Markedness[1] and the Acquisition of English Conditionals
by Ramkhamhaeng University Students[2]
ลักษณะต่างจากทั่วไปและการรับรู้ประโยคเงื่อนไขภาษาอังกฤษ
ของนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยรามคำแหง

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Abstract

The purposes of this study are (1) to investigate the effect of six-hour formal instruction on English conditionals in one day and (2) to investigate the impact of "markedness" (Eckman, 1977, 1996) on the acquisition of English Conditionals. The participants were 30 Thai undergraduates of mixed abilities from the Faculty of Humanities, Ramkhamhaeng University. The instruments used for collecting the data were 12 items in a multiple choice test and 18 items of constructing sentences with the help of words and context given and translating from Thai to English and vice versa. The findings reveal that after the formal instruction the learners were significantly improved at 0.01. The degree of markedness of the conditionals is not statistically significant. Yet markedness definitely had an impact on the learners. The *Predictive Conditional*, which is unmarked was the easiest in terms of both receptive and productive skills. However, the *Predictive Conditional with 'unless', the Counterfactual Conditionals and the Counterfactual Conditional with verb inversion* which are classified as **marked** were fairly easy when a receptive skill is involved. This phenomenon is not in line with Eckman's theory (1977, 1996). When it comes to the productive skill, the learners gained low scores for the Hypothetical Conditional and the Counterfactual Conditional, which are regarded as **marked.** This supports Eckman's

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hypothesis. Finally, *markedness* and the differences between English and Thai conditionals do not always lead to difficulty. There are other factors that facilitated and weakened the acquisition of English conditionals. They were (1) the learners' competence, (2) the skills tested (i.e. whether it is a receptive or productive skill), (3) the kind of language task, and (4) the emphatic teaching of conditionals rated as "very difficult or difficult" by the teachers.

Keyword: Markedness, second language acquisition, interlanguage,

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์ 2 ประการ (1) เพื่อศึกษาผลสัมฤทธิ์ของการสอนประโยคเงื่อนไข ภาษาอังกฤษ (2) เพื่อศึกษาลักษณะต่างจากทั่วไป (markedness) ที่มีต่อปัญหาการรับรู้ประโยค เงื่อนไขภาษาอังกฤษ ประชากรของการวิจัย คือ นักศึกษาคณะมนุษยศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัย รามคำแหง จำนวน 30 คน ผู้ซึ่งมีความรู้ต่างระดับกันแต่สอบผ่านวิชาพื้นฐาน 4 วิชา และเข้ารับ การสอนเป็นเวลา 6 ชั่วโมง ภายใน 1 วัน เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวัดผลสัมฤทธิ์ของการรับรู้ประโยค เงื่อนไขภาษาอังกฤษคือข้อทดสอบ 30 ข้อ แบบปรนัย 12 ข้อ ข้อทดสอบแบบเติมคำและการ แต่งประโยคตามความเหมาะสมของปริบท และการแปลจากอังกฤษเป็นไทยและไทยเป็นอังกฤษ 18 ข้อ ผลการวิจัยสรุปได้ดังนี้ (1) นักศึกษาที่ได้รับการสอนแบบเน้นการสอนประโยคเงื่อนไข ภาษาอังกฤษมีผลสัมฤทธิ์ที่ดีกว่าก่อนการสอน ผลของการทดสอบพบว่า ความแตกต่างมี นัยสำคัญที่ระดับ 0.01 (2) ระดับของลักษณะต่างจากทั่วไป (markedness) ไม่มีความสำคัญอย่าง มีนัยทางสถิติ แต่อย่างไรก็ตาม ประโยคเงื่อนไขชนิด Predictive Conditionals ซึ่งจัดว่าง่ายตาม ความคิดเห็นของอาจารย์และมีลักษณะไม่ต่างจากทั่วไป (unmarked) มีจำนวนนักศึกษาพัฒนา ในการรับรู้ได้มากที่สุด ส่วนประโยคเงื่อนไขชนิด Predictive Conditionals with 'unless' และ Counterfactual Conditionals ซึ่งมีความยากปานกลางและยากตามลำดับกลับมีนักศึกษาตอบถูก มากเมื่อข้อทดสอบเป็นการทดสอบทักษะรับ ซึ่งก็ไม่เป็นไปตามทฤษฎีของ Eckman (1977 และ

