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A corpus-based study of if-conditional forms *If I was/were* as presented in pedagogical materials

Summary

The aim of this paper is to discuss the impact corpora might have on the use of certain grammatical forms in pedagogical materials. As many coursebooks and grammar textbooks are lacking in both text authenticity and some specific forms used for the classroom, it is disputable whether they are applicable to the needs the students might have in their future life. The available corpora for this study were used and then compared to the discourse analysis of pedagogical materials – grammar textbooks and coursebooks. The results showed that if- conditional forms (*If I was/were*) were used differently across the registers. These results might be applied to the pedagogical materials in order to make students' learning more natural and interesting. Firstly, general background of corpus linguistics will be discussed, as well as the existing pedagogical materials used in the classroom. Afterwards, specific features in the corpora chosen for this study will be presented and analysed from a corpus-based perspective.

Key words: corpora, pedagogical materials, foreign language learning

Korpusna študija pogojniških oblik *If I was/were* v pedagoških gradivih

Povzetek

Namen članka je ugotoviti, kakšen vpliv imajo lahko korpusi na rabo slovnic in drugih pedagoških gradiv. Glede na to, da veliko učbenikov in slovničnih priročnikov ne vsebuje avtentičnih besedil in specifičnih oblik, primernih za pouk, je vprašljivo, ali so primerni za potrebe študentov. V študiji smo uporabili nekaj korpusov in jih primerjali s pedagoškim gradivom – slovnični priročniki in učbeniki. Rezultati so pokazali, da se pogojniške oblike (*If I was/were*) rabijo različno v različnih registrih. Te rezultate bi bilo mogoče uporabiti v pedagoških gradivih in tako ustvariti bolj zanimiv in avtentičen pouk.

Ključne besede: korpusi, pedagoška gradiva, pouk tujih jezikov

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1. Introduction

Teachers in Croatian schools, whether primary or secondary, often encounter great problems when they present certain linguistic features to their students. Sometimes the coursebooks, workbooks and grammar textbooks they use are not appropriate for their students' needs. This means that in some way they lack text authenticity concerning the linguistic features they are presenting; moreover, sometimes they are not systematically organised. In order to satisfy students' needs, teachers often use additional materials from the Internet and other sources that might help their students learn and acquire the foreign language in a more natural way. Teachers also use different approaches while presenting these materials, especially when the topics are presented on the lexical level. When it comes to the grammatical level, things sometimes become more complicated. There are always some problematic grammar areas for teachers to teach; certain grammatical structures are very difficult for students to understand because they differ greatly from those of the students' first language (in this case Croatian). In this regard, the presentation of grammar textbooks plays a crucial role in developing students' communicative competence. Authors of grammar textbooks usually confront three basic issues (Biber and Reppen 2002, 199): which grammatical features should be included or excluded in a lesson or book, what the order of grammatical topics should be, and which specific words should be included when illustrating a grammatical feature. If we want to focus, as in this paper, on secondary school grammar teaching, then solid material development for grammar should primarily investigate at least two basic issues: what grammatical features will be presented in the class and in what way.

The purpose of this paper is to show the study of a very common grammatical feature – one which is most problematic for the students in secondary school – and examine it from a corpus-based perspective. The grammar area in question includes if-conditionals. Teaching conditional sentences in English classes causes great effort for a teacher, but for students too. In my study I will compare several pedagogical materials (grammar textbooks and coursebooks) with the real (authentic) language use in the corpora, with a focus on a particular feature. Searching a corpus that consists of sentences used in real life situations can help the writers of pedagogical materials to see whether their examples of particular grammatical structures are in accordance with their presented materials. Firstly, some general background of corpus linguistics will be provided, as well as the existing pedagogical materials used in the classroom. Afterwards, specific features in the corpora chosen for this study will be presented and analysed from a corpus-based perspective. Lastly, what influence corpus might have on the presentation of pedagogical materials will be discussed.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 The impact of corpus linguistics

