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Conditionals in the New Testament
Interpretation and Translation

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Abstract: There are over six hundred conditional sentences in the Greek New Testament, defined as sentences consisting of two clauses, one of which contains the conjunction εἰ or ἐάν and expresses the condition under which the other clause holds. The conditions which εἰ and ἐάν introduce encompass a wide range of meanings, which are unlikely to be expressed by any single conjunction, particle, or construction in another language. Understanding the range of meanings associated with Greek conditional constructions is therefore an essential first step in translating them appropriately. This paper describes the various constructions that are used in New Testament Greek to express conditionality (following the traditional classification of conditionals), demonstrating that the form of each construction does not entirely determine how it should be interpreted. The paper also looks at constructions containing εἰ or ἐάν that express specific meanings, which may be more or less conditional in nature.

1 Introduction

In March 2013, I was facilitating a workshop on hortatory and expository discourse analysis for translation teams in Ethiopia. As usual in such workshops, the translators immediately applied what they had learned about the discourse features of their languages to the translation of a biblical text, which in this case was 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Halfway through the workshop, we came to 1 Thessalonians 3:6–8.

> [6] But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us
> the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always

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> remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— [7] for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. [8] For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. (ESV)

Many of the translators were puzzled by this. In verses 6–7, Paul twice mentions the faith of the Thessalonian believers. Why, then, does he express doubt in v.8 as to whether they are standing fast in the Lord? As we discussed v.8, it became clear that in some of the translators' languages, a direct translation of the *if* conditional could only express doubt or uncertainty.[1] What these translators had not realized was that in Koine Greek, as in English, conditional clauses can express information that is known to be true, that is, factual conditions.[2]

This paper will introduce the various types of conditional constructions found in the Greek New Testament and describe the range of meanings that these can express. Attention will also be paid to constructions that contain (variants of) the conditional conjunctions εἰ and ἐάν but which have specific meanings.

1.1 Defining conditionals

Conditional sentences typically consist of two clauses: one "conditional" clause "provisionally becomes the framework of reference" (Haiman 1978:580) for understanding the other "consequent" clause. In many (but not all) languages, the conditional clause is subordinate, meaning that it cannot form a sentence on its own. It needs to be accompanied by another clause, and so the consequent clause is typically a main clause. The conditional clause is called the PROTASIS, and is conventionally labelled *p*. The consequent clause is called the APODOSIS, and is conventionally labelled *q*. In some languages, *p* must precede *q*, whilst in others *q* can precede *p* (although this order is almost always less common).

Crucially, the truth of the protasis is not asserted, even if it is known to be true. (This distinguishes genuine conditional clauses from other reason clauses, such as those that in English are introduced by *since* or *because*.) The apodosis is

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[1] Most English translations use *if* in v.8, although the NIV uses *since* and the NLT translates this verse, "It gives us new life to know that you are standing firm in the Lord."

[2] In the Greek New Testament, most factual conditions are expressed using the connective εἰ plus an indicative verb form, while most of the conditionals that express doubt or uncertainty use the connective ἐὰν and a subjunctive verb form. However, the conditional in 1 Thes 3:8 is a hybrid: the connective is ἐὰν, but the verb is indicative. Determining the correct interpretation of this conditional therefore depends on looking at the context in which it occurs—which as Porter (1994:255, 267) notes is true of all conditional constructions in New Testament Greek.

understood in relation to the protasis. Usually this means that the likelihood of *p* being true determines the likelihood of *q* being true, or—for example in the case that *q* is a command or question—the likelihood of *p* being true determines the appropriateness of *q*. In the case of "speech act" conditionals, such as "If you're hungry, there is food in the fridge," *q* is true regardless of the truth of *p* (there is food in the fridge whether you are hungry or not), and *p* merely establishes the condition under which *q* is relevant to the hearer.[3]

Conditional sentences are typically defined both formally and functionally. For example, in English conditionals are defined in formal terms as sentences that include an *if* clause and a main clause, often introduced by *then* (although in practice *then* occurs relatively rarely). Clearly, the formal part of any definition will be language-specific; different languages have different grammatical ways to mark conditional sentences, and in fact some have no dedicated grammatical marker of conditional sentences. In addition, as has been widely noted (see, for example, Comrie 1986:77–78 and Wallace 1996:685–689), the formal and functional criteria do not always coincide, and the "conditional" relationship between two clauses can often be expressed without using the typical conditional construction (compare, for example, "If you come any closer, I'll shoot" and "Come any closer, and I'll shoot"). To illustrate this, let's look at some examples from 1 Timothy. First, consider how **1 Timothy 1:8** and **3:1** have been translated in different English versions.

Οἴδαμεν	δὲ	ὅτι	καλὸς	ὁ	νόμος,	ἐάν	τις	αὐτῷ	νομίμως	χρῆται,
we.know	but	that	good	the	law	if	anyone	it	lawfully	uses

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully... (ESV)
We know that the law is good when used correctly. (NLT)

Εἴ	τις	ἐπισκοπῆς	ὀρέγεται,	καλοῦ	ἔργου	ἐπιθυμεῖ.
if	anyone	overseer	aspires.to	good	work	he.desires

If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. (ESV)
whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task. (NRSV)

In both of these verses, the ESV translates the Greek particles ἐάν in 1 Timothy 1:8 and εἰ in 1 Timothy 3:1 (we will come to the difference between these in a minute) as *if*. However, in 1 Timothy 1:8 NLT uses *when*, and in 1 Timothy 3:1 NRSV translates εἰ τις 'if anyone' as *whoever*. Are these translations inaccurate? In English, *when* is used to describe a situation that occurs regularly or that is sure to occur in the future. This fits the context in 1 Timothy 1:8: there

[3] Speech act conditionals are not common in the NT. We have identified only the following: Acts 4:9, 19:38; 2 Cor 2:10; Phil 3:4; 1 Tm 3:15; and possibly 1 Jn 3:20.

are some people who use the law correctly (presumably Paul and Timothy are among them), and so *when* is an acceptable translation of ἐάν. In 1 Timothy 3:1, by using *whoever* and *if anyone* respectively, the NRSV and the ESV both make a general statement about a person who aspires to be an overseer; both sound natural and both express essentially the same idea. Thus, not all Greek conditional clauses are translated as conditional clauses with *if* in all English translations.

Next, consider **1 Timothy 3:10**.

καὶ	οὗτοι	δὲ	δοκιμαζέσθωσαν	πρῶτον,	εἶτα	διακονείτωσαν
also	these	and	let.them.be.tested	first	then	let.them.serve

ἀνέγκλητοι	ὄντες.
blameless	being

And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. (ESV)
And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons. (NRSV)

In this verse, both ESV and NRSV (and in fact most English translations) have used the conditional marker *if* where Greek just has a present participle verb (ὄντες 'being'). Here, two clauses function in the same way as clauses in a prototypical conditional sentence: the validity of one ("let them serve as deacons") depends on the validity of the other ("they prove themselves blameless"). However, they are joined without εἰ or ἐάν in Greek, even though English speakers prefer *if* in this case.

Other examples of implied conditions are found in 1 Timothy 5:9–10, which lists eight requirements for a widow to receive support from the church. The first three requirements are described in non-conditional clauses ("having lived not less than sixty years, having been the wife of one man, and having a reputation for good works"), and the remaining five requirements are described in conditional clauses. It is debatable whether the final five conditions are elaborations of the good works mentioned in the third requirement or separate conditions in their own right; however, it is clear that the first three requirements describe conditions even though they contain no conditional conjunctions.