1996) แต่เมื่อพิจารณาตามคะแนนของข้อทดสอบที่ทดสอบทักษะสร้างและนักศึกษาทำได้ถูก น้อยที่สุดก็พบว่าประโยคเงื่อนไขชนิด Hypothetical Conditionals และ Counterfactual Conditionals สอดคล้องกันกับทฤษฎีของ Eckman ด้วยเหตุนี้ ปัจจัยที่ทำให้ประโยคเงื่อนไขยากต่อการรับรู้นั้น มิใช่เพียงแต่ลักษณะต่างจากทั่วไปและต่างจากภาษาแม่เท่านั้น แต่ยังมีปัจจัยอื่นอีกดังนี้ (1) กิจกรรม ภาษาที่ทดสอบเป็นทักษะรับหรือทักษะสร้าง (2) ลักษณะของกิจกรรมภาษา (3) ระดับความรู้ ภาษาอังกฤษผู้เรียน (4) ลักษณะที่ต่างจากทั่วไปและแตกต่างจากภาษาแม่ที่เป็นสาเหตุของการ สอนแบบเน้นย้ำของผู้สอน

คำสำคัญ: ลักษณะต่างจากทั่วไป การเรียนรู้ภาษาที่สอง ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างภาษา

Introduction

At Ramkhamhaeng University, productive skills are postponed until students embark on the second year, if they are English majors or minors. Hence, students are familiar with learning grammar and vocabulary (ENG1001 and ENG1002), and they practice reading for comprehension (ENG2001) and interpretive reading (ENG2002). Since the first two fundamental courses are compulsory for students in every faculty, and the reading courses are compulsory for some of the faculties, the Department of English and Linguistics, which is responsible for teaching fundamental English courses, has to examine students' command of what they have learned by multiple choice tests. As a result, students are familiar with a receptive skill by means of the multiple choice test rather than a productive skill (i.e. practicing speaking and writing). This phenomenon has ensued from the objective of the curriculum, to ensure that students have accumulated knowledge of grammar and vocabulary that will be used later in their second year when classes are smaller (i.e. about 20-40 students). Unfortunately, this has not borne much fruit. Therefore, I have chosen to conduct formal instruction with a view to teaching grammatical aspects that result in difficulty. I have selected English conditionals as the

focus of my formal teaching for two reasons. First, I would like to find out whether, given the chance to practice in a classroom, students will be able to use English conditionals correctly because they will be fully armed with knowledge about English conditionals from the four compulsory fundamental English courses indicated above. Second, English conditionals are very different from their Thai counterparts. Most of my colleagues have found them to be a serious obstacle for students, the hypothetical and counterfactual conditionals, in particular. Also, my colleagues' favorite choices for the test of "similar meaning" usually involves English conditionals. They have also contributed their viewpoints about the degree of difficulty of English conditionals causing problems for Thai students.

The following table illustrates the hierarchical order of the difficulty of English conditionals according to the 15 Thai English teachers.

Difficulty hierarchy of English conditionals	Type of conditional	English conditionals
Easy (*unmarked*)	Predictive Conditional	If it *rains* heavily, we *won't go* out.
Slightly difficult (*marked*)	Hypothetical Conditional	If I *were* an architect, I *would redesign* this building.
Moderately difficult (*marked*)	Predictive Conditional with *unless*	*Unless* you *work* harder, you'*re not going* to pass the exam.
Difficult (*marked*)	Counterfactual Conditional	If a tsunami *had not happened* in Japan a few years ago, thousands of people *would not have died.*
Very difficult (*marked*)	Hypothetical Conditional with *verb inversion*	*Were* I an elephant, I *would not walk* in the street in Bangkok.
The most difficult (*marked*)	Counterfactual Conditional with *verb inversion*	*Had* she *prepared* for the test, she *would have passed.*

According to 15 teachers' evaluation, the easiest conditional is "the Predictive Conditional"; however, this type of conditional with the word "unless" turns out to be moderately difficult. This is due to the word *unless.* "The Hypothetical Conditional" is ranked as second in the order. Next, there is "the Counterfactual Conditional" which is labeled as "difficult". The fifth rank in the order belongs to "the Hypothetical Conditional with *verb inversion*", and it is under the rubric of *very difficult.* Lastly, there is "the Counterfactual Conditional with *verb inversion*", which is rated as *the most difficult.*

Differences between English and Thai conditionals

The differences between English and Thai conditionals are manifold. To begin with, Thai is not an inflecting language. Second, there are no tenses in Thai, as stated by Udom Warotetamasikhadit (1992, p. 305): "the focus of a verb in Thai is action, not time". Thus, time is indicated by context or adverbs of time. When it comes to hinting "future time", the pre-verb /càʔ/ (meaning *will, shall* or *be going to*) is used. In English, various kinds of modals and inflected verbs show "past, present, and future" (i.e. future time is indicated by modals *will* and *shall* etc.). In contrast to Thai, English Hypothetical Conditionals contain a verb of simple past tense, whereas this kind of conditional is manifested by context in Thai. Hence, as Udom Warotetamasikhadit points out, "time indicators vary from language to language for one thing, and another is that English-speaking people in general are punctual and have a high regard for time. As such, the Thai language is the reflection of Thai culture". Third, a Thai verb on its own does not indicate "time in the past". The word /lɛ́ɛw/, meaning *already*, and context are employed, along with adverbs of time such as yesterday /mɨ̂ɨ-waan-níi/, two years ago/mɨ̂ɨ-sɔ̌ɔŋ-pii-thîi-lɛ́ɛw/, etc. On the other hand, English "time in the past" manifests itself in verb inflection and modals. To be even more distinct from Thai, English verbs showing "time in the past" are used to indicate "the Hypothetical Conditional". Moreover there