Corpus linguistics provides an extremely powerful tool for the analysis of natural language and can provide tremendous insights into how language use varies in different situations, such as spoken versus written, or formal interactions versus casual conversation (Reppen and Simpson 2002, 92). Exploring language use through the methods of corpus linguistics has become very popular among many researchers. Biber, Conrad and Reppen (1998) state some of the features that seem to be characteristic of corpus-based analyses of language. These are: it analyses the actual patterns of use in natural texts; as the basis for analysis it uses a principled collection of natural texts, makes extensive use of computers for analysis and is available for both quantitative and qualitative analysis (O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter 2007, 1-2). The use of corpora has increased over time, especially in the process of dictionary-making. A core tool in corpus linguistics is concordancing, which refers to using corpus software to find every occurrence of a particular word or phrase (O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter 2007, 8). Such beginnings of using corpora also mark the beginning of incorporating them into the language classroom. Concordance lines can provide us with ample examples of how language patterns function in natural texts. In that way, they are of a great help and are applicable to the language classroom, and are often used in language teaching materials. In this paper the focus will be on written and spoken English language discourse and the specific features.

2.2 Pedagogical materials and corpus linguistics

Many pedagogical materials, like grammars, dictionaries and coursebooks, are based on large language corpora. The corpora have not provided us only with our intuitions about the use of language, but have also brought into question many patterns of language use that counter our intuitions. In terms of what we actually teach, numerous studies have shown that the language presented in textbooks is frequently still based on intuitions about how we use language, rather than actual evidence of use (O'Keeffe, McCarther and Carter 2007, 21). Many researchers in the area of corpus linguistics have conducted research on textbook presentations and real language use in corpus. Burns (2001) argues that scripted dialogues rarely reflect the unpredictability and dynamism of conversation, or the features and structures of natural spoken discourse (O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter 2007, 21). This means that students cannot be adequately prepared for, or that they lack the opportunity to be prepared for, unpredictable interactions outside of the classroom.

Biber and Reppen (2002) surveyed six ESL-EFL grammar books and showed the presentation of some grammatical features in comparison with frequency findings based on corpus research done for the LGSWE – Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English. The grammar textbooks included sections on adjectives, participial adjectives and nouns as nominal premodifiers. Adjectives and participial adjectives are considered to be more common devices used for noun modification, while nouns are considered to be less important. Corpus-based analysis showed greater use of adjectives as premodifiers in textbooks, which is explained by the fact that they are a primary device for noun modification in the conversational English on which these textbooks

are based, while newspaper writing showed nouns as premodifiers to be nearly as common as adjectives in their frequency. The authors note that the frequency information can provide a more solid basis for designing materials than just letting us rely on intuitions and accepted practice (Biber and Reppen 2002, 201). This example leads to the importance of understanding corpus-based research in this field, especially when dealing with the use of grammar textbooks and their presentation to the students. I also agree with those authors who claim that at some levels (both intermediate and advanced), students need greater exposure to the commonly encountered forms than comparatively rare forms like participial adjectives in this particular case.

Holmes (1988) surveyed epistemic modality in ESL textbooks as compared with corpus data and found that many textbooks devoted an unjustifiably large amount of attention to modal verbs, at the expense of alternative linguistic strategies (O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter 2007, 21-2).

Similar research was carried out by Gilmore (2004), who examined discourse features of seven dialogues published in coursebooks and contrasted them with comparable authentic interactions in a corpus. He found that the textbook dialogues differed considerably from their naturally-occurring equivalents across a range of discourse features. Those features included turn length and patterns, lexical density, number of false starts and repetitions, pausing, frequency of terminal overlap and the use of hesitation devices and response tokens.

Hughes and McCarthy (1998) looked at the use of past perfect verb forms and found that, across a wide range of speakers in the CANCODE corpus, the past perfect had a broader and more complex function in spoken discourse than described (O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter 2007, 22).

Following recent research on corpus-based study of pedagogical materials and linguistic features presented in them, we can see the importance of teaching language on the basis of materials produced through corpus-based findings. In order to evaluate the materials we use in the classroom, it would be very helpful to see how some problematic grammatical features appear in more natural texts.

