# Teaching Conditionals in Iraq: Towards a Communicative Approach

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## Abstract

This paper aims at presenting the new method used in Iraq to teach grammar. Despite the fact that the curriculum now is very different from the traditional one, it still depends on the exam-based system. The new syllabi of intermediate and secondary schools focus on the communicative approach. Yet, the question here is that this book will help students interact with each other inside and outside the class. Due to the broad areas of grammar, the research will examine teaching conditional as a sample. So, the present study will exclusively investigate teaching conditionals in Iraq compared with teaching conditionals in the UK. In this study, two course books are selected to analyze the conditionals in terms of whether they are based on consciousness raising C-R features or not. The first book is from Iraq, English for Iraq (2013), used as a textbook and designed for senior High Schools, sixth preparatory. The second book is upper- intermediate level course book, New Headway (2005), which is frequently used in British English centres for the purpose of teaching English for international students.

This paper, then, aims at answering the question: To some extent teaching conditionals in Iraq could attain communicative competence? In other words, it will be examined whether the Iraqi textbook deals with teaching conditional in a similar way as the British book.

## 1- Introduction

Regardless of the miserable situation in my country, Iraq, students as well as the authority insist on teaching the English language so as to communicate with English communities. The invention of the Internet and social media promote learners to learn English. Due to the exam-based system, teachers ignore learners' need to speak fluently even though they change the English textbooks many times. They aim at choosing a book with a communicative focus instead of the traditional one which is based extremely on deductive presentation as well as

practice. This will be elaborated later in data analysis section. Thus, an Iraqi textbook attempts to teach English through grammar.

The issue, then, is how to teach grammar in order that Iraqi students could communicate with English native speakers when they confront this situation. Arguably, a significant number of researchers try to find appropriately pedagogical activity so as to allow learners exploit language in everyday life. In fact, much research investigates that teaching grammar as product will enhance learners' ability to expose language and contribute to L2 acquisition. (Ellis, 1992)

The present study will exclusively investigate teaching conditionals in Iraq compared with teaching conditionals in the UK. This paper, then, aims at answering the question: To some extent teaching conditionals in Iraq could attain communicative competence. In other words, it will be examined whether students can use conditionals in their communication after school or merely pass the exam.

The structure of the paper will be as the following: first, the paper will examine some approaches to the teaching of grammar with emphasis on teaching grammar as product. Second, the paper will focus on teaching grammar via Consciousness-Raising (C-R). Third, two selected course books will be analyzed to explain the differences and similarities of teaching conditionals nowadays and see whether they apply C-R activities to a grammar section. Finally, key findings will be discussed.

## 2- Literature review

### 2.1 Approaches to the teaching of grammar

This paper discusses a number of crucial issues regarding teaching grammar. The issue of which type of grammar teachers should teach to language learners: product or process is still controversial. Batstone (1994a;1994b) admits that to teach grammar effectively has been a challenging task due to the multi-dimensional characteristics.

Traditionally, Celce- Murcia (1991) points out that grammar was regarded as an independent component that was isolated from language and was taught separately. However, a new role of grammar instruction has appeared whose main view, contrary to the traditional view, tends to consider grammar as an integrated part in the language system. In other words, Celce- Murcia argues that grammar might be a combination of meaning, social function and discourse i.e. it is one element of communicative competence.

On the other hand, a divergent perspective regarding teaching grammar has emerged. As stated by Ellis (1997: 47), a significant

number of SLA researchers, such as Krashen (1982), and applied linguists (e.g. Prabhu, 1987) hypothesizes the proposition of 'zero option'. They maintain that in order to produce language communicatively, teachers should exclude teaching grammar thoroughly in any component of the language development. In other words, they justify their proposition that learners could acquire grammatical forms when engaging in meaning-focused tasks. Following Ellis (1992), Krashen is one of the advocates who argues that formal grammar will not enhance learners to develop language acquisition due to the lack of authenticity. As indicated by Krashen (1982: 6-7), 'language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules and does not require tedious drill'.