What the discussion of these examples has shown is that Greek clauses containing the conditional conjunctions εἰ or ἐάν are not always translated using *if* in English, and conversely clauses that are translated using *if* in the majority of

English translations do not always contain εἰ or ἐάν in the Greek.[4] Similarly, when translating Greek conditionals into other languages, the most contextually appropriate translation might not contain a conditional construction at all if the intended meaning is best expressed in some other way.

1.2 How many conditional sentences are there in the Greek New Testament?

From the above discussion, it should be evident that determining the number of conditional sentences in the Greek New Testament is not as simple as listing all the εἰ and ἐάν conjunctions. On the one hand, there are what Boyer (1983:184) calls "implied conditions," that is, "sentences or elements which are not in form or fact conditional, but which are judged from context to imply a conditional sense." 1 Timothy 3:10, discussed above, is an example. On the other hand, there are constructions which contain εἰ or ἐάν, but which do not express a conditional relationship between clauses, or in which a conditional sense is debatable.

Because there is not a clear, one-to-one correspondence between the conditional conjunctions εἰ and ἐάν and conditional meaning, different lists of conditionals in the New Testament do not match precisely. Boyer's four articles on the conditionals of the New Testament (Boyer 1981, 1982a, 1982b, 1983) list a total of 629 conditional sentences (Boyer 1982b:n1), and a similar number are listed in Elliott (1981). However, these lists do not entirely overlap (see Entz 2020:23 for a discussion). A "morph search" for "conjunction, adverbial conditional" in Logos Bible Software yields 750 results.[5] My own database lists 624 conditional sentences, plus 220 non-conditional sentences which include some form of εἰ or ἐάν.

In the next section, we will look at the structures and functions of Greek conditional clauses with εἰ and ἐάν.

2 Types of conditionals in Greek

As we have seen, explicitly marked conditional clauses in Koine Greek (henceforth just "Greek") are usually indicated by the conjunction εἰ or ἐάν. The

[4] For a summary of other ways in which conditionals can be expressed in New Testament Greek without the use of the conditional conjunctions εἰ or ἐάν, see Wallace (1996:687–689).

[5] To do this search in Logos, go to Tools > Search, and in a Greek New Testament type @ (to get part of speech), select "Conjunction," and then "Adverbial conditional" (which is the first option listed). Alternatively, just type @CAC in the search box of a Greek New Testament.

different conditional constructions in the NT have traditionally been divided into three "classes"; there is a fourth class that is found in classical Greek, but there are no complete fourth class conditionals in the NT[6] (Boyer 1982b:164; Wallace 1996:484, 699).

2.1 First class conditionals

First class conditionals have the conditional conjunction εἰ together with an indicative mood verb of any tense in the protasis *p*.[7] (If *p* is negated, this is done using οὐ or variants of this, such as οὐκ or οὐδὲ.[8]) The apodosis *q* can be in any mood or tense. Wallace (1996:690–694) characterizes *p* in a first class conditional as "assumed true for the sake of argument" (see also Porter 1994:256). This does not mean that the speaker or writer is necessarily claiming that *p* is true (although he may be), but rather that he is asking the hearer or reader[9] to suppose that *p* is true and to then evaluate *q* on the basis of this assumption. When the speaker and hearer both know and agree that *p* is in fact true, we have what we will call a "factual" conditional; according to Boyer (1981:76), 37 percent of first class conditionals are of this type.[10] The characterization of the content of *p* as "assumed true for the sake of argument" is reflected in the high proportion of first class conditionals in argumentation. For example, Romans contains twice as many first class conditionals as second and third class

[6] A possible exception is Acts 24:19 (Turner 1963:126–127, cited in Porter 1994:264). Boyer (1982b:171) notes that the conditionals in 1 Pt 3:14 and 17 have the characteristics of fourth class conditionals in *p* (that is, the verb is in the optative mood), but the verb in *q* is elided. If *q* also had a verb in the optative mood, these would be complete fourth class conditionals. Other examples where εἰ occurs with an optative verb have non-conditional meanings.

[7] Porter (1994:264–265) treats constructions with εἰ plus the future as a distinct fifth conditional class. This construction occurs twelve times in the New Testament. We follow the traditional classification and subsume these under the first class.

[8] The construction εἰ μὴ also occurs, but this usually has the sense of 'except' (see discussion in §3.4 below).

[9] From here on we will use *speaker* as shorthand for *speaker or writer*, and *hearer* as shorthand for *hearer or reader*.

[10] In many such cases, εἰ could be translated into English with *since*. However, Wallace (1996:692), noting that the Greek NT has several words that correspond more closely to *since*, is adamant that it should not: "To translate εἰ as *since* is to turn an invitation to dialogue into a lecture." However, in languages that do not use conditional constructions when *p* is known to be true, factual conditionals in Greek may need to be translated using a non-conditional construction.

conditionals combined. The following examples are typical (but note the two verbless clauses in Romans 8:31):

Romans 8:31

[**εἰ**	ὁ θεὸς	ὑπὲρ	ἡμῶν,]*p*	[τίς	καθ’	ἡμῶν;]*q*
if	God	for	us	who	against	us

[**If** God is for us,]*p* [who can be against us?]*q*

1 Corinthians 15:16

[**εἰ**	γὰρ	νεκροὶ	οὐκ	ἐγείρονται,]*p*	[οὐδὲ	Χριστὸς	ἐγήγερται]*q*
if	for	(the).dead	not	are.raised	neither	Christ	has.been.raised

[For **if** the dead are not raised,]*p* [not even Christ has been raised.]*q*

The argumentational use of 1 Corinthians 15:16 is stressed by Lyman (1975), who notes that a Zapotec translation of this verse rendered it as follows: “If it is true that God does not bring dead people back to life, then we cannot say that he brought Christ back to life.”

2.2 Second class conditionals

Second class conditionals have the conjunction εί and an indicative imperfect or aorist verb form in *p*; *q* takes the same verb form as *p*, and is often, but not always, marked with ἂν. (If *p* is negated, this is done using μὴ.) This construction presents *p*—and by association *q* also—as contrary to fact. The second class can be thought of as a counterpart to the first class: whilst first class conditionals present *p* as assumed true for the sake of argument, second class conditionals present *p* as assumed not true for the sake of argument (Wallace 1996:711). In fact, Porter (1994:260) describes the second class conditional as “a sub-category of the first class conditional, since the protasis is formed in the same way.”[11] When the speaker and hearer both know and agree that *p* is in fact not true, we have what we will call a “non-factual” conditional. In general, when the verb form is imperfect, the time reference is present, and when the verb form is aorist, the

[11] Because the verb in a first class conditional is an indicative form of any tense, when there is no ἂν in *q* the difference between first and second class conditionals can only be determined on the basis of whether *p* is presented as true or false. This can lead to some debate, as for example in Mk 3:26, Rom 7:7, and 1 Cor 11:31. Boyer (1983:173–175) discusses some examples of mixed conditions, such as Lk 17:6, in which the verb in *p* is present tense, but *q* contains ἂν.

time reference is past.[12] This can be illustrated by the following examples (Wallace 1996:695–696).

John 5:46a—present contrary-to-fact second class conditional (imperfect)

[**εἰ**	γὰρ	ἐπιστεύετε	Μωϋσεῖ,]*p*	[ἐπιστεύετε	**ἂν**	ἐμοί]*q*
if	for	you.were.believing	Moses	you.were.believing	would	me

["For **if** you believed Moses,]*p* [you **would** believe me,]*q* for he wrote about me." (Indicates: You do not believe me, therefore you do not believe Moses either.)