It is often argued that in language teaching examples drawn from corpus sources should form the basis for the materials used to exemplify the language and that one aim of language teaching should be to produce learners who are able to communicate effectively and competently (O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter 2007, 26). This opens the way to the use of more authentic data rather than contrived data. Contrived examples usually refer to language that is mostly invented for the pedagogic purposes of presenting a particular feature or rule of the language. Many texts included in pedagogical materials are also decontextualised. In such cases the presented material in the students' books is taken from a particular corpus and incorporated into the text, but at the same time it has lost its originality. We know that particular features have different meanings in different contexts. Thus, taking these features out of the real context, where they appeared first, would not serve as a good example for teachers to simplify the usage and function of some of the structures for students. According to this, these texts, which are believed to be authentic, are not always authentic.

Nowadays, many teachers make use of computer assisted language learning in class, including also the use of language corpora. Students usually receive a set of materials based on corpus

evidence, such as concordance lines. This kind of learning, through concordance lines, where students can see different usage of certain forms, has become very common and popular as data-driven learning (DDL) (O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter 2007, 24). The advantage of this approach is that it enriches students' vocabulary and helps them see how the language functions in different contexts.

This paper will basically focus on the presentation of specific forms of if-conditionals in pedagogical materials (coursebooks and grammar textbooks) and evaluate their appropriate usage in contrast with the real and natural texts in the corpora.

2.3 Previous research on conditional clauses in corpus linguistics

If-conditionals have been the subject of the study of many researchers dealing with corpus-based research. A number of studies have reported that the ELT typology fails to account for a large number of attested if-conditionals, and provides learners with a narrow and inaccurate view of if-conditionals (Hwang, 1979; Maule, 1988; Fulcher, 1991; Wang, 1991; Ferguson, 2001 cited in Gabrielatos 2006, 1).

Gabrielatos (2006) conducted a study of ten coursebooks for advanced learners contrasting the frequency of the types of if-conditionals usually presented in ELT coursebooks with the relative frequency of the ELT types in the corpus sample. The sample consisted of randomly chosen 1000 *S-units* containing the word *if* from the written sub-corpora of the BNC. The shortcomings of ELT typology presented in the research material in comparison with the corpus data were the following: there is no significant difference between zero and first types of conditionals; the mixed types are very rare; speech-act, indirect and pragmatic conditionals are not covered; modalised if-clauses and if + past tense are too frequent to be treated as special cases and the approach to modality is naive and restricted, and potentially misleading and restricting.

Farr and McCarthy (2002) compared Farr's 60 000-word POTTI corpus of post-observation teacher trainer-trainee feedback sessions with CANCODE. They began by observing the differences in frequency per million words of three hypothetical items (if, maybe, perhaps) in POTTI as compared with the 2.6-million-word sub-corpus of everyday socialising interactions from CANCODE and the spoken academic portion of CANCODE (approximately 340 000 words) (O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter 2007, 127-128). The study showed that the uses of *if* in POTTI were not dominated by the three types of conditional clauses that are well known to English language teachers and mostly used in the classroom.

Ferguson (2000) focused in his work on if-conditionals in naturally occurring discourse, particularly in medical discourse. The study compared the use of conditionals in three medical genres in speech and writing (namely; research articles, journal editorials and doctor-patient consultations). If-conditional constructions were initially identified using concordance software (MicroConcord) but subsequently a manual search was undertaken to examine the conditionals in a wider discourse context. The findings suggested that there was significant variation across genres, in particular between the written and spoken ones.

3. Overview and purpose of the study

Recent research has revealed findings about language use from a corpus-based perspective and how these findings incorporate into effective material design for students. Since we can study various *if-constructions* in the corpora, we can also base our findings on the presentation of these constructions in the pedagogical materials. Conditional clauses cause many problems when presented to secondary school students. Types of conditional clauses are not usually presented together. According to students' levels of English language learning, we can see the examples and exercises following certain types of conditionals. In this paper the focus will be on the use of particular constructions in hypothetical conditional clauses. A hypothetical condition expresses "the speaker's belief that the condition will not be fulfilled (for future conditions), is not fulfilled (for present conditions), or was not fulfilled (for past conditions) and hence the probable or certain falsity of the proposition expressed by the matrix clause" (Greenbaum and Quirk 1998, 317). The table below, as presented by Greenbaum and Quirk (1998), shows the presentation of verbs in hypothetical conditions:

Verbs in hypothetical conditions:

	Conditional clause	*Matrix clause*
Present & Future reference	hypothetical past	past modal
Past reference	hypothetical past perfect	past perfect modal