is "unless", a substitute for "if…not" in English, but there is no equivalent in Thai. Although /weʹn-sĭa-tæ̀æ-wâa/ or /weʹn-tæ̀æ-wâa/ means "unless" in Thai dictionaries, its use is not exactly the same as in English. Finally, whereas there is verb inversion in English conditionals (i.e. in Hypothetical and Counterfactual Conditionals), Thai has none.

Markedness

Eckman (1977) has introduced the theoretical framework of markedness to the studies of second language acquisition on the basis of Chomsky's Universal Grammar, as cited in Ellis (1986, p.194):

> Universal Grammar is made up of formal and substantive universals. These help the child to build a core grammar consisting of unmarked rules. But there are also other rules that Universal Grammar does not determine. They form the periphery and are marked in a varying degree.

Eckman (1977, p. 321) proposes the "Markedness Differential Hypothesis" (MDH), as he explains: "The areas of difficulty that a language learner will have can be predicted on the basis of systematic comparison of the grammars of the native language, the target language and the markedness relations stated in universal grammar, such that,

(a) Those areas of the target language which differ from the native language and are more marked than the native language will be difficult.

(b) The relative degree of difficulty of the areas of the target language which are more marked than the native language will correspond to the relative degree of markedness.

(c) Those areas of the target language which are different from the native language, but are not more marked than the native language will not be difficult."

Eckman (1996, p. 198) has further elaborated on markedness as follows:

> If the presence of a structure *p* in a language implies the presence of some other structure *q*, but the presence of *q* in some language does not imply the presence of *p,* then structure *p* is marked relative to structure *q,* and structure *q* is unmarked relative to structure *p*.

Literature review

Neancharoensuk's study (1999) reveals that Thai learners find Japanese conditionals difficult because of the markedness and the differences between Japanese modals and their Thai counterparts.

Tom Salbury (2000) examined the acquisition of modality in unreal conditionals by 12 students of different nationalities in his longitudinal study over a period of one year. It was a comparison between second language acquisition in a naturalistic environment and the formal instruction the learners received. Both kinds of SLA took place in the United States. The findings revealed that (1) instruction can increase the rate of acquisition, but it does not change the route; and (2) learners acquire only what they are ready to acquire.

Solvang (2008) investigates the acquisition of conditionals by Norwegian learners of Japanese. He proposes "a universal implicational markedness hierarchy" to predict learners' difficulty in the use of Japanese conditional markers. His hypothesis suggests that relative degrees of learning difficulty for the Norwegian learners will be determined by differences in degree of markedness between the native language and Japanese on the implicational hierarchy. Experimental results provide significant evidence to support that this is the case.

Mi-Jeong Song and Bo-Ram-Suh (2008) investigated the role of output and the relative efficacy of the two different types of output tasks (reconstruction task and picture-cued writing task) in noticing and learning the English past counterfactual conditional. The participants of the study were 52 adult Korean EFL learners. In terms of acquisition, the results show

that the participants who received output opportunities during the treatments performed significantly better than those in the non-output condition on the production posttest, but no difference was found in the relative efficacy of the two output tasks.

Objectives of the study

1. To investigate the effect of formal instruction of English conditionals;

2. To examine the difficulty arising from the markedness of English conditionals.

Hypotheses

1. Students who undergo formal instruction on English conditionals and have a chance to use conditionals in speaking and writing will use conditionals more effectively;

2. Markedness in English conditionals will cause difficulty for Thai learners.

Scope of the study

Formal instruction of this study will be restricted to only three types of conditionals: Predictive Conditionals beginning with *if* or *unless,* Hypothetical Conditionals with and without verb inversion, and Counterfactual Conditionals with and without verb inversion. However, conditionals which join two scientific facts or involve general truth will be excluded from this study.

Participants

The subjects are 30 Ramkhamhaeng University students in the Faculty of Humanities, who have passed fundamental English courses (ENG1001 and ENG1002) on sentences and vocabulary in general and daily use and two other courses (ENG2001 and ENG2002) on reading for comprehension and English interpretive reading. The students are of mixed abilities, as is the case of normal classes of Ramkhamhaeng University, an open admission university based on optional class attendance.