1 Corinthians 2:8—past contrary-to-fact second class conditional (aorist)

[**εἰ**	γὰρ	ἔγνωσαν,]*p*	[οὐκ	**ἂν**	τὸν	κύριον	τῆς	δόξης	ἐσταύρωσαν.]*q*
if	for	they.knew	not	would	the	Lord	of	glory	they.crucified

[for **if** they had understood,]*p* [they **would** not have crucified the Lord of glory.]*q*

2.3 Third class conditionals

Third class conditionals have the conjunction ἐὰν (historically a combination of εἰ and ἂν). The verb in *p* is in the subjunctive mood and can be in any tense; *q* can be in any mood or tense. (If *p* is negated, this is done using μὴ, often with the sense of "unless"[13].) Wallace (1996:696) describes the meaning of the third class as follows: "The *third* class condition encompasses a broad range of potentialities in Koine Greek. It depicts what is *likely to occur* in the *future*, what could *possibly occur*, or even what is only *hypothetical* and will not occur" (original emphasis). Wallace (1996:697) distinguishes two sub-classes of third class conditionals: "probable future conditionals" that denote specific situations in the future, and "present general conditionals" that denote generic situations in the present. Boyer (1982b:172-174) rejects this distinction and prefers the term "future condition" for all third class conditionals, arguing that even "gnomic or atemporal" apodoses include future time. We have found that the range of uses of third class conditionals is so wide that it is impractical to try to divide them simply into "future" and "present"; also, the term "future condition" can be misleading.

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[12] The time reference of imperfect second class conditional sentences is typically the present, despite the facts that a) the imperfect and the aorist are both termed "past tense" forms in traditional Greek grammars, and b) English translations of the imperfect usually use the past tense in *p* and *would* in *q* (while English translations of the aorist use the past perfect in *p* and *would have +en* in *q*). See Porter (1994:260–261) for arguments against treating this generalization as a hard-and-fast rule.

[13] For a discussion of 'unless' conditionals, see Nicolle (2022b).

Luke 16:30–31 illustrates how third class conditionals can receive different interpretations, and also contrasts third and first class conditionals.

[30] ὁ	δὲ	εἶπεν,	Οὐχί,	πάτερ	Ἀβραάμ,	ἀλλ’
he	and	said	no	father	Abraham	but

[**ἐάν**	τις	ἀπὸ	νεκρῶν	πορευθῇ	πρὸς	αὐτοὺς]*p*1
if	someone	from	[the].dead	should.go	to	them

[μετανοήσουσιν.]*q*1
they.will.repent

And he said, “No, father Abraham, but [**if** someone goes to them from the dead,]*p*1 [they will repent.”]*q*1

[31] εἶπεν	δὲ	αὐτῷ,	[**Εἰ**	Μωϋσέως	καὶ	τῶν	προφητῶν
he.said	and	to.him	if	Moses	and	the	prophets

οὐκ	ἀκούουσιν,]*p*2
not	they.listen.to

[οὐδ’	[**ἐάν**	τις	ἐκ	νεκρῶν	ἀναστῇ]*p*3
neither	if	someone	from	[the].dead	should.rise.again

[πεισθήσονται.]*q*3]*q*2
they.will.be.persuaded

He said to him, [“**If** they do not hear Moses and the Prophets,]*p*2 [neither [**if** someone should rise from the dead]*p*3 [will they be convinced.”]*q*3]*q*2

In Luke 16:30, using a third class conditional construction, the rich man seems convinced that a visit from the dead would convince his family members to repent, suggesting that he thinks that it is possible or even likely that someone can go to them from the dead. In 16:31 Abraham responds using a third class conditional construction embedded within a first class conditional construction. The first class conditional expresses a known fact in *p2*: they do not listen to Moses and the prophets; *q2* expresses the consequence—they will not be convinced—that is further modified by a third class conditional in *p3*: if someone should rise from the dead. This conditional expresses a situation that Abraham seems to view as very unlikely to occur, and in fact many English translations (including NASB, NRSV, NIV, and NLT) translate this as a concessive conditional with “even if” (see §3.1 below).

Here are four examples from John's gospel[14] that demonstrate some of the range of functions of third class conditionals:

John 12:24 (two conditionals, both are hypothetical[15] and gnomic; the first is translated "unless")

[**ἐὰν μὴ**	ὁ	κόκκος	τοῦ σίτου	πεσὼν		εἰς	τὴν	γῆν
if not	the	grain	of wheat	having.fallen		into	the	ground
ἀποθάνῃ,]*p*1		[αὐτὸς	μόνος	μένει·]*q*1				
dies.(SUBJ)		it	alone	remains				
[**ἐὰν**	δὲ	ἀποθάνῃ,]*p*2		[πολὺν	καρπὸν	φέρει.]*q*2		
if	but	it.dies.(SUBJ)		much	fruit	it.bears		

["**unless** a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies,]*p*1 [it remains alone;]*q*1 [but **if** it dies,]*p*2 [it bears much fruit."]*q*2

John 14:3 (factual and future, because Jesus has just stated that he is going to prepare a place)

καὶ	[**ἐὰν**	πορευθῶ	καὶ	ἑτοιμάσω	τόπον	ὑμῖν,]*p*	
and	if	I.go.(SUBJ)	and	I.prepare.(SUBJ)	place	for.you(PL)	
[πάλιν	ἔρχομαι	καὶ	παραλήμψομαι	ὑμᾶς	πρὸς	ἐμαυτόν...]*q*	
again	I.am.coming	and	I.will.receive	you(PL)	to	myself	

"And [**if** I go and prepare a place for you,]*p* [I will come again and will take you to myself..."]*q*

John 21:25 (non-factual and gnomic)

Ἔστιν δὲ καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ ἃ ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ἅτινα

[**ἐὰν**	γράφηται	καθ' ἕν,]*p*	[οὐδ'	αὐτὸν	οἶμαι	τὸν	κόσμον
if	it.were.written	every.one	not	itself	I.think	the	world

[14] John's gospel is characterized by a high number of third class conditionals. While Matthew and Luke use roughly equal numbers of first and third class conditionals, John uses over twice as many third class conditionals (63 compared to 24 first class). John's gospel also contains more conditional sentences of all classes than either Matthew's or Luke's gospels, despite being shorter than both.

[15] That is, not clearly factual or non-factual; the probability of *p* occurring falls somewhere between very likely and very unlikely but excludes cases in which *p* is known to be true or false.

χωρῆσαι	τὰ	γραφόμενα	βιβλία.]*q*
to.contain	the	being.written	books

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which [**if** they were written in detail,]*p* [I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.]*q* (NASB)

2.4 Differences between parallel passages

From the previous examples and discussion, it is clear that the form of a Greek conditional (first, second, or third class) does not entirely determine its meaning. This can be seen most clearly by comparing parallel passages in the gospels where different forms are used in identical contexts and with identical or almost identical meanings. We have identified fifteen clear cases where the writers of the synoptic gospels used different conditional constructions, or conditional and non-conditional constructions, in identical contexts.

2.4.1 Different classes

Both first and third class conditionals can be used to describe hypothetical situations, and parallel passages do not always use the same form. Matthew 18:8–9 uses first class conditionals (see also Mat 5:29–30), but Mark 9:43, 45, 47 uses third class conditionals.

Matthew 18:9

[καὶ	**εἰ**	ὁ	ὀφθαλμός	σου	σκανδαλίζει	σε,]*p*
and	if	the	eye	of.you	causes.to.stumble	you

[ἔξελε	αὐτὸν	καὶ	βάλε	ἀπὸ	σοῦ·]*q*
take.out	it	and	throw	from	you

["And **if** your eye causes you to sin,]*p* [tear it out and throw it away."]*q*

Mark 9:47

[καὶ	**ἐὰν**	ὁ	ὀφθαλμός	σου	σκανδαλίζῃ	σε,]*p*	[ἔκβαλε	αὐτόν·]*q*
and	if	the	eye	of.you	cause.to.stumble (subjunctive)	you	take.out	it

["And **if** your eye causes you to sin,]*p* [tear it out."]*q*

Matthew 5:46 uses a third class conditional, but Luke 6:32 uses a first class conditional. (See also Mt 10:13b and Lk 10:6b, and Mt 17:20 and Lk 17:6.)