According to the table, we can name three examples of hypothetical condition in the following sentences:

> If she *tried* harder next time, she *would pass* the exam. (future reference)
> If they *were* alive, they *would be* moving around. (present reference)
> If they *had invited* him to the conference, he *would have attended*. (past reference)
> (Greenbaum and Quirk 1998, 293)

As we can see, the most common modal used in the matrix clause is *would*. Other modals are also possible: *should, could, might, ought to + inf.* (Karlovčan 2002, 293). In this paper I will concentrate more on hypothetical condition with present reference, particularly on the construction in this type of conditional *if I were…* and *if I was…* (also with reference to *If he, she, it was/were…*). It is stated that the form *were* refers to the past subjunctive, used in formal discourse in hypothetical conditional clauses, as well as other constructions with hypothetical meaning. For example:

> I'd rather I *were* in bed. or If she *were* here, she would speak on my behalf
> (Greenbaum and Quirk 1998, 295)

In informal styles the hypothetical past would be replaced then by the form *was*.

The paper will deal with different style uses (formal or informal) of *If I was/were* in hypothetical conditional clauses, and in what way these forms are presented in pedagogical materials for secondary school students. In order to confirm the presentation of these forms in pedagogical materials, I will compare several corpora where these forms are used or appear. One corpus will be spoken, more informal, and the other ones will be written, more formal genres. I chose these particular forms in this type of conditional clauses because it is very hard for students to understand this type of conditional clauses – hypothetical condition with present reference, especially when used with these forms. As we teach our students that the past simple of the verb *to be* is *was* in the first and third person singular, it is sometimes questionable whether students will understand the usage of these constructions and when they will use them for this particular type. According to most grammarians, *were* refers to singular past subjunctive form in the English language, conventionally for the idiom *If I were you* (Greenbaum and Quirk 1998, 44). Some researchers think that only *If I was* is incorrect, while *if I were* is correct. Where the fulfilment of the condition is considered highly improbable or impossible, the condition is expressed by means of *were + to-infinitive*, instead of the Past Tense *was* (Karlovčan 2002, 293).

There are several research questions I would like to answer in this paper:

1. What is the frequency of if-conditionals in the corpora available for the purpose of this study?

2. What is the occurrence of the forms *If I was/were (he, she, it was/were)* in if-conditionals in the corpora?

3. How are these forms used in the corpora with regard to different registers?

4. How do these forms incorporate into the presentation of pedagogical materials to secondary school students?

Firstly, I will conduct a corpus study of the available corpora where if-conditionals appear, discern the occurrences and frequency of the relevant forms, and then try to compare the results with the results of these forms presented in pedagogical materials. My corpus study consists of three main sub-corpora: senate speeches, newspaper articles and TV scripts of the series *Friends.* These corpora were chosen primarily on the basis of accessibility and suitability for the purpose of the study. In order to confirm the results with regard to the use of special forms in conditional sentences, I will also use and look at another sub-corpora taken from the British National Corpus of spoken and written language (BNC).

4. Methodology

This section consists of two parts. In the first part the study of the frequency and use of particular conditional clauses in the corpora will be explained, while in the second part I will refer to pedagogical materials used for the study.

Part 1

The study uses texts from several separate registers to investigate the frequency and occurrence of if-conditional forms, with special reference to the forms *If I was/were* and register variation in this particular construction – that is, whether they are used in formal or informal style. The texts used in this paper are taken from the corpora prepared by Dr. Enikö Csomay[1] for her PhD course held in August 2007 at the University of Pécs. These sub-corpora include: senate speeches, newspaper articles and TV scripts of the series *Friends*. Another sub-corpus was taken from the British National Corpus of spoken and written language. The sub-corpus of senate speeches consists of 287,433 words, that of the newspaper articles of 53,321 words and sub-corpus of TV scripts of the series *Friends* of 839,937 words. The toolkit used for this analysis was AntConc 3.2.1. The search was conducted using this toolkit and looking at the occurrence of conditional clauses through the concordance list of the forms previously mentioned – forms *If I was/were* in if-conditionals.