Ellis (1992), however, as other researchers, denies the view of 'zero option'. Accordingly, Ellis suggests that grammar teaching could contribute to L2 acquisition, despite the delayed effect, which is related to the formal grammar rather than instant effort. Additionally, much research concerning teaching grammar concludes that grammar teaching is influential but it is required to be taught in a way that is compatible with a natural process of acquisition.

In addition, as claimed by Long (1989), it is not proved that learners could develop their language items step by step. In other words, learners, first, acquire structures separately and after mastering the form, then move to learn functions of language. Thus, as Batstone indicates, SLA research investigates that learning structural forms encourages learners to develop their language gradually until they reach the full L2 form.

To this end, there are two perspectives concerning teaching grammar: product and process. According to the assignment focus on C-R, only product process will be explicitly conducted. Both product and process perspectives have been mentioned clearly by Batstone (1994a; 1994b). Batstone creates a salient distinction between grammar as product and grammar as process. He states that the emphasis to be 'product teacher' or a 'process teacher' is not the issue. Rather, it is based on the goal of each perspective. He distinguishes between them as follow: noticing grammar features would be the first phase of teaching product before learners can structure any grammatical form. While teaching grammar as process encourages learners to use grammar influentially in communication by giving learners opportunities to practice their language. (1994a: 52).

Batstone identifies the advantages and disadvantages of teaching grammar as product. He points out some positive characteristics. The first is that …' it provides a clear framework … such a structured approach … have a motivation effect' (ibid: 71).He acknowledges that product teaching could rapidly achieve explicit learning of the grammatical structure. Besides, flexibility is another strong point. Teachers have the responsibility for suggesting which structural form will be exhibited to learners. Furthermore, teachers can change their emphasis, from time to time, to display either form-focused tasks or meaning-focused tasks.

However, there is a drawback of product-based teaching. Some researchers doubt that product teaching would result in language process in authentic communication. Some researchers, also, criticize this approach for being insufficient input. Arguably, they are, to some extent, correct but the input might be widely provided during classroom time such as teacher speech and learners' discussion.

It could be concluded, then, that teaching product grammar would contribute to language teaching as well as it tends to be the prevalent approach used by teachers throughout the world (Batstone, 1994a; 1994b).

## 2.2 Consciousness Raising Tasks(C-R)

A great deal of research has been conducted concerning the benefit behind teaching grammar as Consciousness-Raising (C-R) (Ellis, 1992; Ellis, 1993; Hopkins and Nettle, 1994; Batstone, 1994; Ellis, 1997; Thornbury, 2001; Nitta and Gardner, 2005). C-R activities have been recommended by a large number of researchers (except Krashen and Prabhu as seen above) to teach this task either as the alternative or complement to communication activities. Ellis (1997: 160), defines grammar consciousness-raising tasks as:

'a pedagogic activity where the learners are provided with L2 data in some form and required to perform some operation on or with it, the purpose of which is to arrive at an explicit understanding of some linguistic properties of the target language'.

Similarly, Thornbury (2001) defines consciousness-raising activities as activities whose main purpose is to promote learners notice specific grammatical units. Thornbury, contrary to Krashen, argues that noticing target forms consciously helps learners acquire them. It can be noted that Schmidt's Portuguese language, the first researcher who suggested the notion noticing, was improved through noticing characteristics of the

spoken language in Brazil. After Schmidt initially joined Portuguese classes, he, then, noticed the language form. Consequently, he succeeded in producing the target form. This led Schmidt to conclude that 'instruction plus', as Thornbury refers to the learning, and 'instruction minus', as Thornbury refers to acquisition, are complementary. In other words, classroom contexts tend to aid learners to notice the form naturally. It can be, also, argued that the acquisition of the grammatical structure might not be immediately but it may require time in order that learners could produce accurate forms (2001, 2004).