Matthew 5:46

[**ἐὰν**	γὰρ	ἀγαπήσητε	τοὺς	ἀγαπῶντας	ὑμᾶς,]*p*	[τίνα	μισθὸν
if	for	you(PL).love	those	loving	you(PL)	what	reward

ἔχετε;]*q*
you(PL).have

["For **if** you love those who love you,]*p* [what reward do you have?"]*q*

Luke 6:32

[καὶ	**εἰ**	ἀγαπᾶτε	τοὺς	ἀγαπῶντας	ὑμᾶς,]*p*	[ποία	ὑμῖν
and	if	you(PL).love	those	loving	you(PL)	what.kind	to.you(PL)

χάρις	ἐστίν;]*q*
credit	is

["**If** you love those who love you,]*p* [what benefit is that to you?"]*q*

2.4.2 Constructions without εἰ *or* ἐὰν

There are a number of passages in Matthew that contain a conditional conjunction εἰ or ἐὰν but where the parallel passages in Mark or Luke have no conditional conjunction. These can serve as examples for translators in cases where a conditional construction in the receptor language does not convey the same function as a conditional construction in Greek. The parallel passages without εἰ or ἐὰν use a variety of alternative constructions: aorist participles, conjunctions meaning "when", constructions meaning "whoever", rhetorical questions, and imperatives. An example of each is provided below.[16]

2.4.2.1 Aorist participle. Matthew 16:26 uses a third class conditional to describe a hypothetical situation in which a non-specific person gains the whole world but forfeits his soul. Luke 9:25 describes the same hypothetical situation using an aorist participle verb form, without any conditional conjunction (although most English translations use *if*).

Matthew 16:26

[τί	γὰρ	ὠφεληθήσεται	ἄνθρωπος]*q*
what	for	will.be.benefited	man

[16] In addition to the examples below, see Mt 12:11 and Lk 14:5; Mt 18:12–13 and Lk 15:4–5; Mt 21:21b and Mk 11:23; Mt 22:45 and Mk 12:37 / Lk 20:44; Mt 24:23 / Mk 13:21 and Lk 17:23.

[**ἐὰν** τὸν κόσμον ὅλον κερδήσῃ τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ
if the world whole he.acquires the but soul of.him

ζημιωθῇ;]*p*
he.forfeits

["For what will it profit a man]*q* [**if** he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?"]*p*

Luke 9:25

[τί γὰρ ὠφελεῖται ἄνθρωπος]*q*
what for profits man

[**κερδήσας** τὸν κόσμον ὅλον ἑαυτὸν δὲ ἀπολέσας ἢ
having.gained the world whole himself but having.lost or

ζημιωθείς;]*p*
having.forfeited

["For what does it profit a man]*q* [**if** he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?"]*p*

2.4.2.2 'When'. Matthew 6:22–23 contains two third class conditionals to contrast two alternative hypothetical situations. The parallel passage in Luke 11:34 achieves the same effect using ὅταν 'when' and ἐπὰν 'since', 'when' instead of conditional conjunctions.

Matthew 6:22–23

[**ἐὰν** οὖν ᾖ ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου ἁπλοῦς,]*p*1 [ὅλον τὸ
if therefore is the eye of.you single.(healthy) whole the

σῶμά σου φωτεινὸν ἔσται·]*q*1
body of.you bright will.be

[**ἐὰν** δὲ ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου πονηρὸς ᾖ,]*p*2 [ὅλον τὸ σῶμά
if but the eye of.you evil is whole the body

σου σκοτεινὸν ἔσται.]*q*2
of.you dark will.be

["So, **if** your eye is healthy,]*p*1 [your whole body will be full of light,]*q*1 [but **if** your eye is bad,]*p*2 [your whole body will be full of darkness."]*q*2

Luke 11:34

[**ὅταν**	ὁ	ὀφθαλμός	σου	ἁπλοῦς	ᾖ,]*p*1	[καὶ	ὅλον	τὸ
when	the	eye	of.you	single.(healthy)	is	also	whole	the

σῶμά	σου	φωτεινόν	ἐστιν·]*q*1	
body	of.you	bright	is	

[**ἐπὰν**	δὲ	πονηρὸς	ᾖ,]*p*2	[καὶ	τὸ	σῶμά	σου	σκοτεινόν.]*q*2
when	but	sick	is	also	the	body	of.you	dark

[“**When** your eye is healthy,]*p*1 [your whole body is full of light,]*q*1 but [**when** it is bad,]*p*2 [your body is full of darkness.”]*q*2

2.4.2.3 ‘Whoever’. Matthew 18:3 uses the negative third class construction ἐὰν μὴ ‘if not’, ‘unless’ whereas Mark 10:15 and Luke 18:17 use ὃς ἂν μὴ ‘whoever not’.

Matthew 18:3

[**ἐὰν μὴ**	στραφῆτε	καὶ	γένησθε	ὡς	τὰ	παιδία,]*p*
unless	you(PL).change	and	you(PL).become	like	the	children

[οὐ μὴ	εἰσέλθητε	εἰς	τὴν	βασιλείαν	τῶν	οὐρανῶν.]*q*
never	you(PL).will.enter	into	the	kingdom	of.the	heavens

[“**unless** you turn and become like children,]*p* [you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”]*q*

Mark 10:15 / Luke 18:17

[**ὃς ἂν**	μὴ	δέξηται	τὴν	βασιλείαν	τοῦ	θεοῦ	ὡς	παιδίον,]*p*
whoever	not	receives	the	kingdom	of.the	God	like	a.child

[οὐ μὴ	εἰσέλθῃ	εἰς	αὐτήν.]*q*	
never	may.enter	into	it	

[“**whoever** does not receive the kingdom of God like a child]*p* [shall not enter it.”]*q*

2.4.2.4 Rhetorical questions. Matthew 15:14 has a third class conditional, but Luke 6:39 uses a pair of rhetorical questions.

Matthew 15:14

[τυφλὸς	δὲ	τυφλὸν	**ἐὰν**	ὁδηγῇ,]*p*	[ἀμφότεροι	εἰς
blind.person	and	blind.person	if	leads	both	into

βόθυνον	πεσοῦνται.]*q*
a.pit	will.fall

[“And **if** the blind lead the blind,]*p* [both will fall into a pit.”]*q*

Luke 6:39

Μήτι	δύναται	τυφλὸς	τυφλὸν	ὁδηγεῖν;	οὐχὶ	ἀμφότεροι
not	is.able	blind.person	blind.person	to.lead	not	both

εἰς	βόθυνον	ἐμπεσοῦνται;
into	a.pit	will.fall.in

“Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?”

2.4.2.5 Imperative. Matthew 21:24 has a third class conditional, but Mark 11:29 uses an imperative. The third class conditional is open to different interpretations: Nolland (2005) suggests that Jesus genuinely did not know how the addressees (the Pharisees) would respond, whereas according to Hagner (1995), Jesus likely knew that the Pharisees would try to avoid the question.