Since it is not the only form crucial for this particular type of conditional clause, other forms, such as *If he was/were, If she was/were, If it was/were*, were also searched for in the sub-corpora. In the BNC corpus, only 50 randomly chosen forms out of 898 found for the form *If I was* and 50 solutions out of 688 found for the form *If I were* were looked at in order to complete the previous corpora – senate speeches, newspaper articles and TV scripts of the series *Friends*. The BNC was used with the aim of investigating the forms' occurrence in the corpus, as well as to see the usage of the forms. What I want to point out is that the sub-corpora chosen for this paper might not be completely valid, primarily due to its representativeness (Biber 1993, 243). Since it demands a great deal of work to make someone's own corpora, as well as to choose the best representative pattern available for the aimed work, there might also be some disadvantages regarding its representativeness. I chose to look at concordance lists of the forms searched for, because they best show the way how these forms are integrated into the real language use. The frequency word list was also used that helped me look at the forms frequently used in the sub-corpora.

Part 2

The forms I want to analyse in the corpora are also looked at in pedagogical materials. Since the forms refer to grammatical units used in secondary school classroom, different pedagogical materials are used. These materials include grammar textbooks and coursebooks shown in the table below:

Author	Title of the book	Level
Rudolf Filipović, 1998	An outline of English Grammar	Intermediate–upper-intermediate
John Eastwood, 1999	Oxford Practice Grammar	Intermediate–upper-intermediate
Liz & John Soars, 2003	New Headway Intermediate	Intermediate
M. Harris, D. Mower & A. Sikorzynska, 2002	Opportunities Intermediate	Intermediate
M. Harris, D. Mower & A. Sikorzynska, 2002	Opportunities Upper Intermediate	Upper-intermediate

Results

In this section, the frequency and occurrence of if-constructions in the corpora are presented, and then the same presentation of merely if-conditionals, excluding other constructions and forms with *if*, like the forms: *only if, what if, as if, if not, even if, if only, if so, if ever and when if*. The corpus analysis toolkit Antconc 3.2.1. provided us with the following results in the tables 1 and 2:

Corpora	Occurrence	Frequency (per 10 000 words)
Senate speeches	1313	32.77
Newspaper articles	76	9.93
TV scripts of the series *Friends*	2127	21.26

Table 1: Occurrence and frequency of if-constructions in senate speeches, newspaper articles and TV scripts of the series Friends

Corpora	Occurrence	Frequency (per 10 000 words)
Senate speeches	1170	27.79
Newspaper articles	68	8.43
TV scripts of the series *Friends*	1 926	18.8

Table 2: Occurrence and frequency of if-conditionals in senate speeches, newspaper articles and TV scripts of the series Friends

The number of if-constructions and if-conditional clauses presented in the tables vary due to the number of words used in the corpora. They are used largely in spoken discourse – senate speeches and TV scripts of the series *Friends*. Since there are fewer words contained in the corpus of newspaper articles, we find fewer occurrences of if-constructions and if-conditionals. These corpora might not be adequately representative, because we have taken only a few of them for

the study, but since the emphasis is not only on the frequency of particular constructions, but to search for the presentation of special if-conditional forms and compare them with their usage in pedagogical materials, the chosen corpora are enough to be used in the paper.

I looked at if-conditional forms *If I was/were* that are the focus of my study, but I also referred to the forms *If he, she, it was/were* in order to provide the study with some more examples. In the following table the presentation and occurrence of the form *If I was/were* is shown.

Corpora	Occurrence
Senate speeches	1
Newspaper articles	0
TV scripts of the series *Friends*	11

Table 3:   Occurrence of the form **If I was...**

Corpora	Occurrence
Senate speeches	0
Newspaper articles	0
TV scripts of the series *Friends*	9

Table 4:   Occurrence of the form **If I were...**

The forms *If I was/were* in the corpora are rather rare. There is only one occurrence of the form *If I was* found in senate speeches. In this particular case, the form is not followed by a pronoun or noun, but the verb:

If I was being given that same intelligence information, I saw no reason for that shift to occur.

As a senate speech is seen as formal discourse, the example found in this case does not agree with the fact that this form is found more in informal discourses. As we notice, the form *If I were* does not appear at all in senate speeches. Since the first person singular might be rather rare for newspaper discourse, we cannot find any occurrence of the forms. In TV scripts of the series *Friends*, we can see the greatest usage of these forms. This is due to the fact that the discourse is more spoken and informal than the previous ones.

