The Conditional Mood

Review #2: Usage

The basic meaning of the conditional is familiar to you. It is used to express "would" type things:

- Bheidís sásta  
  they would be content

- D'hiocfadh muid  
  we would come

- D'ólfainn é  
  I would drink it

- Cheannófá carr  
  You would buy a car

- D'fhoghlaimeofadh sí Gaeilge  
  She would learn Irish

Most of the time it works very much as in English, but, as always, there are a few tricks.

A TALE OF TWO IF'S (AND ONE IF NOT)

In the affirmative, there are two words for "if", dá (or dhá in much of Conamara) and má. The short summary is that dá is used only with the conditional, and má is used to express the other four tenses, although it only uses the forms of three tenses to do that. First, how they work.

Dá

Dá is used for conditional clauses like, "If it would rain," "If they would come," "If you would buy". It is what you will use much of the time when you are thinking "would" in English.

Dá is followed by the conditional form, but with eclipsis:

- Dá mbeiféá sásta
- Dá dtiocfadh muid
- Dá n-ólfainn é
- Dá gceannófá carr
- Dá bhfoghlaimeofadh sí Gaeilge

Má

Má is used for things that might happen, but more in the sense of "if that happens" than "if it would happen, be the case, that . . .". We'll sort out the subtleties in a moment, but after the má version of "if":

1. the verb is lenited, except for the "deir" forms, and fuair;
2. vowel and fh forms keep the d' in front of them;
3. we can the special combination má tá; and
4. we don't use the future, even when that is what we mean. We use the habitual present instead.

Thus:

- Má d'ól mé é
- Má cheannaigh tú carr
- Má fhoghlaímíonn sí Gaeilge
- Má tá tú anseo (anois)
- Má bhionn tú anseo (go hiándúil)
- Má théann sibh 'chuile lá
- Má théann sibh amárach
- If you go every day
- If you go tomorrow

If he shuts up, I will say something

"If he shuts up" is talking about a future event.

If he shuts up, I will say something
When to Use What

These two If’s don’t map perfectly to English, of course, but they are pretty close. Still, it can be hard to know where the line is at times, and I certainly am not always certain of which one I want. But the following notions and examples should help.

First, remember that most of these If’s have a Then someplace. The easiest way to keep things straight is to focus on the Then part. If your "then" feels like a "would" phrase, use Dá and the conditional. If your "then" would be in some other tense, use má and the appropriate tense.

- Má thagann sí, beidh fearg orm If she comes, I will be angry
  i.e., I told her not to come, and I will be annoyed if she shows up.
- Dá dtiocfadh sí, bheadh áthas orm If she would come, I would be delighted.

In both cases, we are talking about something that might happen. The first has a more factual feel to it, if you will, and the "then" is a simple cause-effect outcome of the "if".

The second is less concrete: you aren't necessarily expecting her to show or not show, but if it came to be, this is how things would be. People say there's a degree of belief or probability (or sometimes wishing) in the conditional forms.

Although it is hard to explain, you can develop a feel for it, just as you have in English:

- If he shuts up, I will speak (má) If he would shut up, I would speak (dá)

And the "if" portion doesn't have to lead the sentence:

Cheannóinn carr nua dá dtabharfá an t-airgead dom.
Rachaidh mé go dtí mo sheomra má thagann sí.

Remember, though, if the non-if part of the sentence is conditional, use dá + conditional in the if part.

If Not

The same word is used for "if not" in both situations, in all tenses. Mura (or mara) is followed by eclipsis (and dependent forms). Murar is used in the past, except for the usual irregular verbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mura bhfuil tú sástá</th>
<th>Mura mbeifeá sástá</th>
<th>Mura gceannófá carr nua</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mura dtiocfaidh sí</td>
<td>Mura dtiocfadh sí</td>
<td>Murar gheid sé é</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mura raibh siad ann</td>
<td>Mura ndearna tú</td>
<td>Murar ól sí é</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other Particles

Everything else -- an, nach, go, etc. -- works as expected. Dúirt sí go dtiocfadh sí.

ODDS & ENDS

Questions & Answers

As you might expect, when you answer questions in the conditional, you can used the combined forms:

- An ólfá tú cupán tae? D’ólfainn
- An mbuaftainn? Ní bhuafá
- Nach gcoinneofá é? Choinneoinn.

That said, there's a tendency to answer the other persons/number with the basic form:
An bhfoilseoidís é?  
Ni fhoilseodh (Ni fhoilseoidís)

Nach ndíolfaidís iad?  
Dhíolfadh! (Dhíolfaidís!)

Murach

There is also *murach*, which is used with nouns -- If it weren't for the rain . . .. Your dictionary is clear enough on that, just mentioning it so it doesn't get mixed up with the *mura* forms.

If So

Sometimes you may respond to a statement with a *má*, to express a condition or doubt:

*A:* "Caithfidh muid feiceáil "Slasher Killer Gruesome Movie Part 13," tá sé go hiontach ar fad!"

or

*A:* "Cuir mé ar ais isteach, "Coach," is féidir liom imirt, nil mo chos chomh briste sin!"

*B:* "Bhuel, má tá . . ."

Féad

You have to get a handle on the verb *féad*. It's basic meaning is "to be able to", but when you put it in the conditional, you end up with "could":

*Tá brón orm, ní fhéadfaíonn fanacht nóiméad eile!*
I'm sorry, I couldn't stay a minute longer!

*Nach bhféadfaíonn é a dhéanamh . . . Couldn't you . . .

*Dhéanfainn é dá bhféadfainn*  
I would do it if I could

In fact, the vast majority of the time you encounter this verb, it will be in the conditional. It is often used, even in non-autonomous forms, in general ways that feel kind of autonomous:

*D’fhéadfa í a rá*  
you could say

*D’fhéadfadh sé a bheith fíor*  
It could be true

Now, this verb is used in other tenses. But you see the conditional forms so often, as the most common way to express "could" -- and I notice that people struggle with it when they encounter it in reading, say -- that you really want to make sure you know the conditional of this one.