Matthew 21:24

᾽Ερωτήσω	ὑμᾶς	κἀγὼ	λόγον	ἕνα,	ὃν	[**ἐὰν**	εἴπητέ	μοι]*p*
I.will.ask	you(PL)	I.also	word	one	which	if	you(PL).tell	me

[κἀγὼ	ὑμῖν	ἐρῶ	ἐν	ποίᾳ	ἐξουσίᾳ	ταῦτα	ποιῶ.]*q*
I.also	you(PL)	I.will.tell	in	what	authority	these	I.do

“I also will ask you one question, and [**if** you tell me the answer,]*p* [then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things.”]*q*

Mark 11:29

᾽Επερωτήσω	ὑμᾶς	ἕνα	λόγον,	καὶ	ἀποκρίθητέ	μοι
I.will.ask	you(PL)	one	word	and	you(PL).answer	me

καὶ	ἐρῶ	ὑμῖν	ἐν	ποίᾳ	ἐξουσίᾳ	ταῦτα	ποιῶ.
and	I.will.tell	you(PL)	in	what	authority	these	I.do

“I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things.”

3 Other constructions with εἰ / ἐὰν

The conditional particles εἰ and ἐὰν occur in a number of constructions with quite specific meanings. Some of these function as specific types of conditionals, but others do not express typical conditional meanings. In this section, we discuss some of the more common constructions with εἰ and ἐὰν found in the NT.

3.1 Concessive conditionals: εἰ καὶ, κἂν, etc.

Concessive conditionals are distinguished from regular conditionals by two features. First, the apodosis *q* is asserted regardless of the truth of the protasis *p*; for this reason, they cannot receive an "if and only if" interpretation.[17] In this respect, concessive conditionals are similar to speech act conditionals (see §1) in which *p* merely establishes the situation in which *q* is relevant to the hearer. Second, *p* describes a situation that would be expected to lead to a different outcome than the one asserted in *q*. Often the situation described in *p* is extreme or unexpected, and may even appear incompatible with *q*; all of this serves to emphasize the assertion of *q*. Concessive conditionals are typically expressed in English using *even if* or, when *p* is known to be true (that is, when it is factual), *though*, *even though*, or *although*.[18]

An example of a concessive conditional is **John 11:25b**. The form of the concessive here is κἂν, which is a reduced form of καὶ + ἐὰν. The statement in *q*, "whoever believes in me will live," is asserted, including in the extreme case presented in *p*, "even if he dies."

ὁ	πιστεύων	εἰς	ἐμὲ	[κἂν	ἀποθάνῃ]*p*	[ζήσεται]*q*
the.one	believing	in	me	even.if	he.should.die	he.will.live

"Whoever believes in me, [though he die,]*p* [yet shall he live…"]*q* (ESV)
"he who believes in Me [will live]*q* [even if he dies…"]*p* (NASB)

[17] The distinction between concessive conditionals and regular conditionals is reflected in the fact that some languages express concessives using grammatical forms that are entirely unrelated to conditionals. For example, Mandarin has a subordinator *juishi* which can be glossed as 'even if', but which is morphologically distinct from genuinely conditional morphemes. Similarly, Korean has conditional suffixes, including *-(u)myen* 'if'/'when', *-tamyen/lamyen* 'if'/'provided that', and *-eya/aya* 'if only', and a number of unrelated concessive suffixes, including *-eto/ato, -telato, -(u)lcitato, -ulmangcen, -(u)ntul*, and *-(u)lciengcen*, all of which can be glossed 'even if' (Sohn 2009:303–306). For a discussion of different ways in which concessive conditionals are formed, see Bossuyt (2022).

[18] *Though* (and these other forms) can be thought of as being the concessive counterpart to *since* and *because*, whereas *even if* is more clearly related to regular *if* conditionals. For further discussion, see Nicolle (2017:11–12).

Concessive conditionals in Greek are typically indicated by the presence of καὶ in *p*. Not all conditionals with καὶ are concessive, however. In most of the places where καὶ co-occurs with a conditional particle, it is simply a conjunction or additive 'and'/'also'.[19] The various constructions that are used to express concessive meaning in the NT, together with the verses in which they occur, are listed below:

εἰ καὶ: Mark 14:29; Luke 11:8, 18:4, 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4:16, 5:16, 7:8a, b, c, 7:12, 11:6, 12:11; Philippians 2:17; Colossians 2:5; Hebrews 6:9; 1 Peter 3:14

καὶ εἰ: 1 Peter 3:1

ἐὰν καὶ: Galatians 6:1[20]

κἂν: Matthew 21:21b, 26:35; Luke 12:38 (two occurrences); John 8:14, 8:55, 10:38, 11:25b[21]

καὶ ἐὰν: John 8:16; Galatians 1:8[22]

καὶ εἴπερ: 1 Corinthians 8:5

Boyer (1983:187) claims that when καὶ follows the conditional particle (εἰ or ἐὰν), this refers to situations that are actually fulfilled (what we have been calling "factual" conditionals), while when καὶ precedes the conditional particle this refers to unlikely situations or events.[23] For example, in Mark 14:27 Jesus states

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[19] According to Boyer (1983:187), in 66 cases καὶ does not add a concessive sense to εἴ / εάν, while 29 times it does. However, we have counted a few more of those in Boyer's lists as concessive.

[20] It is debatable whether Gal 6:1 should be interpreted as a concessive conditional; out of five major English translations, only the NASB translates it as such. For a detailed discussion see Nicolle (2022a).

[21] Out of 17 occurrences of κἂν, 11 have a concessive sense. In addition to the 8 just listed, there are 3 that are concessive but that may not be functioning conditionally: Mk 5:28—a separate ἐὰν is present, and thus κἂν is not used to modify the whole phrase; Acts 5:15—κἂν just modifies part of a non-conditional phrase; 2 Cor 11:16—a separate εἴ is present in an εἰ δὲ μή γε 'otherwise' construction, and thus, κἂν is not used to modify the whole clause, which is arguably not conditional in any case.

[22] 1 Cor 7:11, 28 and 1 Jn 2:1 could also be interpreted concessively, though most English translations interpret the καὶ simply as a conjunction. For a detailed discussion of Gal 1:8, see Nicolle (2022a).

[23] There are a few exceptions to this: although most occurrences of εἰ καὶ express factual conditions—and are usually translated with (*even*) *though* in English—this is arguably not

that all of his disciples will desert him, but in v.29 Peter responds that although he is willing to accept the fact that all of the other disciples will desert Jesus,[24] he refuses (incorrectly, as it turns out) to accept that this is true of him. This is a factual concessive and is expressed with εἰ καὶ:

[**Εἰ καὶ**	πάντες	σκανδαλισθήσονται,]*p*	[ἀλλ’	οὐκ	ἐγώ.]*q*
even.though	all	will.fall.away	but	not	I

[“**Even though** they all fall away,]*p* [I will not.”]*q*

The parallel passage in Matthew 26:33 uses εἰ with no grammatical indication of a concessive. However, the meaning is clearly concessive. This illustrates how some conditional sentences that do not have καὶ in *p* are interpreted as concessive simply based on the context.[25]

[**Εἰ**	πάντες	σκανδαλισθήσονται	ἐν	σοί,]*p*	[ἐγὼ	οὐδέποτε	
if	everyone	will.fall.be.offended	in	you	I	never	

σκανδαλισθήσομαι.]*q*
will.be.offended

[“**Though** they all fall away because of you,]*p* [I will never fall away.]*q*

As the conversation continues, Jesus tells Peter that he will deny him three times before the cock crows, but Peter responds that he will die rather than deny Jesus. No one has said that Peter will die, and he expresses this extreme eventuality using κἂν in **Matthew 26:35**.

[**Κἂν**	δέῃ	με	σὺν	σοὶ	ἀποθανεῖν,]*p*	[οὐ	μή	σε	ἀπαρνήσομαι.]*q*
even.if	must	for.me	with	you	to.die	not	not	you	I.will.deny

[“**Even if** I must die with you,]*p* [I will not deny you!”]*q*

The parallel passage in **Mark 14:31** has just ἐὰν, but a concessive interpretation is clearly justified by the context.