In the corpus of TV scripts of the series *Friends* the form *If I was* is usually followed by the verb (four times), adjective (three times), noun (twice) and adverb (twice).

Here are some examples from the corpus:

I don't know *if I was* happier when um George Bailey destroyed the fami...
If I was in this for the money, I'd be a millionaire.

I'm sorry *if I was* a little weird after the last time we went out.
I would feel more comfortable *if I was* having this conversation in private.

I excluded the construction *what if,* which appears four times in some examples, and one construction with *even if.* The examples mostly followed by a noun, verb and an adjective express more a direct condition than an indirect one. This means that the situation in the matrix clause is directly contingent on the situation in the conditional clause (Greenbaum & Quirk 1998, 316). These results, although they might not be sufficient, confirm what many people have discussed about the informal usage of this form in conditionals. So far, it is noticed that only in the spoken discourse, as this one is, do we find the greatest usage of the form *If I was.*

In the examples of the form *If I were* we can notice less occurrence of this form than in the previous corpus. There are only two idiomatic forms *If I were you*:

If I were you I would wear them every day, every day!
I think and she said you shouldn't call her. But *if I were you* I would.

Other forms are followed by a noun, verb or an adjective. These data disprove the view of many grammarians and coursebook makers that this specific form is mostly used in literary or more formal English. The figures presented in the corpus also indicate that the most common usage recommended for standard English in grammars and textbooks – *if I were* + pronoun – is not any more secured in everyday spoken English. What I find is that neither of the forms is preferred over the other when it comes to the imagination:

If I was a superhero… and *If I were* a salmon shirt.

With regard to the use of verbs after each form, the verbs with *If I was* prevail, while with *If I were*, only two occurrences are noticed. The data for both forms do not confirm that either *If I was* or *If I were* are used in spoken English, but that both forms are almost equally used, which gives another support for the coursebook creators, when presenting the forms.

Corpora	If he was	If he were	If she was	If she were	If it was	If it were
Senate Speeches	1	0	0	0	3	3
Newspaper Articles	1	0	0	0	0	0
TV scripts of the series *Friends*	2	0	3	3	11	5

Table 5: Occurrence of other forms: **If he, she it was/were…**

In the examples above, we also see very rare use of the forms with *was* and *were* in senate speeches and newspaper articles, while again in TV scripts of the series *Friends*, we see a little bit more occurrences of the forms, with the greatest usage of the form *If it was*, followed by *If it were.* This is because the third person singular in this discourse is surely more common when expressing some situations and actions than the first person singular. It is especially common in presenting events and situations in everyday speech, which is about we are talking about. I also excluded some other constructions with *if* like *what if* and *even if.*

There is only one use of the form *If he was* in senate speeches, followed by an elliptical adverb:

> My client was not there. *If he was*, he did not commit the assault.,

while the uses of the forms *If it was/were* are followed in this case by verbs and nouns:

> *If it was* not working, it would have been terminated.;
> *if it was* not a crusade for economic justice.;
> *If it were* not my son or grandchild, killed in…;
> *If it were* a vote on the appropriateness of the response…

In newspaper articles the only example of *If he was* is followed by a verb:

> It was unclear *if he was* referring to rebels or U.S. agents.

In TV scripts of the series *Friends If he was* is followed by a noun and verb:

> *If he was* a regular at the coffee house, I'd be serving him.
> and You wouldn't mind *if he was* dating someone else?,

and the forms *If she was/were* are also followed by the same word classes, as in the previous examples – nouns and verbs:

> …*If she was* kidding was very funny.;
> Wouldn't it be great *if she was* my wife;
> *If she were* marrying a guy, none of you'd expect me to be...,

but there is one example where we can see *If she were* followed by an adverb:

> *If she were* here right now, she'd…

According to the results, the forms *If it was/were* are more frequent than the rest and they are mostly followed by nouns and verbs. It is also interesting to note the same uses of both forms as they are followed by the pronoun:

> *If it were/was* me, I'd…

BNC CORPUS

In the BNC corpus I wanted to see whether the usage of some *If I was/were* forms differ from those found in the other corpora. I looked at 50 randomly-chosen concordance lines of *If I was* and *If I were* in the BNC corpus, since they appeared to be available in the search box giving the solutions of each form separately searched for. The query yielded a random selection of 50 solutions from the 898 found forms *If I was*, and the same number of solutions from the 688 found forms of *If I were*. According to the number of forms found, we can see that there are more forms with *If I was*. The verb *was* is mostly used after the verb, then noun and to-infinitive. There are three usages of the verb *was* followed by pronoun *you*, as in the sentences:

> I shouldn't think of it *if I was you*. or
> *If I was you* I'd give it up.

The sentences are primarily used to give somebody advice. In the query for the form I*f I were* I found a very wide range of the idiom *If I were you…* and the verb *were* followed by to-infinitive. Other word classes, such as nouns and adjectives, are rare. Since the examples with *If I were you* are very common in BNC, it is very disputable that this construction is only used in formal discourse, as it is considered by some grammarians. As we can see it is also very common in spoken discourse, more informal.

Presentation of the forms *If I was/were…* in pedagogical materials

An Outline of English Grammar/ intermediate – upper-intermediate level
This type of grammar textbook is mainly used for secondary school students in Croatian schools from the age of fourteen to the age of eighteen. It refers to the intermediate and the upper-intermediate levels. There are only few examples of some constructions students may use in their everyday English, and some of them are not even mentioned.

> *If I were* Mr. Brown, I should repair the roof of the house.

This example is the only one presented in the grammar textbook, which denotes the use of form *If I were* in conditional clauses to denote an unfulfilled condition, and is referred to as the subjunctive. Other examples and forms related to this type are not found, even in the texts.

Oxford Practice Grammar/intermediate – upper-intermediate level
This grammar textbook states the following examples of the aimed forms, with the explanation why they are used in such a way:

In a type 2 if-clause we sometimes use *were* instead of *was*, especially in the clause *If I were you:*

> *If Rachel were playing* her stereo, it wouldn't be so quite in here.

This sentence has come out of the possibility to use the sentence in that way as explained, since they also provided us with the example:

> *If Rachel was* playing her stereo, it wouldn't be so quiet in here.

It is obvious that the examples give us the possibility of using the two forms, but in this case with the third person singular. The first person singular form is shown only in the idiomatic form *if I were you*:

> *If I were you*, I'd ask a lawyer for some advice.

New Headway Intermediate/intermediate level
We find three types of conditionals in this coursebook presentation (zero conditional, first conditional and second conditional). Since conditionals are among the more complex structures in the English grammar, it is understandable that these three types (later we will also find four types, which will include a third conditional) of conditionals are presented at the later stages of students' learning. In the introduction of conditionals in the coursebook, there is one example stated as a variation for the unreal situation:

If I were rich, I wouldn't have any problems.

What we find next in the presentation of the use of second conditional is that this type of conditional is used to express an unreal situation and its probable result. The situation or condition is improbable, impossible, imaginary or contrary to known facts. This rule is followed by three examples, out of which one is with *If I were* form:

If I were the president of my country, I'd increase taxes.

The second rule referring to the aimed form is also stated: *If I were you*, I'd… is used to give advice. The examples are the following:

If I were you, I'd apologize to her.
I'd take it easy for a while *If I were you*.

This form, presented in the sentences, is not mentioned to be subjunctive.

Opportunities Intermediate/intermediate level
In this coursebook we find a review of four types of conditional clauses. In the examples of second conditional to which the forms *was/were* belong, we cannot find a lot of these forms, except the sentences with the idiomatic form *If I were you*:

If I were you, I'd visit cities like Prague and Budapest.;
If I were you, I'd go to university.

The second conditional with *were* is only found in the sentence with third person plural:

If they were older, they could go there on their own.

Opportunities Upper Intermediate/upper-intermediate level
This students' coursebook gives us the presentation of mixed conditionals. It is also mentioned that there are four types of conditional sentences: the zero conditional, first conditional, second conditional and the third conditional. They are not presented separately due to the fact that the book is aimed at the students' final stage of learning, and students have already come across these types. Among the use of mixed types of conditionals we find only one example with the verb *was/were*:

If he was/were a more skilful player, he would have scored more points.

