

The Conditional Mood

Review #1: Forms

The conditional form of the verb is, of course, the “would” version. Although it is technically referred to as “an modh coinnfollach”, the conditional *mood*, but if you are not a linguist or a grammarian, just thinking of it as a “tense” is fine..

The real reason so many students never get comfortable with this “mood” is because they don't have to use it as often as some of the others. That means, first, that they don't get much practice, and second, that most of the time they can get along without it, so they don't work on it.

There are several tricks to getting comfortable with the conditional:

1. It takes a little attention to use it in the right circumstances.
2. Pronunciation has its challenges, and there are some dialect differences.
3. There are special forms for several person/number combinations.

We're going to concentrate on forms for the moment, and come back to usage later.

Shortcuts to Conditional Forms

You can build the basic form of the conditional mood from the components listed below. (This certainly isn't a linguist's description, mind, but a practical one that you might be able to carry around in your head and at least get close to generating these forms on the fly.)

1. The front is like the past: lenition or d' (except for “to say:” déarfadh sí . . .)
2. The stem is the same as the future (mainly a factor for irregular verbs) .
3. The ending is like the future, but broad, *-dh* instead of *-idh*.

Thus, for the third person singular, followed by *sé* or *sí*:

Future	Conditional	Future	Conditional
feicfidh	d'fheicfeadh	baileoidh	bhaileodh
brisfidh	bhrisfeadh	beidh	bheadh
ólfaidh	d'ólfadh	rachaidh	rachadh
tógfaidh	thógfadh	íosfaidh	d'íosfadh
ceannóidh	cheannódh	tiocfaidh	thiocfadh
osclóidh	d'ósclódh		

In general, if you know the future, you can broaden the ending and put a past-like front end on it, and you're there, *but*:

- ◆ pronunciation will be quite different, and
- ◆ this only works for *sé*, *sí*, *sibh*, and maybe *muid*.

Pronunciation, Part I

Let's ignore that *f* in the first conjugation for the moment, and just think about this basic form ending in *dh*, because, frankly, most students (I'm talking about way beyond just my class) tend to be a bit inconsistent about this. And it doesn't help that there's a bit of a “trick” to it. As I said, this is different from the *idh* future ending, which is silent for most speakers, or “*ig*” for some Munster speakers.

The conditional *dh* ending:

1. is said like a *ch* sound, that guttural thing, generally, **BUT**
2. it is said like a *t* when it comes in front of *sé, sí, sibh, siad*. (Technically, it becomes a *t* whenever the next word starts with a slender *s*.)

In other words, these common phrases sort of sound like . . . :

bheadh muid -> vuch mwid bheadh Seán -> vut Shawn
 bheadh sé -> vut shay bheadh Nora -> vuch Nora

Disclaimers

- ◆ This "t before slender s" situation may not be as prevalent in Munster, and
- ◆ it may not be as strong, among some speakers, before other words (Seán, sneachta) as it is before these pronouns.

That's guessing, one of the linguists may know more.

Summary of Forms

The pattern for the two conjugations is basically identical, except that a "long o" sounds goes before the ending in the second conjugation: Just note that the past habitual forms are not too far away from these, but we'll get to that later.

	1 st Conjugation		2 nd Conjugation	
Aut.	bhrisfí		cheannófaí	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
1st	bhrisfinn	bhrisfimis*	cheannóinn	cheannóimis*
2nd	bhrisfá***	bhrisfeadh sibh	cheannófá	cheannódh sibh
3rd	bhrisfeadh sé	bhrisidís**	cheannódh sé	cheannoidís**

	1 st Conjugation		2 nd Conjugation	
Aut.	ólfaí		d'inseofaí	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
1st	d'ólfainn	d'ólfaimis*	d'inseoinn	d'inseoimis*
2nd	d'ólfá***	d'ólfadh sibh	d'inseofá	d'inseodh sibh
3rd	d'ólfadh sé	d'ólfaidís**	d'inseodh sé	d'inseoidís**

* *muid* is much more likely than the standard, *-mis* outside of Munster.

**In Connaught, either the *-dís* or a separate *siad* might be used, with the latter probably being used most of the time in Ulster.

*** *fá*, with the *f*, is used in *rachfá*, even though the other endings (*rachadh*) have no *f*.

Pronunciation, Part II: F-in' Issues, and more

There are two considerations brought on by the *f* found in the first conjugation issues.

1. Devoicing of voiced consonants before *f*, that is, *b* becomes *p*, etc.;
2. How to pronounce the *f*.

Devoicing

With either future or conditional 1st conjugation endings, if a voiced consonant -- that means, *g, d, bh,* or *p* -- precedes the *f*, it changes into its unvoiced relative, becoming a *k, t, f,* or *p*:

scríobhfadh sé	sounds like	shkree-uh- <u>f</u> ach
scuabfadh		skoo-uh- <u>p</u> ach
chreidfeadh		<u>ch</u> reh-tach
thuigfeadh		hih- <u>k</u> ach

This is important! First of all, it provides another clue about the ending. And for verbs that have these kinds of consonants at the ends of their stems, it can be a big help in telling the conditional from the past habitual. Second, of course, it is the right thing to do.

To F or Not To F

There is a temptation, being influenced by the spelling, to pronounce the *f* you see in future and conditional endings just as it looks, as an "f" sound. Like most temptations, this is the work of The Devil.

My recommendation is to treat the *f* as an *h* sound. This will be understood everywhere, and it is the practice, for most *f*- endings, in most places where Irish is spoken. The big exceptions are the second person singular, the *fá*, ending, and the autonomous. You have the option of saying the *f* in *fá*, as speakers who don't say *f* any other time will say it with that ending. Still, I would expect to hear that *f* pronounced, in that ending, mostly in Munster.

Again, I say go with an *h* sound. As mentioned, that makes sense everyplace, and I find that once students start slipping that *f* in there on one ending, it is hard to resist the temptation to pronounce the *f* in other endings. So I like *d'ólfá = dólhá*, *cheannófá = cheanóhá*

The autonomous ending, in both conjugations, has an *f* in it, which can be pronounced *h*. But some speakers will use the *f*, there, too.

Also . . .

- ◆ In Ulster, the *f* usually turns into a *ch* in Type 2 (*cheannófá = cheanóchá*).
- ◆ In Cois Fharráige (eastern Conamara), you won't even hear those *h* sounds: *d'ólfainn = dólen*. And you won't always get the long *ó* before *f*: *cheannófá = cheaná*, *cheannfaí = cheanní*.
- ◆ As mentioned, even stems that are irregular and don't use the *f* ending, like *rachadh*, will keep the *f* in the second person singular, *rachfá*.