Thornbury (2004) claims that grammar consciousness-raising is a term which represents grammar presentation and production is not the main prerequisite of consciousness-raising since its main goal is understanding and interpreting.

Ellis lists the main characteristics of the (C-R) as follows:

(1) There is an attempt to isolate a specific linguistic feature for focused attention.

(2) The learners are provided with data which illustrate the targeted feature and they may also be supplied with an explicit rule describing or explaining the feature.

(3) The learners are expected to utilize intellectual effort to understand the targeted feature.

(4) Misunderstanding or incomplete understanding of the grammatical structure by the learners leads to clarification in the form of further data and description/explanation.

(5) Learners may be required (although this is not obligatory) to articulate the rule describing the grammatical structure (1992: 234).

In other words, it should be clear that in C-R, teachers encourage learners to discover the grammatical structures within certain data particularly supplied to this activity and learners explicitly recognize this activity as a grammar lesson. (ibid)

Some disadvantages of C-R, however, have been identified by Ellis (1992, 1997). According to the learning level and learner desire, C-R has limitations. Some young learners see this task as inappropriate since their learning tends to be 'doing' instead of 'studying'. Alternatively, some beginner learners might utilize it providing they use their L1 in order that it could help them solve the problem.

Rutherford (1987: 104, cited in Batstone, 1994: 70) defines C-R as

'… the means to an end, not the end itself. That is, whatever it is that is raised to consciousness is not to be looked upon as an artifact or object

of study … Rather, what is raised to consciousness is not the grammatical product but aspects of the grammatical process…'.

This is simply clarified the fact that C-R is inadequate to master language formerly and functionally but demands supplemental tasks so as to achieve accuracy and fluency.

Thornbury (2001: 31) suggests that theoretical knowledge is a quite different from practical knowledge expressing that, in learning a second language there is a difference between 'know what' and 'can do'. In other words, it might be challenging to master communication and accuracy simultaneously. Thornbury considers that learners confront problems as they try to focus on meaning and form at the same time. Therefore, this problem requires designing activities whose major purpose is to emphasize meaning as well as form.

Thornbury (ibid: 38) believes that consciousness raising, unlike other activities such as practice, does not anticipate immediate production. Thus, the influence of consciousness-raising will be delayed and it can emerge in the right time as shown in Schmidt's experience. Thornbury suggests that consciousness-raising is

Input----- noticing------ intake------ output

He illustrates the meaning of intake by saying that when learners use the language data and it helps learners in grammar, this data transfers from input to intake. Intake could be a source that learners use it as the (taking in) of language items. (ibid: 69)

Grammar consciousness-raising tasks can be inductive and deductive presentations (Ellis, 1997; Nitta and Gardner, 2005). Inductive approaches, according to Nitta and Gardener (2005: 7), are characterized by 'developing an understanding of the target grammar through manipulating tasks, while deductive approaches are realized through grammar explanation'. In other words, the former is based on the learners themselves to notice and interpret the form and the meaning associated to it. Alternatively, the latter widely depends on the teacher to explain the target structure explicitly without any pressure to produce it but to apply it to the L2 data.

Arguably, language teaching might be tackled as this assumption:' if you teach the product, the process will take care of itself'. Teachers' role are, then, to divide language into its forms and properties so that learners would collect them together to use them in authentic communication. This hypothesis disregards the belief that product and process are distinct. It can be inferred that it is challenging for learners to use the

forms in real meaning. Accordingly, Thornbury maintains that …' a description of used language is not the same as language being used'(2001: 2).