Instruments

The pretest and posttest consisted of 30 items (see Appendix) and all of them had undergone pilot testing by 163 Ramkhamhaeng University students of the same qualifications as those of the experimental group in January, 2013 one month before the formal instruction took place. The first 12 items were intended to examine the participants' receptive skills. Their P value and R value are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Test item no.	P value	R value	Test item no.	P value	R value
1	0.60	0.43	7	0.58	0.70
2	0.68	0.55	8	0.55	0.45
3	0.46	0.49	9	0.56	0.66
4	0.59	0.50	10	0.45	0.68
5	0.69	0.61	11	0.66	0.64
6	0.57	0.55	12	0.68	0.59

The rest of the test items, some of which are purported to elicit the participants' ability to use conditionals appropriately, are based on Yule (2006) and Vince (2008). These 18 test items constitute reconstruction of sentences with the help of the words and context given and translation from English to Thai and vice versa. After the pilot testing, they were revised for clarity. The following list shows the percentage of the conditionals embedded in the test:

Predictive Conditionals: 10% [3 items (one test item for a receptive skill; two for a productive skill)];

Predictive Conditionals with "unless" : 23.35% [8 items (three test items for a receptive skill and five items for a productive skill)];

Hypothetical conditionals: 20% [5 items (one for a receptive skill and four for a productive skill)];

Counterfactual conditionals: 30% [9 items (four items for a receptive skill and

five for a productive skill)];

Hypothetical Conditionals with verb inversion: 10% [3 items (two for a receptive skill and one for a productive skill)];

Counterfactual Conditionals with verb inversion: 6.65% [2 items (one for a receptive skill and one for a productive skill)].

Procedure

A six-hour formal instruction was conducted in one day on February 20 and 22. The participants were divided into two groups (i.e. 14 and 16 students for each group and the day for class attendance depended on the students' convenience.). The teaching method was "grammar-translation". The content and the teaching materials of the course covered various kinds of tenses and modals that constitute the three conditionals mentioned above. The exercises used in the classroom were derived from *Advanced Oxford Practice Grammar* by Yule (2006) and *Macmillan English Grammar in Context (Intermediate)* by Vince (2008). At the beginning of the class the participants did the pretest and after every half an hour of teaching, the students were asked to do exercises and the researcher corrected their work individually. Sometimes they did peer correction in class. At the end of the formal teaching, the posttest was administered.

Results and discussion

The finding for Hypothesis 1 reveals that the formal instruction on English Conditionals was effective. The learners were significantly improved at 0.01 level[3]. This result confirms the studies conducted by Krashen et al. (1978), Long (1983), Spada (1986), Pinnemann (1987), White et al. (1991) and Salbury (2000). The answer to Hypothesis 1 is also in parallel with Mi-Jeong Song and Bo-Ram-Suh's study (2008) in relation to a productive skill as a facilitating factor for acquiring English conditionals and those of the research on formal instruction in Thailand (i.e. Khajorn Pringjamras (1976), Paisan Prasertsang (1982), Narongrit Sobha (2006), and Phra Chakrapong Tamara (2007). In addition, these Thai studies provide evidence for the enhancement of a receptive skill to a productive skill, as

reported by this current research. Unlike a productive skill, the participants could perform better when a receptive skill was instantly involved. Also, the correlation between the receptive and productive skills of both pretest and posttest are statistically significant at 0.01 level[4]. Table 2 displays the scores in the pretest and posttest obtained by the 30 participants.

Table 2

Participant Number	Scores for receptive skill gained in pretest (full score=12)	Scores for receptive skill gained in posttest (full score=12)	Scores for productive skill gained in pretest (full score=18)	Total scores for productive skill gained in posttest (full score=18)	Increased scores for both skills	Increased scores in percentage
1	1	7	3	7	10	33.33
2	5	9	4	10	10	33.33
3	11	11	11	11	0	0
4	7	12	5	12	12	39.99
5	9	11	7	12	7	23.33
6	5	9	5	9	8	26.66
7	1	4	2	6	7	23.33
8	4	7	0	7	10	33.33
9	1	8	2	7	12	39.99
10	7	7	9	10	1	3.33
11	3	6	2	5	6	19.99
12	5	8	2	9	10	33.33
13	4	11	4	12	15	50.00
14	5	7	4	6	4	13.33
15	3	5	1	9	10	33.33

Table 2 (continued)

Participant number	Scores for receptive skill gained in pretest (full score=12)	Scores for receptive skill gained in posttest (full score=12)	Scores for productive skill gained in pretest (full score=18)	Total scores for productive skill gained in posttest (full score=18)	Increased scores for both skills	Increased scores in percentage
16	12	11	12	13	0	0
17	7	8	8	12	5	16.66
18	4	8	1	9	12	39.99
19	5	8	8	11	6	19.99
20	4	9	6	11	10	33.33
21	7	10	3	7	7	23.33
22	8	10	7	11	6	19.99
23	8	10	8	14	8	26.66
24	6	10	8	9	5	16.66
25	8	8	11	11	0	0
26	6	8	7	9	4	13.33
27	6	8	13	15	4	13.33
28	6	7	10	12	3	9.99
29	8	10	9	9	2	6.66
30	7	9	6	13	9	29.99

The following section discusses the scores gained by five less competent and five more competent participants, together with some description of their receptive and productive skills.

