

SYNTACTIC FEATURES OF STRUCTURALLY INCOMPLETE CONDITIONAL UTTERANCES IN COLLOQUIAL ENGLISH

© 2010 E.A. Milyutina*

Keywords: structurally incomplete utterance, conditional sentence, colloquial speech, meaning disposal, elimination.

The article is devoted to the study of features of structurally incomplete conditional utterance disposal in the syntactical aspect. The interpretation of the meaning expressed by the following structure is treated according to the grammatical features of the conditional sentence.

Structurally incomplete conditional utterance is a characteristic feature of English grammar functioning. The conjunction "If" is used in the conditional sentences of three different types. This structure regularly functions in speech that is why the shortening of the conditional sentence can help the reader to correctly interpret its meaning and the degree of probability of its happening.

The elimination of a conditional sentence results in an utterance that is structurally incomplete. The types of elimination may be the following:

a) Complete elimination of the complex sentence.

During the telephone dialogue the speaker answers the offer of a business question discussion with the declaration that he is married and has got two children and his interlocutor says:

"I see... if.. " the line went dead.

According to the context the reader understands that the woman wants to make an appointment, but the utterance is broken due to someone's interference.

b) Elimination of the main part of the complex sentence.

The speaker is not satisfied with the food and wants to taste something else:

" If you have a little fruit", he would say apologetically, "or some vegetables..."

The implied meaning is guessed with the help of the described situation.

c) Elimination of the main part of the complex sentence just after the object.

"I'll bet you could use a cup of coffee," Eugene said eagerly. "And there is some pie left, if you - "

In this case the reader does not need the knowledge of the apperception base because

the structure is widely used in everyday dialogues.

d) Elimination of the auxiliary verb.

"I hope you don't mind about the snowball, but I thought maybe, if Josh had never played in the snow, he'd - "

The speaker is not sure that his interlocutor will participate in the activity offered that is why the continuation may be: "refuse" or "be afraid of". The prosodic aspects of communication are enough for the interpretation of the meaning without apperception base background.

It should be mentioned that in the cases of incomplete conditional utterance we mostly deal with the complete elimination of the main part of the utterance and the absence of non-verbal components including the intonation description which can be guessed only from the semantic component of the communication.

From the grammatical point of view all the cases of incomplete conditional utterance usage can be divided into three groups according to the probability of the described situation:

a) incomplete utterance shortened from the conditional sentence of the first type, which shows the real situation which can happen in the future.

In this case we use Present Indefinite tense in the main clause and Future Indefinite tense in the conditional clause. The structurally incomplete utterance made within the frame of the conditional sentence of the first type offers the reader an opportunity to guess the grammatical form and the meaning of the verb omitted.

"Jack if you don't write it down - "

The content of the main clause offers the semantic meaning of the conditional clause as "you will forget it".

b) Conditional sentences of the second type, realized through the structurally incomplete utterance, show less possible assumptions.

* Ekaterina A. Milyutina, lecturer of Samara State University of Economics. E-mail: kmilyutina@mail.ru.

The main clause is in the Past Indefinite Tense and the conditional clause is expressed through the Indefinite Infinitive with should.

"You must be very careful - very, very careful. If you were to make a mistake - the smallest mistake - "

The assumed mistake could lead to the problems in the past and the speaker is afraid of it.

c) structurally incomplete utterances of the third type express the assumptions referred to the past and, accordingly, the non-existent ones.

In the conditionals of this type the main clause is in the Past Perfect tense and the conditional part is showed with should or would with Perfect Infinitive.

"If we'd ever seen CVs" Began Uncle Vernon, but Harry lost patience.

The meaning "we would have known" is guessed through the context, but the utterance is broken.

In some cases we deal with the violation of the rules of structurally incomplete conditional utterance construction. For example, in the main clause the author uses the construction 'to be going to do something', instead of Future Indefinite Tense:

"If you're going to catch the inflation, for God's sake, do it now - "

Or the Future Indefinite Tense is used both in the main and the conditional clauses:

"If you'll excuse us, we'll - "

In those cases the communicative task of the talk is of primary importance to the author, which leads to the semantic and syntactic incompleteness.

We should mention the fact, that structurally incomplete conditional utterances are used in fiction to show the undesirable or negative consequences of an action, and such concepts as fear, threat or regret of a person or a thing.

1. Sheldon S. The Stars Shine Down. N.Y., 1992. P. 178.

2. Ibid. P. 64.

3. Thompson V.L. Boone's Bounty. N.Y., 2000. P. 71.

4. Clancy T. Debt of Honor. N.Y., 1995. P. 600.

5. Thompson V.L. Op. cit. P. 112.

6. Rowling J.K. Harry Potter and Deathly Hallows. London, 2007. P. 34.

7. Clancy T. Op. cit. P. 12.

8. Thompson V.L. Op. cit. P. 26.

Received for publication on 15.04.2010