According to Thornbury (ibid: 21), it might seem that learners require not only fluency activities but also grammatical skills. Both fluency and grammar are essential because the former encourages learners to produce language fluently and automatically while the latter enhances grammatical ' complexity' as well as 'automaticity'. As a result, both activities improve learners' language. From time to time, teachers have to remind their learners to 'grammar up', that is, to balance their language system with both fluency and grammatical activities in order not to In this section, the grammatical feature-conditional- is chosen to be analyzed since it is problematic for Iraqi students. Two course books are selected to analyze the conditionals in terms of whether they are based on C-R features as discussed above or not. Further, to compare and contrast the most important feature in order to reach the fact of whether Iraqi book used in teaching grammar is communicative or not and to what extent it resembles the western book. The first book is from Iraq, English for Iraq (2013), used as a textbook and designed for senior High Schools, sixth preparatory. In fact, learner levels are not applied in Iraq but the students are taught according to their stage in school. The second book is upper- intermediate level course book, New Headway (2005), which is frequently used in Britain to teach English.

Before starting the analysis, let me introduce the story of this textbook. As mentioned before, since 2003, Iraq has encountered many problems embedded its development after the war. Notwithstanding all these problems, Iraq manages to contact American authors to design Iraqi coursebook with aid from Iraqi authors to edit it and make it suitable for our culture. The challenging is not the syllabus design only but also the way of teaching grammar.

Traditionally, the textbook tends to be extremely teacher- centered as well as form –focus. Teachers explained the rules of the targeted structure using L1 to check learners understanding to the form so as to help the students pass the exam successfully. The traditional book did not teach students listening and speaking skills. Rather, it is a thoroughly grammatical feature. Nowadays, because it covers to some extent the four skills of language, the textbook seems to be more communicative than a traditional book but there is a problem. It can be said that modern

teachers' interest, like traditional teachers, to force students to teach English for the sake of passing the exam.

undermine their linguistic competence.

To sum up, Ellis admits that C-R is a supplement to meaning-focused activities. Since to develop language, it requires mixed activities that provide focus on form as well as focus on meaning (1992, 1997).

## 3- Data Analysis and Discussion
### 3.1 Background
### 3.2 Book map

Based on the contents of both books, it can be said that they share some feature. Both books, somewhat, refer to the grammar section functionally. In New Headway, the designer refers to grammar as language focus, see appendix 1, to let us understand, possibly, that grammar is incorporated in the language system. While the Iraqi textbook, English for Iraq, indicates the grammar section clearly (as given in appendix 2) but adds the function to it. Besides, it may suggest that the term grammar is insufficient alone in order that we interpret the book as communication- based. New Headway uses the function of conditional to describe it. On the other hand, English for Iraq noticeably refers to the structure, even though the map indicates there is a function of language, by expressing all types of conditional from zero to third conditional. Similarly, both textbooks share the expression to refer to either hypothesizing or conditional. However, the intention of new headway is to teach the difference between regret and wish during the conditionals. Therefore, it helps learners connect the meaning with the form.

### 3.3 *New Headway*
### 3.3.1 Test your grammar

New Headway, appendix 3, focuses on the meaning of the message. To some extent, it involves real life activity. The book introduces hypothesizing, the notion of language, by pre-task to raise learners awareness of the target language form that they will expose to it. Students explicitly realize that they will engage in grammar focus.

### 3.3.2 Listening task

Ordering the photos as they listen to data, learners are forced to distinguish between the function of language – wish and regret. So, this task is C-R and especially is inductive presentation in which learners are provided with data and they asked to perform on it.

### 3.3.3 Language focus

Following the listening task, appendix 4, it should be clear that language focus also represents inductive presentation. It encourages learners to notice the related forms of expressing imaginary situations but each structure can convey a different meaning. Thus, it is advantageous because it helps learners elicit a conscious understanding of the target structure and it raises learners awareness regarding the form can be linked to the meaning. Language focus number 1, like any C-R tasks, intends to lead learners to use meta-language in order that learners could use it to describe the meaning of all hypothetical sentences. Number 4 in language focus also asks students to interpret the meaning beyond the form. In other words, New Headway considerably concentrates on the meaning rather than the form.

On the other hand, this task also focuses on the form, as seen in appendix 3 number 2, in terms of asking students what the full forms of I'd, you'd and we'd could be. Both activities altogether would enhance language development. At the bottom of language focus, there is a reference to additional information and explanations concerning conditionals.