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the case in 1 Peter 3:14, “But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed.” The previous verse states, “Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?” (NRSV), which suggests that Paul is not presenting *p* as factual. Conversely, most occurrences of κἂν (καὶ + ἐὰν) refer to unlikely conditions, but a few in John refer to factual conditions (Jn 8:14, 10:38, 11:25).

[24] “Peter is not surprised at the thought of the defection of the other disciples. Perhaps he even expects it of them” (Edwards 2002:429). See also Cole (1989:301).

[25] These include (but are probably not limited to) Mt 26:33; Mk 14:31; Acts 13:41; Rom 3:3, 9:7; 1 Cor 4:15, 9:2.

[**Ἐὰν** δέῃ με συναποθανεῖν σοι,]*p* [οὐ μή σε ἀπαρνήσομαι.]*q*
if must for.me to.die for.you not not you I.will.deny

["Even if I have to die with you,]*p* [I will never disown you."]*q* (NIV)

3.2 εἴτε 'whether… or…'[26]

The conjunction εἴτε is composed of the conditional conjunction εἰ and the particle τε, and often occurs in pairs indicating "both… and…".[27] This conjunction is used almost exclusively by Paul with the one exception (two uses of εἴτε) occurring in 1 Peter. As with concessive conditionals, *q* is usually asserted when εἴτε occurs in *p*. However, whereas concessive conditionals have a single protasis which describes a situation that would be expected to make *q* less likely, εἴτε typically introduces a series of protases that together constitute a list of alternative situations.

There are 26 sentences containing εἴτε in the New Testament, which together contain 65 occurrences of εἴτε. Most of these sentences have several protases (up to eight in 1 Cor 3:22) each introduced by εἴτε, and only one apodosis. The items listed following εἴτε provide either an exhaustive list of alternatives (e.g., life and death in 1 Thes 5:10) or a variety of examples which represent all members of a particular class of things (e.g., flute and harp representing all musical instruments in 1 Cor 14:7). However, there are six εἴτε conditionals that contain a separate apodosis for each item in the list, and a seventh εἴτε conditional that appears entirely on its own. These will be discussed in turn.

3.2.1 Multiple protases with εἴτε*, single apodosis*

There are 19 sentences containing εἴτε (73 percent) which fall into this category.[28] When εἴτε appears in this type of construction, it creates a list, and is usually translated in English with "whether" for the first occurrence and "or" for any following occurrences. The apodosis is asserted and does not depend on any of the protases. Let's consider two examples of this construction.

1 Corinthians 10:31

*p*1:	So, whether you eat	Εἴτε οὖν ἐσθίετε
*p*2:	or drink,	εἴτε πίνετε

[26] This section was written in collaboration with Mikayla Benner.

[27] The particle τε also occurs in οὔτε and μήτε, both of which are usually translated in English as "neither… nor…".

[28] 1 Cor 3:22, 8:5, 10:31, 12:13, 14:7, 15:11; 2 Cor 5:9, 5:10, 12:2, 12:3; Eph 6:8; Phil 1:18, 1:20, 1:27; Col 1:16, 1:20; 1 Thes 5:10; 2 Thes 2:15; 1 Pt 2:13–14.

*p*3:	or whatever you do,	εἴτε τι ποιεῖτε,
q:	do all to the glory of God.	πάντα εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ ποιεῖτε

In the previous verses, Paul has discussed the issue of eating food from the market or at the house of a non-believer. His advice was that it is acceptable to eat such food unless it is known to have been offered in sacrifice to an idol. The first two protases list eating and drinking not as alternatives but as representative actions involved in sharing a meal with others. The third protasis "whatever you do" alludes to the alternative of not eating or drinking. Since there is no other possible alternative, it follows that "do all to the glory of God" is asserted unconditionally.

Philippians 1:18

	Only that in every way,	πλὴν ὅτι παντὶ τρόπῳ,
*p*1:	whether in pretense	εἴτε προφάσει
*p*2:	or in truth,	εἴτε ἀληθείᾳ,
q:	Christ is proclaimed,	Χριστὸς καταγγέλλεται
	and in that I rejoice.	καὶ ἐν τούτῳ χαίρω.

This sentence provides a clear dichotomy: either the preaching is done in pretense, or it is done in truth. There is no other way it could happen, as the previous phrase "in every way" makes clear. Neither protasis effects whether or not Christ is proclaimed, and so this too cannot be a genuine conditional.

3.2.2 Multiple protases with εἴτε*, multiple apodoses*

There are six instances where each occurrence of εἴτε is paired with its own apodosis.[29] However, these occurrences of εἴτε occur in groups, with all of the εἴτε protases being related in some way. The meaning of any single protasis-apodosis pair can only be understood by virtue of its contribution to the meaning of the group as a whole. Some of these groups create a comprehensive scenario, by providing either an exhaustive list of alternatives or a representative list of members of a particular class; others present a list of related items with a distinct apodosis for each item. We will look at two groups of εἴτε protases, 2 Corinthians 5:13 and Romans 12:6–8, that comprise related items with distinct apodoses, and then consider a group, 1 Corinthians 13:8, in which the apodoses are virtually identical.

2 Corinthians 5:13

*p*1:	For if we are beside ourselves,	εἴτε γὰρ ἐξέστημεν,
*q*1:	it is for God;	θεῷ

[29] Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:26, 13:8; 2 Cor 1:6, 5:13, 8:23.

*p*2:	if we are in our right mind,	εἴτε σωφρονοῦμεν,
*q*2:	it is for you.	ὑμῖν.

This set creates a comprehensive scenario with no other alternatives, since being "beside ourselves" is the opposite of being in our right mind. However, there is a different result for each case, which sets this apart from the εἴτε sentences with a single apodosis.

Romans 12:6–8

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, [let us use them:]		ἐχοντες δὲ χαρίσματα κατὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσαν ἡμῖν διάφορα,
*p*1:	if prophecy,	εἴτε προφητείαν
*q*1:	in proportion to our faith;	κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως,
*p*2:	if service,	εἴτε διακονίαν
*q*2:	in our serving;	ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ,
*p*3:	the one who teaches,	εἴτε ὁ διδάσκων
*q*3:	in his teaching;	ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ,
*p*4:	the one who exhorts,	εἴτε ὁ παρακαλῶν
*q*4:	in his exhortation;	ἐν τῇ παρακλήσει

Each protasis identifies a gift, and each apodosis tells the readers how to use that particular gift. The first four protases are introduced by εἴτε (NIV translates the final two as "if it is teaching" and "if it is to encourage"—see also NET). There are three more in this list in v.8 that are not preceded by εἴτε but rather are similar to how *p*3 and *p*4 are translated into English above (from ESV).

1 Corinthians 13:8

*p*1:	As for prophecies,	εἴτε δὲ προφητεῖαι,
*q*1:	they will pass away;	καταργηθήσονται·
*p*2:	as for tongues,	εἴτε γλῶσσαι,
*q*2:	they will cease;	παύσονται·
*p*3:	as for knowledge,	εἴτε γνῶσις,
*q*3:	it will pass away.	καταργηθήσεται.

Structurally, this group consists of three protases, each with its own apodosis. (The conditional nature of these εἴτε protases is obscured by the ESV translation provided above. The NET Bible makes the conditional nature clearer: "if there are prophecies, they will be set aside; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be set aside." NASB is similar.) However, the apodoses are virtually synonymous (in fact, *q*1 and *q*3 contain the same verb root), and this group functions much like a construction with a single apodosis.

3.2.3 Single protasis with εἴτε*, single apodosis*

There is one instance of εἴτε that does not follow any of the usual patterns, but instead appears by itself without another εἴτε nearby.

