

**Topic: Negotiations (4): Bargaining**
**Aims:**

- To introduce and discuss some techniques and strategies for the bargaining stage of a negotiation;
- To analyse and practise if-sentences (conditionals) in the context of bargaining;
- To provide practice of bargaining in a complex multi-variable negotiation.

**Level:** Intermediate (B2) and above

**Introduction**

For many people, negotiating is all about bargaining, the give-and-take between two sides. This workshop focuses on some strategies for successful bargaining, especially with a view to building long-term business relationships. Effective bargaining involves trading concessions – giving one thing in exchange for another. Inevitably, this involves a lot of *if*-sentences (conditionals), but this workshop goes beyond the traditional classification of “first and second conditionals”, and explores the effectiveness and dangers of using a range of conditional structures in a negotiation.

**1. Lead-in: Discussion**

Students work in small groups to discuss the seven questions. After a few minutes, open up the discussion to include the whole class.

**Suggested answers:** See exercise 2.

**2. Reading: The Bargaining Stage**

Students read the text to see what it says about the seven questions from exercise 1, and to find out what the diagram shows. They discuss their answers in pairs and feed back to the class. When you check the answers, discuss any vocabulary problems, e.g. *exaggerated*, *a counterpart*, *a hint*. You could also discuss the diagram with the class (e.g. how useful and practical is it to think in terms of lines of preference, rather than individual variables) and the mini-dialogue (e.g. Do you think B could seriously claim that he/she made no commitment here?).

**Background notes:**

- The terms at the beginning of the article (***horse-trading***, ***concession-trading***, ***give-and-take***, ***haggling***, ***bartering*** and ***bargaining***) are all intended to have the same meaning. *Concession-trading* is explained fully later in the article. *Haggling* involves a kind of friendly argument over a price; *bartering* typically involves exchanges not involving money.
- If you ***pay over the odds***, you pay more than something is really worth.
- If something is ***explicit***, it is clearly stated, with no room for misinterpretation.

- If you **go back to square one**, you have to start again from the beginning of a process.

**Suggested answers:** The diagram shows a simplified negotiation, where there are only two variables, *price* and *exclusivity*. Both parties have a line showing satisfactory outcomes for them, with various combinations of the two variables. The manufacturer would be very happy with any combination of price and exclusivity which falls above the upper line; the distributor would be very happy with any combination which falls below the lower line. In this case, there's no point where the two lines touch (i.e. where both sides are very happy), but the lines come close enough (inside the shaded area) that a deal could probably be reached where both parties are fairly happy.

1. Bargaining means giving something in order to get something in return.
2. Because it is easy to feel as if you have failed.
3. No. Just because you change your position, it doesn't mean the original position was dishonest.
4. The situation when you accept less of one thing in exchange for more of another.
5. Trading concessions, not making concessions.
6. *if*
7. Make your offers explicitly tied to conditions; write everything down, ideally on a flipchart that both parties can see.

### 3. **If-sentences**

Cut up enough copies of the worksheet for students to work in small groups, with one set of slips per group. Point out that the exercise is very difficult to do perfectly, as it relies on some very subtle distinctions, so students should aim to sort the sentences very roughly. There should be plenty of room for discussion and disagreement. Note that the language of these sentences is analysed fully in exercise 4. When they are ready, discuss the answers with the class. The answers below are just a suggestion – other orders are possible.

**Suggested answers (See exercise 4 for analysis):** c(= most direct offer), a, j, k, h, b, d, i, e, f, g, n, l, m (= most hypothetical offer)

### 4. **If-sentences: Analysis**

Students discuss the questions in small groups. Note that the questions are quite technical and abstract, so if they struggle, tell them not to worry too much in their groups and open up the discussion to include the whole class.

#### **Suggested answers:**

1. a, b, c, d, e, f, g, i, j, k, m, n.
2. It makes no difference in terms of meaning – the two clauses can usually be reversed (although clauses with *onlyif* usually come second). However, there

- is a subtle difference in attitude between sentences **l** and **m**: sentence **m** sounds more like a threat, while sentence **l** feels more like a positive suggestion.
3. On the surface, they have exactly the same meaning. However, sentences with '*if we ...*' (e.g. sentence **c**) sound more like a one-sided offer, whereas sentences with '*if you ...*' (e.g. sentence **a**) are more clearly dependent on the other party's actions. In other words, '*if we ...*' sentences may be more dangerous, because they show possible weakness. Sentence **a** is safer.
  4. Sentences **a** and **b** are classical examples of first and second conditionals. There is a clear difference in meaning: sentence **b** is more hypothetical than sentence **a**. In practice, however, they both depend on the other person's actions (*If you ...*), so this difference may not be very important in the negotiation. The speaker is simply estimating the likelihood of the other person's actions.
  5. Again, sentences **c** and **d** are classical first and second conditionals. This time, however, because they are '*if we ...*' sentences, the speaker is communicating the likelihood of his/her own actions. In other words, he/she is expressing more willingness to be flexible in sentence **c** than sentence **d**. Sentence **e** is similar to sentence **d**, but the structure *were to* is used to emphasise the hypothetical nature of the suggestion.
  6. The structure *if + will* is fairly rare, but not incorrect. In such cases, *will* is used to refer to a promise of a future action, i.e. '*if you agree that you will increase your order ...*'.
  7. It makes the offer much more hypothetical. Other examples: *might consider*, *could*.
  8. *Only if*, *as long as* and *provided* all have a similar meaning: that the offer will be withdrawn if the condition isn't met. *Unless* (= if not) has a similar function, but because the main clause tends to be negative (as in sentences **l** and **m**), it allows you to communicate a condition without making an offer. *Supposing* is a way of making the hypothetical nature of the sentence more explicit.
  9. It makes the hypothetical nature of the suggestion more explicit.
  10. Yes and no. For many negotiators (native and non-native), it doesn't matter how you decorate your offer with subtle grammar – the offer still stands. However, when negotiating with native English speakers and proficient non-natives, it is certainly useful to understand the messages they are signalling with their choice of conditionals, e.g. this is a serious offer vs. this is just an idea. When negotiating with people whose English is weaker, such subtlety may be meaningless. In general, it is always worth focusing on lexical differences (e.g. *might* instead of *would*, *supposing* or *unless* instead of *if*) in order to convey that your offer is hypothetical. This can be much more explicit than relying on differences between first and second conditionals.

## 5. Hedging phrases

Discuss the questions with the class.

**Suggested answer:** They can be used before if-sentences to make it clear that you are not making a firm offer, but simply exploring possible solutions.

**6. Case study: background**

Tell students to read the background paragraph to find out who the two companies are and why they are negotiating. Then divide the class into two teams and allocate roles. If you have a large class (e.g. twelve or more students), you could have more groups (e.g. four, six).

Students work in their teams to discuss their interests and those of the other side, and to plan their target and reservation points. Make sure they realise that their aim is to reach an agreement, so they should not be too extreme when they set these points.

**7. Case study: language practice**

Students work in their teams (or sub-teams of two or three) to plan conditional sentences, using the techniques from exercises 3, 4 and 5. Monitor carefully.

**8. Case study: role-play**

Put the two teams together to role-play the negotiation. Encourage them to use the sentences they prepared in exercise 7, but remind them that they also need to be flexible, and to adapt their suggestions based on the way the negotiation is going. Remind them that both sides are keen to reach an agreement and to build a good long-term relationship based on trust and respect.

Allow plenty of time for the role-play (e.g. at least fifteen minutes). Monitor carefully in order to give feedback at the end on the effectiveness of their bargaining techniques.