### 3.3.4 Unit 11 Hypothesizing

Appendix 5 shows a deductive presentation to the grammar structure, conditional. Clearly, it is grammar explanation with no need to produce the form immediately but it promotes learners to apply the rule later to L2 data.

### 3.3.5 Practice

Appendix 4 involves not only grammar presentation but also a practice approach to examine learners understanding to the form. So, practice supplements C-R tasks but it cannot be alternative to it. As we can notice that C-R tasks in this book disregard the effect of producing correct language feature. Instead, they prompt learners to notice and expose the target data and, then, when the time is suitable, learners would process the form spontaneously. It can be argued that New Headway presents grammar inductively and deductively.

### 3.4 English for Iraq

### 3.4.1 If you could choose any job

On the other hand, similarly, the textbook English for Iraq presents conditional deductively. Thus, it can be noted that the task (If you could choose any job) itself is not C-R but it is simply listening task. The listening and reading task at the same time before doing exercise might

support learners in articulating the form as they listen to the conversation. Regardless of unreal communication, the language used as input is nonsense. In other words, the conversation reveals the fact of Maryam's dream to be a pilot regardless of her fear from the heights. If someone fears from the height, how they can dream to be a pilot.

However, it would be noticed that the students are required to do exercise after the listening activity and deductive presentations to check their understanding. The exercise is located in the activity book. Then, students practice their target structure in an additional book as well as their textbook.

Deductive presentation, below the listening activity, explicitly describes the grammatical structure in order students can apply the rule to the target data. Clearly, this textbook adopts a traditional method of teaching grammar which considers grammar as a separate component of language. Although the listening task serves grammar as input, it is inadequate because of the unauthentic communication. Students asked to notice grammar by performing a brief task which is underlining examples, as given by appendix 6, and explicit explanation of the rule. It can be inferred that the major goal of teaching grammar is to attain accuracy rather than fluency due to the exam-centered system.

### 3.4.2 If I'd been fitter

Also, this task is not C-R. Learners are required to complete the sentences as they listen to a movie director's talk (appendix 7). It cannot be realized the benefit beyond this task indeed since the halves of sentences do not show the expression of conditional. However, there is a clear explanation to third conditional. Thus, the task greatly focuses on the structure mainly deductive presentation. Like a task in appendix 6, third conditional task in appendix 7 forced students to practice it in activity book. Obviously, the task does not provide students opportunity to use the language.

### 3.5 The differences and similarities between *New Headway* and *English for Iraq*

It can be noticed the difference in the presentation of conditional tasks between New Headway and English for Iraq. The former presents all of the expressions related to hypothesizing simultaneously with reference to the function of each structure while the latter presents conditional separately. In other words, each structure (e.g. second conditional) follows another structure (e.g. third conditional) after the task is fully presented and practiced by students.

Unlike New Headway, the two tasks which are provided to teach conditional in English for Iraq seem to be inappropriate. There is no evidence to force students to interpret the structure after finishing listening task. It is merely based on answering the two questions concerning Maryam's dream job and then underlining examples of second conditional. There is no assumption that students after class can use conditional structure to talk about unreal situations or express regret.

From the overview of English for Iraq, it can be seen that practicing grammar is separate from the textbook. So, the aim is to focus on the form to achieve accuracy. Like New Headway, English for Iraq presents the grammatical feature deductively. Conversely, it differs from New Headway because the latter emphasizes the function (regret and wish) and notion (hypothesizing) of language as well as the form which is clearly lacked in English for Iraq. The deductive presentation in English for Iraq appears along with listening tasks while New Headway shows deductive presentation at the end of the book in order to emphasize first on the meaning of the language.