Less competent participants

Participant 1

In her posttest, she could obtain a full score on understanding and producing Predictive Conditionals. Her score for the Counterfactual Conditionals with and without verb inversion amounted to three for her receptive skill, but she managed to write only one sentence with the Counterfactual Conditional correctly. As for the use of "unless", her score increased to six in the posttest; this improvement is attributed to her latent knowledge of using "unless", as shown in her pretest score.

Participant 7

This participant could score only one in the pretest in terms of Predictive Conditionals. He, however, received a full score in the posttest. His achievement in using Counterfactual Conditionals manifested in his two scores in the posttest and one in this conditional with verb inversion, whereas in the pretest he obtained a zero. His score for the Predictive Conditionals with "unless" slightly increased from two in the pretest to three in the posttest.

Participant 11

This participant received a full score for Predictive Conditionals in the posttest, even though she could not get any in the pretest. Her ability to understand Hypothetical Conditionals with verb inversion increased to two and she also gained one point for a Hypothetical Conditional. Her latent knowledge of both Hypothetical and Counterfactual Conditionals raised her score. She was able to write this kind of conditional in her posttest correctly. On the whole, she moderately improved.

Participant 20

This participant's score for the Hypothetical Conditionals with and without verb inversion increased because of her potential ability to recognize this kind of conditional (i.e. she gained three and two for each in her pretest.) As for the conditional with "unless", the scores increased from four to seven and she succeeded in writing two sentences correctly. With respect to the Counterfactual Conditional, her latent knowledge of it raised her score from one to two when a

receptive skill was involved. She gained only one point when writing this kind of conditional in her posttest correctly. In this regard, she barely improved.

Participant 30

This participant's score sharply rose in every kind of conditional. The correct construction of the conditional beginning with "unless", in particular, almost doubled (i.e. from four to seven). Also, her potential ability to understand Hypothetical Conditionals led her to produce both Hypothetical Conditionals with and without verb inversion correctly. She, however, failed to construct Counterfactual Conditionals correctly when she had to interpret the context given. Consider her interlanguage:

Example 1 (see c17 in Appendix)

Her response: *If you <u>warned</u> us about the bad weather, I <u>would bring</u> a raincoat.

Example 2 (see c21 in Appendix)

Her response: *If Alexander the Great <u>marched</u> west instead of east, he <u>would conquer</u> the whole of Europe.

More competent participants
Participant 3

This participant's scores for his receptive skill was remarkably high in both the pretest and posttest (i.e. he gained 11 out of 12). His use of the Hypothetical Conditional slightly improved because he received only one more point in the posttest. He became worse in writing Counterfactual Conditionals, in particular, even though he could understand and construct them as evidenced in his performance in the pretest. His score dropped sharply from four to zero in the posttest. He confessed that he was confused by my explanation in class (he usually had a barrage of questions) This remark was reflected in the conflicting scores in his pretest and posttest. Consider his interlanguage:

Example 3 (see c18 in Appendix)

His response: *If I <u>had not been</u> in your position, I <u>would have started</u> looking for a new job.

Example 4 (see c17 in Appendix)

His response in the posttest (Surprisingly, he got it right in his pretest):

*If you <u>warned</u> us about the bad weather, I <u>would bring</u> a raincoat.

Participant 4

His improvement was manifested in almost every kind of conditional except the Hypothetical Conditional with verb inversion (i.e. he gained one point less in the posttest). Also, he did not manage to construct Counterfactual Conditionals in either the pretest or the posttest. This defect indicated that his ability to understand this type of conditional was not adequate to enable him to construct one correctly. Consider his interlanguage:

Example 5 (see c17 in Appendix)

His response: *If you <u>warned</u> us about the bad weather, I <u>would bring</u> a raincoat.

Example 6 (see d24 in Appendix)

His response: *If I <u>bought</u> a lottery ticket, I <u>would</u> win the rewards.

Participant 5

This participant improved in both understanding and using every kind of conditional. As regards her receptive skill for Counterfactual Conditionals, she

scored only two out of four points and could not construct any of them correctly in the pretest. But, even so she managed to get seven items right. In this respect, her receptive skill remarkably enhanced her productive skill. Consider her performance in the pretest and posttest:

Example 7 (see c17 in Appendix)

Her response in the pretest: *If you <u>had warned</u> us about the bad weather, I <u>will bring</u> a raincoat.

Her response in the posttest: *If you <u>had warned</u> us about the bad weather, I <u>would have bring</u> a raincoat.

With respect to the use of the Predictive Conditional with "unless", she displayed incomplete competence by getting one item wrong in both pretest and posttest. Consider her interlanguage:

Example 8 (see d25 in Appendix)

Her response: *Unless you <u>are diligent</u>, you <u>will be successful</u>.