1 Corinthians 14:27

p:	If any speak in a tongue,	εἴτε γλώσσῃ τις λαλεῖ,
q:	let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret.	κατὰ δύο ἢ τὸ πλεῖστον τρεῖς, καὶ ἀνὰ μέρος, καὶ εἷς διερμηνευέτω·

Immediately following this are two third class conditionals. While they are not marked with εἴτε, their protases are clearly linked with 14:27. In verse 28 we read, "but if there is no one to interpret" and in verse 30, "if a revelation is made to another sitting there." Taking these three together, it is possible to see the usual εἴτε pattern of a list covering all possibilities.

3.3 ἐὰν μὴ 'unless', 'if... not'[30]

ἐὰν μὴ is the negative form of the third class conditional. Compared to other Greek conditional constructions, the ἐὰν μὴ construction has a few peculiarities:

- Of the 55 ἐὰν μὴ conditionals in the NT, the apodosis *q* precedes the protasis *p* 30 times (55 percent). In contrast, only about 6 percent of affirmative conditional sentences in the NT have the order *q* > *p*.
- In 28 of the 55 ἐὰν μὴ conditionals *q* is negative, and in an additional 6 cases *q* consists of a rhetorical question that expects a negative response; that is, *q* is explicitly or implicitly negative 62 percent of the time. Of course, *p* is also negative because of the negative marker μὴ, which means that most conditional sentences with ἐὰν μὴ have two negative clauses.
- At the pragmatic level, *p* usually describes the only situation or fact that would invalidate *q*.

Consider **John 3:2**.

[**οὐδεὶς**	γὰρ	δύναται	ταῦτα	τὰ	σημεῖα	ποιεῖν	ἃ	σὺ	ποιεῖς,]*q*
no.one	for	is.able	these	the	signs	to.do	which	you	do
[**ἐὰν μὴ**	ᾖ	ὁ θεὸς	μετ'	αὐτοῦ]*p*					
unless	is	God	with	him					

["**no one** can do these signs that you do]*q* [**unless** God is with him."]*p*

[30] Further discussion of the ἐὰν μὴ construction can be found in Nicolle (2022b).

This passage illustrates the three peculiarities of the ἐὰν μὴ construction listed above: 1) *q* ("no one can do these signs that you do") occurs before *p* ("unless God is with him"); 2) both clauses are negative: *q* contains οὐδεὶς 'no one' and *p* contains ἐὰν μὴ 'if not' (these expressions are in bold); 3) *p* describes the only situation that would make "no one can do these signs that you do" false, namely God being with that person.

The unusual clause order and the fact that both clauses are often negated mean that sentences containing ἐὰν μὴ may be challenging to translate clearly and naturally in some languages. One way to rephrase such conditionals is to make both clauses affirmative and to make it explicit that *p* describes the only situation that makes the now affirmative *q* true. John 3:2 could be rephrased in this way as follows:

["a person can do these signs that you do]*q* [only if God is with him."]*p*

For a discussion of situations in which this type of rephrasing would not be appropriate, see Nicolle (2022b).

3.4 εἰ μὴ 'except', 'instead', 'but'

In contrast to the ἐὰν μὴ construction, εἰ μὴ does not express a conditional meaning, and is generally translated into English with "except", "instead", "only", or "but".[31] The fact that εἰ μὴ typically modifies a noun phrase rather than a clause (with a verb) means that rather than containing a protasis and an apodosis, εἰ μὴ is part of a single clause.

Against this position, Boyer (1983:178–179) claims that uses of εἰ μὴ are usually elided class one conditionals, and so in Mark 2:7 "Who can forgive sins but (εἰ μὴ) God alone?" the underlying proposition would be something like "If God cannot forgive sins, no one can forgive sins." However, this is not what the speakers meant at all: they were not doubting God's ability to forgive, nor were they mentioning God's ability to forgive to make a further point. They were merely asserting that only God can forgive sins. A similar use is found in **Matthew 14:17**.

οἱ	δὲ	λέγουσιν	αὐτῷ,	Οὐκ	ἔχομεν	ὧδε	**εἰ μὴ**	πέντε	ἄρτους
they	but	say	to.him	not	we.have	here	except	five	loaves

καὶ	δύο	ἰχθύας.	
and	two	fish	

They replied, "We have nothing here **but** (εἰ μὴ) five loaves and two fish." (NRSV)

[31] For more detailed discussions of this construction, see Runge (2010:§4.2; 2016:35).

NRSV follows the structure of the Greek fairly closely, but most other English translations, including ESV, NASB, NIV, NLT, and NET, replace "nothing... but" with "only": "We have here only five loaves and two fish" (NASB). This illustrates clearly how the disciples' speech contains only one clause rather than two (an apodosis and a protasis).

Matthew 5:13b provides a somewhat different example of how εἰ μὴ can be used: "it [salt] is no longer good for anything except (εἰ μὴ) to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet." Nolland (2005) notes that in this verse "εἰ μή points here not to a residual usefulness ('no use, except'), but rather to the fate of the useless salt ('no use. It can only')". For further discussion, see *BDAG*[32] entry εἰ definition 6iα.

There are a few occurrences of εἰ μὴ which are true conditionals, however. These cases are simply negative second class conditionals that are translatable as "if not": Matthew 24:22; Mark 13:20; John 9:33, 15:22, 24, 18:30, 19:11; Acts 26:32; Romans 7:7, 9:29.

3.5 εἰ δὲ μή (γε) 'otherwise'

Unlike the εἰ μὴ construction, εἰ δὲ μή (γε)[33] introduces a reduced protasis (where the rest of the clause has been elided). There is a genuine conditional relationship between εἰ δὲ μή (γε) and the apodosis (though the content of the protasis must be recovered from the preceding clause or sentence), and it can often be translated in English with "but if not". Boyer (1983:182) explains εἰ δὲ μή (γε) as follows: "In each case it is a compressed negative conditional clause; the verb of the protasis is left unexpressed but may be supplied from the preceding context. It is used to express an opposite alternative to the one in the preceding clause[34]: "If you don't do that..." or "If that is not the case...". 'Otherwise' is a good English rendering." (*Otherwise* indicates that the clause it introduces follows from the opposite of some previously stated proposition.)

There are fourteen occurrences of εἰ δὲ μή (γε) in the NT: Matthew 6:1, 9:17; Mark 2:21, 22; Luke 5:36, 37, 10:6, 13:9, 14:32; John 14:2, 11; 2 Corinthians 11:16 (εἰ δὲ μή γε is followed by κἂν); Revelation 2:5, 16.

The range of ways in which εἰ δὲ μή (γε) can be translated into English can be seen in **Revelation 2:16**.

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[32] See Danker et al 2000.

[33] Stephen Levinsohn (personal communication, 5 August 2022) notes that Mark and John, whose first language was not Greek, omit γε, whereas Luke, whose first language was Greek, and Matthew, who may have been bilingual in Aramaic and Greek, always include γε. There does not appear to be any difference in meaning between the two forms.

[34] As we will see below, εἰ δὲ μή (γε) does not necessarily refer back to the preceding clause.

μετανόησον	οὖν;	**[εἰ δὲ μή,]*p***	[ἔρχομαί	σοι	ταχὺ...]*q*
repent	therefore	if.but.not	I.am.coming	to.you(SG)	quickly

"Therefore repent. **If not**, I will come to you soon..." (ESV, NRSV)
"Therefore repent; **or else** I am coming to you quickly..." (NASB)
"Repent therefore! **Otherwise**, I will soon come to you..." (NIV)
"Repent of your sin, **or** I will come to you suddenly..." (NLT)

The clause that εἰ δὲ μή (γε) refers back to is usually the immediately preceding clause, but this is not always the case. In **Luke 10:6** (below), εἰ δὲ μή γε refers back to the protasis of the preceding conditional sentence ("if a son of peace is there"), rather than to the apodosis ("your peace will rest upon him"), even though this is the immediately preceding clause. The meaning is, "If there is not a son of peace there, your peace will return to you."