Both verbs are shown, but without any explanation or examples to remind students of some more situations when we use these verbs. We can just notice that in a regular unit presentation with exercises there are few examples according to which students form several sentences using mixed conditionals with *was or were*, as in example:

Use the cues to write mixed conditional sentences.

Example:

If John weren't so tall, he wouldn't have had to have the doors in his house changed.

The next example is followed by the exercise:

Write three conditional sentences about some events in your life that these personality traits contributed to (lazy/hardworking, sociable/shy, well organised/disorganised):

If I was more hardworking, I would have studied harder and passed the last chemistry test.

These examples and exercises lack the fuller explanation of the verb to be – *was/were* in conditional sentences, that is, they lack everyday usage of these verbs in the sentences.

5. Discussion

With regard to the results received from the corpora and pedagogical materials, we can draw the following conclusions: There is differing usage of the if-conditional forms *if I was/were* in different registers. They are rather rare, but still they present some of the common usages of the forms searched for. This is because conditionals are grammar structures not very applicable to all registers. Although we can find them occasionally in any register, they are not so common. Even in Croatian, some forms are used more than the others, depending on the registers. Apart from that, we are focused on teaching our students all the forms with which they can come across in the real language use, that is, in more natural contexts. I think the results gleaned from all corpora can be applied to the language classroom. Above all, they show that some grammars that are considered to be applicable to the public do not cover all the examples of some of the grammar areas important for someone's needs.

The results show that the form *were* – a singular past subjunctive form, used in hypothetical conditional clauses, which is considered to be used more in formal discourse, is not always in accordance with this. The form *were* can also be seen in a more informal spoken discourse, like TV scripts of the series *Friends*. The usages of both forms *was/were* verbs correlate in some registers, mostly in spoken discourse, since they are used particularly there. In all the corpora verb the form *If I was* is more frequent than *If I were*. They are in a way differently used, but still have some common usages. They are both followed by a noun or a pronoun, even the verb in some cases. What can be noticed is that the idiomatic form *If I were* is found more than *If I was*. This does not give us a complete conclusion that *were*, in the searched corpora prevails over *was*, but just helps us see things from different sides.

Therefore, we cannot conclude that one form is more used than the other, and then presented more in pedagogical materials. Coursebooks and grammar textbooks that have been searched do not make us look at the things that way. They mainly stick to one or two rules, and do not show the exact examples that can be drawn from the corpora. Regardless of the fact that the grammar textbooks and coursebooks given in this paper are older editions (the new ones also follow the same structure), I think that the problematic structures – which conditional sentences seem to be in English – should be examined more carefully in the materials for students' language learning.

I need to point out that in this study there are certain limitations. Only specific forms were examined in the corpora and pedagogical materials, so the results cannot be generalised.

If we look at other forms and combinations of conditional clauses, or even other discourses, we will certainly have more complete results. Since the aim of the paper was to compare the corpora results with those presented in pedagogical materials for secondary school students and to see whether we can help material designers to use the corpora in their work, I have been able to answer research questions proposed for the study. It would be also useful and interesting to investigate the use of these forms in other discourses as well as to search for these forms in merely grammar textbooks.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this article was not to give advice or an answer regarding how to teach certain forms of conditional clauses, but to encourage those who create teaching material to take corpora into consideration when presenting their materials in order to help teachers in their classroom presentation of specific forms. What models of conditionals will be taught and when depends on the teachers, because they best know their students' characteristics. By using information based on actual frequency and context of use (register differences), materials developers and teachers should be able to increase the meaningful input that is provided to learners (Biber & Reppen 2002, 207). Using authentic texts in the language classroom has always been a very useful pedagogical tool in creating more naturally-occurring environment in the classroom. For most pedagogic purposes in most contexts of teaching and learning a language, it is preferable to have naturally-occurring, corpus-based examples than contrived or unreal examples, but always in the context of freedom of choice and careful mediation by teachers and materials writers who know their own local contexts (O'Keeffe, McCarthy & Carter 2007, 27). To sum up, careful examination of the corpora and their incorporation into pedagogical materials can make learning specific language structures very useful to students, and help teachers in developing more interesting everyday environment in the English language classroom.

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