## 4- Results and conclusion

Though English for Iraq points to the grammar section as grammatical areas and function (see appendix 2), there is no clear evidence to teach grammar functionally. Rather, grammar is extremely taught structurally. In New Headway, the syllabus of grammar is displayed notionally. Both the inductive presentation and practice, in New Headway, show us the difference between regret and wish which means the relation between form and meaning. While it can be noted that English for Iraq seems to be restricted and controlled in terms of teaching the function of language as well as notion.

Arguably, the intention of teaching grammar, though it is more advantageous now than those in the past, tends merely to allow students pass the exam, regardless of their ability to use the language fluently after the class. This situation encourages syllabus designers to be biased towards institution's desire rather than learners' demands. So, the goal is thoroughly far away from the communicative end. Moreover, it can be examined that practice approach is more dominant in English for Iraq than New Headway. Alternatively, New Headway seems to be more effective than Iraqi book in the way of presenting the grammatical items and the focus on the communicative competence with reference to the form as well. New Headway displays many tasks before obviously starting express the form to allow learners interpret their understanding

by themselves while English for Iraq explains the form for learners. Teaching grammar in Iraq, simply, demands radical modification in order to achieve learners L2 objectives

To conclude, how to teach grammar effectively is still a debatable. Although some researchers argue for consciousness-raising activities and other are in favor of process teaching, recent research shows a mixed methodology could be utilized to achieve accuracy as well as fluency. It is important to note that C-R could be exploited in a preliminary phase of teaching grammar in order to draw readers' attention to the fore. Conversely, C-R would be supported by practice approach so that learners could benefit from the opportunities provided by practice.

## ملخص البحث

يهدف البحث الى عرض الطريقة الجديدة المستخدمة في تدريس (اذا الشرطية). على الرغم من ان المناهج الان مختلفة جدا عن المناهج التقليدية، الا ان المناهج الحديثة لا تزال معتمدة على نظام الامتحان. اعتمدت مناهج المدارس الثانوية والمتوسطة في العراق على التواصلية. ولكن رغم ذلك السؤال يكمن هنا هل هذه المناهج تساعد الطلاب في التفاعل باللغة الانكليزية داخل وخارج الصف . سيختار البحث موضوع(اذا الشرطية) كمثال عن تدريس النحو بسبب ان النحو موضوع واسع جدا. سيكون البحث عبارة عن مقارنة تدريس النحو في العراق مع تدريسه في المملكة المتحدة. تم اختيار كتابين لتحليل تدريس اذا الشرطية. الكتاب الاول هو كتاب منهجي مستخدم في المدارس العراقية للصف السادس الاعدادي. والثاني هو كتاب headway المعروف عالميا لتدريسه في بريطانيا. وسيكون هدف البحث اذن هو الاجابة عن الاسئلة التالية: لاي مدى تدريس موضوع (اذا الشرطية) في العراق تساعد في الوصول الى كفاءة التواصل لدى الطلاب. وبمعنى اخر، سيبحث فيما اذا الطلاب يستخدمون اذا الشرطية في تواصلهم خارج المدرسة او فقط لينجحوا ويعبروا الى مرحلة اعلى.
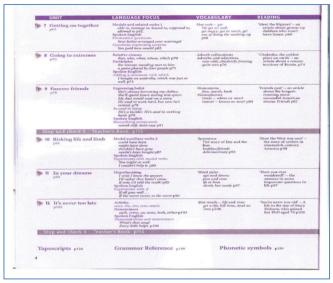
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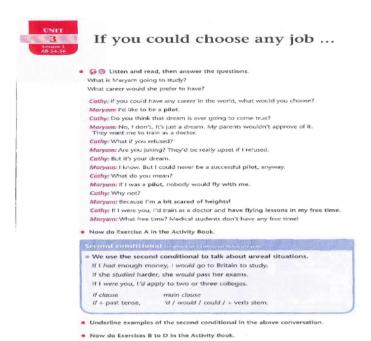Appendix1



Appendix 2

**Teaching Conditionals in Iraq ……………………………… (169)**

Appendix 3



Appendix 5

Appendix 6



Appendix 7