Participant 13

This participant obtained higher scores for almost all of the conditionals except the Hypothetical Conditional. Her scores for her receptive skill considerably

improved (i.e. she scored 11 out of 12 points). Moreover, she managed to produce two Conditionals with "unless" and two Counterfactual Conditionals correctly in her posttest. Yet her ability to use Hypothetical Conditionals still fell short. She could construct only one Hypothetical Conditional correctly and was able to understand two sentences of Hypothetical Conditionals with verb inversion and translate one accurately (i.e. she received a full score for this).

Participant 16

This competent participant improved a little because she experienced a ceiling effect. That is, her pretest and posttest scores were 24 out of 30 and she adhered to that achievement. When she had to cope with writing a Counterfactual Conditional,

she fell short. She scored only two out of five. Nevertheless, she had a voracious appetite for knowledge. She would always seek an opportunity to attend class even though she was a working woman.

As for the answer to Hypothesis 2, markedness affected the participants' acquisition of English conditionals to a certain extent. *The Counterfactual Conditional* is ranked the most difficult when a productive skill is involved. As in the scores of the test items c17, c21, c22, d24, and d27 (see Appendix), the number of participants who arrived at the correct answers were less than 5 out of 30. The scores slightly rose in the posttest, i.e. the lowest score is 3 for c17 whereas the highest score is 10 for d24. Thus, to illustrate:

The scores gained by 30 participants for *the Counterfactual Conditionals*								
	Receptive skill				Productive skill			
Test item number for Counterfactual Conditionals	a1	a4	b7	b12	c17	c21	c22	d24	d27
Scores gained in pretest	15	15	11	16	3	2	2	3	4
Scores gained in posttest	22	17	20	24	3	5	8	10	9

Consider the covert error arising from the test item c17, for which most of the participants failed to interpret the context correctly, as follows:

*If you <u>warned</u> us about the bad weather, I <u>would bring</u> a raincoat.

As for c21 and c22, the inadequate knowledge of history and lack of imagination together with logical thinking pertaining to history caused most of the participants to get both of them wrong, as in the error below:

*If Alexander the Great <u>marched</u> west instead of east, he <u>conquered</u> the whole of Europe.

The Hypothetical Conditional is ranked second, i.e. the number of participants gaining scores for c18, c19, c20 and d23 are ranged from zero to seven in the pretest and from two to twelve in the posttest. The test item d23, in particular, is the most daunting. The reasons underlying this test item are threefold. First, Thai does not have a grammatical structure similar to "there is" and "there are" in English; Thai has only /mii/ meaning 'have'. Second, in Thai a subject of a sentence can be deleted.

Third, the participants had to resort to logical thinking or imagination (i.e. the participants have to think of the real situation and imagine the consequences of not having the Internet) to get the answer correct. Hence, the following errors crop up:

*If <u>don't have</u> internet, there <u>wouldn't have</u> Google.

*If <u>have</u> no internet, it <u>won't have</u> Google.

*If it <u>had not</u> the internet, it <u>would not have</u> a Google.

*If no internet, no Google.

Again the incorrect response for c20 is attributed to incomplete understanding of the Hypothetical Conditional. Thus, to illustrate:

*The world's oceans contain huge amounts of salt. In fact, if you <u>removed</u> all the salt from the oceans, you <u>were</u> able to use it to build a wall about 300 km. wide and a kilometer tall all around the earth.

The scores gained by 30 participants for *the Hypothetical Conditionals*					
	Receptive skill	Productive skill			
Test item numbers of Hypothetical Conditionals	b9	c18	c19	c20	d23
Scores gained in pretest	7	7	7	2	0
Scores gained in posttest	20	12	12	9	2

The third in rank which weakens the acquisition is *the Hypothetical Conditionals with verb inversion.* Eleven of the participants' incorrect response for 'b10' (see b10 in Appendix) was "if" and three opted for "Had". The rest abstained.

The scores gained by 30 participants for *the Hypothetical Conditionals with verb inversion*			
	Receptive skill		Productive skill
Test item numbers of Hypothetical Conditionals with verb inversion	a3	b10	e28
Scores gained in pretest	16	12	15
Scores gained in posttest	21	16	26

The fourth in rank order belongs to *the Counterfactual Conditionals with verb inversion.* Seventeen participants obtained scores for these two items. This indicates that they are moderately difficult.

The scores gained by 30 participants for *Counterfactual Conditionals with verb inversion*		
	Receptive skill	Productive skill
Test item numbers of Counterfactual Conditionals with verb inversion	a6	e29
Scores gained in pretest	17	17
Scores gained in posttest	19	28

The fifth rank falls to the Predictive Conditional with "unless". As predicted by the teachers, it seems problematic because the participants had to decode two layers of meaning. One, they had to translate from Thai to English; and two, they had to replace "thâa mây/if…not" with "unless".