καὶ	[ἐὰν	ἐκεῖ	ᾖ	υἱὸς	εἰρήνης,]*p*	[ἐπαναπαήσεται	ἐπ'	αὐτὸν
and	if	there	is	son	of.peace	it.will.rest	on	him

ἡ	εἰρήνη	ὑμῶν·]*q*
the	peace	your(PL)

[εἰ δὲ μή γε,]*p*	[ἐφ'	ὑμᾶς	ἀνακάμψει.]*q*
otherwise / but if not	on	you(PL)	it.will.return

"And [if a son of peace is there,]*p* [your peace will rest upon him.]*q* [**But if not**,]*p* [it will return to you."]*q*

This is confirmed by a comparison of the parallel passage in **Matthew 10:13**, which uses a negative third class conditional where Luke 10:6 uses εἰ δὲ μή γε:

καὶ	[ἐὰν	μὲν	ᾖ	ἡ	οἰκία	ἀξία,]*p*	[ἐλθάτω	ἡ	εἰρήνη	ὑμῶν
and	if	–	is	the	house	worthy	let.it.come	the	peace	your(PL)

ἐπ'	αὐτήν,]*q*
on	it

[ἐὰν	δὲ	μὴ	ᾖ	ἀξία,]*p*	[ἡ	εἰρήνη	ὑμῶν	πρὸς	ὑμᾶς
if	but	not	is	worthy	the	peace	your(PL)	to	you(PL)

ἐπιστραφήτω.]*q*
let.it.return

"And [if the house is worthy,]*p* [let your peace come upon it,]*q* [but **if** it is not worthy,]*p* [let your peace return to you."]*q*

3.6 Indefinite reference

The Greek conditional particles are used in various constructions that describe non-specific individuals, things, times, and places. In the case of εἴ τις / ἐὰν τις 'if anyone' the conditional nature of the construction is clear, as the clause that it introduces functions as the protasis in a conditional sentence. In the case of ὃς ἐὰν 'whoever' and related constructions, the relation to conditionality is less obvious; these constructions are usually translated with relative pronouns but can sometimes be expressed as conditional clauses (see 1 Timothy 3:1 below for an example).

3.6.1 εἴ τις / ἐὰν τις *'if anyone'*

When τις or τι occurs as the subject of a clause on its own (i.e., not modifying another word), it is usually translated "someone" or "anyone". So when it is the subject of a conditional clause, we see sentences that begin with εἴ τις / ἐὰν τις 'if anyone'.

In the synoptic gospels, εἴ τις conditionals are almost always found in the speech of Jesus, where they sometimes introduce a new discourse topic. There are a few examples of ἐὰν τις functioning this way in the synoptic gospels. In John's gospel, only ἐὰν τις is used, with no occurrences of εἴ τις. In the rest of the New Testament, εἴ τις / ἐὰν τις conditionals occasionally introduce discourse topics. This is particularly noticeable in 1 Timothy. In **1 Timothy 3:1**, the topic of the qualities expected of leaders in the church (overseers or bishops) is introduced:

[**Εἴ**	**τις**	ἐπισκοπῆς	ὀρέγεται,]*p*	[καλοῦ	ἔργου	ἐπιθυμεῖ.]*q*
if	anyone	office.of.overseer	aspires.to	good	work	he.desires

If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

NRSV and NIV have "Whoever aspires...". Similarly, the εἴ τις conditionals in 1 Timothy 5:4, 8, and 16 introduce new sub-topics within the broader topic of caring for widows that was introduced in 5:3. There are also, however, many εἴ τις / ἐὰν τις conditionals that do not introduce new discourse topics.

3.6.2 ὃς ἐὰν *'whoever'*, ὃς ἐὰν, οὗ ἐὰν, ὅσα ἐὰν, *etc. 'whatever', 'whichever',* ὅπου ἐὰν *'wherever'*

Boyer (1983:183–184) calls these "indefinite relative and temporal clauses". They are often translated in English as "whoever", "whatever", "whenever", or "anyone who". They resemble third class conditionals as they use ἐὰν with the subjunctive, and many occurrences could be translated in English equally well as "if anyone" or "if anything". Boyer (1983:184) notes that this "suggests a

relationship between indefiniteness and supposition or condition." When ὃς ἐὰν is used to compare two types of people, the second groups are often referred to using the relative pronoun ὃς and the particle ἂν rather than ἐὰν, as in **Luke 9:48**.

Ὃς ἐὰν	δέξηται	τοῦτο	τὸ	παιδίον	ἐπὶ	τῷ	ὀνόματί	μου,	ἐμὲ δέχεται;
whoever	receives	this	the	child	in	the	name	my	me receives
καὶ	**ὃς ἂν**	ἐμὲ	δέξηται,	δέχεται	τὸν	ἀποστείλαντά	με;		
and	whoever	me	receives	receives	the	he.having.sent	me		

"**Whoever** receives this child in my name receives me, and **whoever** receives me receives him who sent me."

There seems to be little if any difference in meaning between ὃς ἐὰν and ὁ 'he, the one' followed by a participle verb, and most English translations use "whoever" for both. John's gospel has no examples of ὃς ἐὰν, but instead uses ὁ plus a participle verb to express 'whoever'. Occasionally this construction is preceded by πᾶς 'every', giving πᾶς ὁ 'every one' plus a participle verb; an example is **John 3:15** (see also v.16).

ἵνα	πᾶς	**ὁ**	**πιστεύων**	ἐν	αὐτῷ	ἔχῃ	ζωὴν	αἰώνιον.
So.that	every	one	believing	in	him	may.have	life	eternal

"that **whoever** believes in him may have eternal life."

3.7 εἰ δυνατὸν 'if possible'

There are only eight occurrences of εἰ δυνατὸν 'if possible' in the New Testament: Matthew 24:24 / Mark 13:22; Matthew 26:39 / Mark 14:35; Acts 20:16, 27:39; Romans 12:18; Galatians 4:15.

In general, εἰ δυνατὸν indicates that the proposition it accompanies is extremely unlikely. In addition to acknowledging the unlikeliness of an event, sometimes the speaker is also expressing doubt as to whether it is possible at all. It is debatable whether most of these occurrences are true conditionals. They typically consist of only a partial protasis (almost always simply "if possible"), and only some occurrences (Mt 26:39, Mk 14:35, Gal 4:15) have a clear apodosis. In some cases, an implied apodosis could be reconstructed, but in others there is no clear apodosis—either explicit or implicit—in the text.

4 Conclusion

Conditional sentences in New Testament Greek can take various forms, most often involving the conditional conjunctions εἰ or ἐάν. Although the grammatical

form of each conditional construction—and in particular the mood of the verb in the protasis—narrows down the range of possible interpretations, the precise function of each conditional construction can only be determined based on context (Porter 1994:255, 267). It is likely that every language, like New Testament Greek, has a range of different strategies which speakers can use to express conditional meanings, and so translators of the New Testament need to consider the meaning of each conditional expression in context, rather than just the form of the Greek, and translate in such a way that the intended meaning is conveyed clearly and naturally in the receptor language.

The conditional conjunctions εἰ and ἐάν also occur in a variety of more or less idiomatic constructions, some of which are clearly conditional in meaning and others of which are less so. This paper has attempted to describe the most frequently occurring of these. Translators should be aware that other languages may use constructions that are not formally related to conditionals to express many of these meanings.

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