The Conditional Sentence in English and Arabic

Pattern: IF a condition exists, THEN a result can be expected.

A type of subordinate or adverbial clauses, consist of two clauses: main clause (Apodosis) and conditional clause (Protasis). The latter clause sets the condition, whereas the former clause contains the consequential statement whose fulfilment depends on the fulfilment of the proposition expressed in the conditional clause:

1. Components of the English Conditional Sentence

   Conditional clause (the “IF” clause)
   - If I were you…
   - If you had money…
   - If she were in charge…

   Result clause (the “THEN” clause)
   - ...(then) I would stay awake.
   - ...(then) you would buy dinner.
   - ...(then) she would set things right.

Examples:

Give them my regards if you meet them. إذا قابلتهم فسلم لي عليهم.
If you meet them, give them my regards. سلم لي عليهم إذا قابلتهم.

1. Types of Conditional Sentences in English

   English has two subordinators that are used in conditional clauses: if and unless.

   English has two types of conditional sentences: real/possible and unreal/impossible

1.a. The Real Conditional

(The conditional clause is true or possible in present or future (conventionally known as Conditional Type I))

Structure: if + Simple Present, will-Future... {Real Possibility} :

   - If you meet them, you will find them sociable.
• If you arrive late, you will miss the first half of the lecture…

1.b. The Unreal Conditional in the present

(The conditional clause is not true or impossible or contrary-to-the-fact (conventionally known as Conditional Type II))

**Structure:** if + Simple Past, Conditional I (= would + Infinitive) … {imaginary present\unlikely future} :

• If they had enough money, they would buy the house.
• I were you, I would not resign.

1.c. Unreal/Impossible Condition in the past

(The conditional clause is absolutely impossible or contrary-to-the-fact in the past (conventionally known as Conditional Type III))

**Structure:** if + Past Perfect, Conditional II (= would + have + Past Participle) … {Imaginary past} :

• If I had attended the classes, I would have impressed my teachers.
• If things had been different, they would have reconsidered our position.

_Unless_ is used in negative condition and means “except if”.

• I am not going to return to my job unless the manager apologises.

The above sentence is synonymous with the following one:

• I am not going to return to my job if the manager does not apologise.

_ English has conditional sentences without the conditional subordinate if; herein, the absence of if triggers subject-auxiliary inversion rule for example:

• Had she arrived earlier, I would have seen her.
• Should they arrive late, there will be no one to receive them.

_ English also has the following special cases of conditional structures:

• If we boil water, it vaporises. (factual condition)
• If I want something, i just buy it.
• If you should see Nada, please tell her about the meeting (predictive condition).
2. Types of Conditional Sentences in Arabic

Conditional sentences in Arabic are also made up of two parts (or two sentences), one of them contains a particle for condition (أداة الشرط, جملة الشرط), and this sentence is called the ‘condition clause’ (جملة الشرط), and the other one provides the outcome of the condition, and it is called the ‘answer’ (جواب الشرط). The conditional clause normally precedes the main clause in Arabic.

The most common type of conditional in English involves ‘if’. There are three conditional particles: ‘in’ – 'ithaa' – ‘law’.

These particles determine the type of the condition expressed. ‘in’ and 'ithaa' occur in fulfillable conditions, while ‘law’ occurs in unfulfillable conditions.

The sentence containing the conditional particle is –in most of the cases- in the past tense, although the present can also be used.

2.a. Fulfillable Conditions

Here, we use the two particles ‘in’ and ‘ithaa’.

(i) ‘in’

This particle expresses possible condition with the verb of the conditional clause is in the perfect or imperfect tense, as in the sentences below:

- إن جاء فسأخبره عنك
  - If he came then-I-will-tell him about-you
- إن تجتهد تنجح
  - If you work hard, you will succeed.

We notice that in the first sentence above that the verb of the main clause is prefixed by the particle fa- since the verb is not in the perfect tense (which is what is expected by rule).

We notice also that the verb in the second sentence is in the jussive mood (ال أمر), which sometimes has perfect tense force in Arabic. Thus the jussive replaces perfect tense as in the second sentence above, which equals:
If you worked-hard, you succeeded

(ii) ‘ithaa’
This particle expresses probability. The verb of the conditional clause must be in the perfect tense. The main clause has fa- prefixed to the verb if it is not in the perfect tense, as in the three sentences below:

If he-came then-tell-him about the-accident.
If he comes, tell him about the accident.
If he-came then-tell-him about the-accident.
If he comes, I will tell him about the accident
If he-came told-I-him about the-accident.
If he comes, I will tell him about the accident

2.b. Unfulfillable/Contrary-to-fact Conditions
The particle ‘law’ is used in unfulfillable conditions. The particle la- is prefixed to the verb of the main clause.

 لو حضر لأخبرته عن الحادث
If he-came indeed-I-told-him about the-accident.
If he came, I would tell him about the accident / If he had come, I would have told him about the accident

We notice that the two verbs in the Arabic sentence are in the perfect tense.

In negative conditional sentences, the verb of the conditional clause occurs in the jussive mood after ‘lam’:

ان/ إذا لم حضر فسأعتذر
If not I-come then-I-will-apologise.
If I do not come, I will apologise.
The main clause may consist of an *equational* clause; for example:

- If you be-patient then it good for you.
- If you show patience, it is to your advantage.

Arabic has other conditional particles called ‘nouns of condition’ (اَسْمَاءُ اَلْشِرْطَ الْجَازِمَة) and these involve:

- Arabic: 
  
  - **man** من
  - **maa** ما
  - **mahma** مهما
  - **mataa** متى
  - **ayyana** أيّان
  - **annaa** اّنا
  - **haythuma** حيثّما
  - **kayfama** كيفّما
  - **ayy** أيّ

3. Contrast

- In Arabic, the use of the different conditional particles determines the type of the condition, whereas in English, condition type is determined by the sequence of verb forms.
- In English, the conditional clause may precede or follow the main clause, whereas in Arabic, the conditional clause typically precedes the main clause.
- The tense of the verb of English sentences that express impossible condition is past perfective, whereas in the Arabic counterpart, the verb is in the perfect tense.
- The English conditional subordinator *if* has three counterparts in Arabic: ‘in’, ‘ithaa’ and ‘law’.
- Only English may have a conditional sentence without a conditional subordinator (like *if*).
- The verbs of the two clauses comprise an English conditional sentence agree in tense, whereas in Arabic no such tense agreement is required. Here, we say that English conditional sentences have *tense harmony*, whereas Arabic ones do not.
- The main clause in Arabic conditional clauses may consist of equational (verbless) clause.