As pointed out in "Differences between English and Thai Conditionals", a single lexical item embodied "if+not" does not exist in Thai. Surprisingly, most of the participants arrived at the correct answer. Yet, when they had to cope with the test items d25 and d26 (which are viewed as doubled obstructions for acquisition: one is that "unless" is *marked*, and two, its

meaning is distinct from Thai), Most of the participants fell short. Consider their interlanguage as a response for d25.

*Unless you are diligent, you are successful.

*Unless you hard working, you won't be successful.

*Unless you don't hard working, you wouldn't successful.

Consider the incorrect responses for d26.

*Unless it won't rain, we will go eating out.

*Unless it's raining, we might have eaten out.

*If it doesn't rain, we might have eaten out.

The scores gained by 30 participants for *Predictive Conditionals with "unless"*								
	Receptive skill			Productive skill				
Test item numbers of Predictive Conditionals with "unless"	a2	a5	b8	c15	c16	d25	d26	e30
Scores gained in pretest	17	23	9	25	25	6	7	16
Scores gained in posttest	21	27	21	29	28	19	14	25

The lowest in rank is the Predictive Conditionals which is rated as "unmarked and easy" by the 15 teachers and it still retains the same rank. This confirms their evaluation.

The scores gained by 30 participants for *Predictive Conditionals*			
	Receptive skill	Productive skill	
Test item numbers of Predictive Conditionals	b11	c13	c14
Scores gained in pretest	15	23	16
Scores gained in posttest	23	30	27

Based on 30 participants' scores in the pretest and posttest, the difficulty hierarchy of conditionals is shown in Table 3, but it is not statistically significant. The types of conditional are ranked from "easy and unmarked" to "most difficult and marked". The marked conditionals labeled as "slightly difficult, moderately difficult, difficult, very difficult and most difficult" are obviously distinct from Thai; this impeding factor confirms Neancharoensuk's (1999) and Solvang's (2008) findings that the differences between L1 and L2 will induce errors. Table 3 reveals the comparison between 15 teachers' evaluation and the difficulty hierarchy based on the participants' performance in terms of productive skills.

Table 3

15 teachers' evaluation of the difficulty hierarchy	Type of conditional	Difficulty hierarchy based on the participants' performance in terms of productive skills
Easy and unmarked	Predictive Conditionals	Easy and unmarked
Moderately difficult and marked	Predictive Conditionals with *unless*	Slightly difficult and marked
Most difficult and marked	Counterfactual Conditionals with verb inversion	Moderately difficult and marked;
Very difficult and marked	Hypothetical Conditionals with verb inversion	Difficult and marked
Slightly difficult and marked	Hypothetical Conditionals	Very difficult and marked
Difficult and marked	Counterfactual Conditionals	Most difficult and marked.

To conclude, besides markedness and the differences between Thai and English, there are other factors that facilitated and weakened the acquisition of English conditionals. They were (1) the learners' competence, (2) the skills tested (i.e. whether it is a receptive or productive skill), (3) the kind of language task, and (4) the emphatic teaching of conditionals rated as "very difficult or difficult" by the teachers.

Limitations and recommendations

The limitations and recommendations are manifold. First, since this study has focused on only three types of English conditional, teachers and advanced students should be aware of the existence of other kinds of conditional (see Yule (2006)). Second, the participants for this study are of mixed abilities, so further research should be conducted with learners of the same proficiency. Third, as regards teaching grammatical structures, a receptive skill must go hand in hand with a productive skill, and individual error correction and peer correction should be conducted in class as a reinforcement.

Fourth, a follow-up study should be undertaken to detect the learners' retention of what they have learned. Lastly, other grammatical structures and vocabulary should be investigated with respect to English language acquisition in Thailand.

Notes:

1. Keywords: markedness, second language acquisition (SLA), interlanguage, and formal instruction.

2. This research was funded by the **Research and Development Institute**, Ramkhamhaeng University from 22 October 2012 to 16 June 2014. It was presented at the International Conference on *Language, Literature, and Cultural Studies,* organized by Burapha University, at A-ONE the Royal Cruise Hotel, Pattaya, Chonburi, 22-24 August 2013.

3. The statistical method employed for measuring the effectiveness of formal instruction is *Paired t-test.*

4. The statistical method used for investigating the correlation between a receptive and a productive skill is *Regression.*

Appendix:

Language task used as the pretest and posttest:

Part A: Choose the answer that best corresponds to the given item.

1. Bill could have caught the bird if he had had a net.
    1. Bill caught the bird.
    2. Bill didn't manage to catch the bird.
    3. Bill had a net so he could catch the bird.
    4. Bill was able to catch the bird.

2. Unless she works harder, she will have to take ENG2001 again.
    1. Without hard work, she is going to take ENG2001 again.
    2. She will probably have to take ENG2001 again because she works hard.
    3. Hard work will make her fail in ENG2001.
    4. All are correct.

