [8, P. 150].

An alternative approach to the problem of students’ successful comprehension of English conditional sentences is the use of WhatsApp in teaching and learning activities. It is stated that “the teaching grammar focused on the three dimensions of grammar: Form, Meaning, and Use, to make the teaching grammar more communicative. That is why PPP needs to be modified in teaching English through WhatsApp. It is believed that it can be one of the ways to improve students’ achievement of a conditional sentence” [1, P. 136].

It is recommended for English teachers to use the Modified PPP procedure through WhatsApp. It is actually a superb choice to improve students’ knowledge of conditional sentences, especially in the current war condition in Ukraine when online learning is necessary. As the students need to understand the topic profoundly, they have an opportunity to discuss further either with the teacher or groupmates using WhatsApp. In any case, “the Modified PPP procedure through WhatsApp still can be implemented as an effective alternative way of teaching to improve students’ achievement of a conditional sentence” [1, P. 148].

One more teaching technique is Picture Sequences in teaching conditional sentences. “Picture sequences are groups of pictures that together form a sentence or a story. The images provide a framework for students to construct ideas based on
their prior knowledge and experience, allowing them to understand the topics more easily” [12, P. 12]. J. Harmer believes that pictures are an excellent way to motivate students for writing stories [23, P. 69]. This process consists of five activities: describing images, suspects and objects, writing the sentences using conditionals, deciding what type of conditionals is more fitting, and constructing a short story using the conditional sentences students have written on the pictures [12, P. 13].

As the practice shows there are some opportunities and obstacles of the technique outlined above. Among the advantages one can point out students’ motivation to learn English and developing their imagination. The disadvantages are students’ inability to use their speaking skills effectively and the teacher’s limitations as for the time of presenting and evaluating the writing process as well.

Thus, this teaching technique can be applied fruitfully in case of the teacher’s providing adequate time for the students and managing the time effectively in accordance with the lesson plan.

*Teaching conditionals by means of songs* is another educational technique. Songs are considered to be one of the most flexible materials to be used in foreign language classrooms. We can use a song in numerous ways either while gap filling, making up jumbled sentences or error correcting. Moreover, songs can be used for various purposes: “to enhance the listening skill, improve pronunciation, acquire vocabulary, provide examples of grammatical structures, practice reading and writing, and sensitize the students to cultural facets” [10, P. 17].

The rhythmical organization, the rhyme and the repetitive style of the songs help the students to remember the structure of conditional sentences. Since songs are entertaining, the students will be attracted to listening to them over and over. Thus, in this way they will be able to memorize the melody soon.

The teacher should find a popular song/songs, containing different types of conditional clauses. D. Şahin, for example, offers to use “Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps sung by Cake, Tears in Heaven sung by Eric Clapton and Without You sung by Harry Nilsson, If I Were You performed by Kasey Chambers, If I had $1000000 – by Barenaked Ladies” [10, P. 25, 35, 65]. The researcher gives different recommendations how to use songs while teaching and learning conditionals. For example, the teacher can change the title If I were you to different celebrities or substitute If I were good by If I were bad and turn it into a question like What would happen if you were bad? [10, P. 34]. Students may be encouraged to ask each other questions and give answers, thus, practicing the question form of conditional clauses. By the way, songs are also perfect for filling in the blank exercises. The final phase may be students’ writing or talking what they would do if they were in this or that situation or state as the speaker of the song is. The detailed description of this teaching technique and the plans of the lessons may be found here [10].

**Conclusions and perspectives.** We believe that this is the first time the methodological approaches and teaching techniques as for English conditionals are presented profoundly in one paper. This highlights just how conditionals are paid...
attention to in modern scientific circles in spite of the complicated issue. These results widen our knowledge of teaching-learning English conditionals. The current study supports previous research in this area in spite of various pros and cons. We cannot rule out that the effectiveness of teaching and learning conditionals depends on the teacher to a greater extent. Moreover, it is the teacher’s solution what textbook, exercises, method or technique to use at classes. The main thing is that the teaching-learning process will have high-quality results and the students will be motivated and stimulated as well. We think that there is a definite probability for teachers to improve and strengthen their scientific background. Additionally, the picture is thus still incomplete and can be further complemented by one’s personal illustrations.

Future studies on the current topic are therefore required in order to depict our own approach of teaching-learning English conditionals with the students of non-philological specialities taking into account personal observations, remarks, results and some pieces of advice which can be shared with English teachers.

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