3. Were you more aggressive, no one would support you.
    1. You are not aggressive.
    2. No one supports you now.
    3. Don't be more aggressive; otherwise, no one will support you.
    4. When you are aggressive, you lose your friends

4. If Malee hadn't prepared dinner, we might have eaten out.
    1. Malee was too busy to prepare dinner for us.
    2. There was no dinner for us so we ate out.
    3. Somebody invited us to have dinner in a restaurant.
    4. We didn't eat out because Malee prepared dinner for us.

5. I will play badminton unless I have a headache.
    1. I'm going to play badminton if I don't have a headache.
    2. I always have a headache when I play badminton.
    3. Playing badminton makes me have a headache.
    4. Despite having a headache, I still want to play badminton.

6. Had my employer fired me from my job, I would have been in a great financial problem.

   1. It's impossible that my employer will fire me.

   2. I was not fired so I didn't have a financial problem.

   3. I was short of money because I was fired.

   4. I am not a good employee; the boss will fire me.

Part B: Choose the best item to fill in the blank.

7. If he _____ me, I would have helped him.

   1. call   2. will call

   3. called   4. had called

8. _____ you eat and sleep properly, you won't develop as an athlete

   1. Unless   2. Were

   3. If   4. Had

9. If I _____ John's telephone number, I would tell him what happened.

   1. would know   2. know

   3. knew   4. had known

10. _____ I in your situation, I would start looking for another job.

   1. Were   2. Will

   3. Had   4. If

11. If the test is difficult, Malee _____ well.

   1. does   2. won't do

   3. didn't do   4. hadn't do

12. If the neighbour's dog hadn't started barking at 4 a.m., we _____ in bed.

   1. could be   2. would have been

   3. would be   4. had been

Part C: Use the words given to complete an if-clause.

Example: *everyone / recycle paper / companies / not cut down so many trees*

   If everyone recycles paper, companies won't cut down so many trees.

13. *everyone / recycle metal and glass / we not produce so much rubbish*

_____

14. *we / turn off unwanted lights / save a lot of electricity*

_____

Rewrite these two sentences so that they contain *unless.*

Example. *If you don't train hard, you won't succeed in sport.*

Unless you train hard, you won't succeed in sport.

15. *If you don't train regularly, you won't improve your performance.*

_____

16. *If he doesn't take any exercise, he will become fat.*

_____

Write an *if – clause* with the help of the context given.

Example. *I don't have extra pens. I won't give you one.*

If I had extra pens, I would give you one.

17. *You didn't warn us about the bad weather. I didn't bring a raincoat.*

_____

18. *I'm not in your situation. I'll start looking for a new job.*

_____

Take the context into consideration and complete the following sentences using the verb in brackets.

19. Humans are among the few animals to have colour vision. If you (be) _____ a horse, for example, you (see) _____ everything in black and white.

20. The world's oceans contain huge amounts of salt. In fact, if you (remove) _____ all the salt from the oceans, you (be able) _____ to use it to build a wall about 300km wide and a kilometer tall all around the Earth.

21. If Alexander the Great (march) _____ west instead of east, he (conquer) _____ the whole of Europe.

22. If Columbus (sail) _____east in 1492, he (reach) _____China or Japan.

Part D: Translate the following sentences into English. Also use an appropriate form of if – clause.

23. ถ้าไม่มีอินเทอร์เน็ต ก็จะไม่มี Google (literally translated as: If no have internet, then no have Google)

_____

24. ถ้าฉันซื้อลอตเตอรี่ ฉันก็จะถูกรางวัลที่หนึ่ง (แต่ฉันไม่ได้ซื้อลอตเตอรี่) (literally translated as: If I buy lottery, I then win the first prize.

(But I didn't buy it)

_____

25. ถ้าคุณไม่ขยัน คุณก็ไม่ประสบความสำเร็จ (ใช้คำ *unless* แทนการใช้ *if*) (literally translated as: If you not diligent, then you not meet success. (Use "unless" instead of "if")

_____

26. เว้นเสียแต่ว่าฝนไม่ตก เราก็จะไปกินข้าวข้างนอกกัน (literally translated as: If rain not fall, we will eat out.)

_____

27. ถ้ามาลีมีเงินพอ เขาก็จะซื้อเสื้อใหม่ไปแล้ว (มาลีไม่ได้ซื้อเสื้อใหม่เพราะมีเงินไม่พอ) (literally translated as: If Malee has money enough, she then buy new blouse already. (But she didn't buy it because she didn't have enough money)

_____

Part E: *Translate these three sentences into Thai.*
28. Were England a communist country, there wouldn't be a queen.

_____

29. Had I known that George wanted to get up early, I would have woken him.

_____

30. Unless a doctor knows the cause of a disease, he will not be able to cure it.

_____

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