37. GRAMMAR: Expressing Conditions with *si* [*expression de la condition*]

In this section, you will learn how to express a hypothesis/assumption about the present and the future in French. Study the examples below:

(a) *If the weather is good tomorrow, we will go to the sea.*

(b) *If the weather were good today, we could go to the sea.*

In sentence (a), you are talking about a **possible scenario for the future** (*going to the sea*) that can be fulfilled if a certain condition (*good weather tomorrow*) is met.

In example (b), the situation is a bit different. Here, you are imagining a scenario (going to the sea) that **cannot be fulfilled in the present** or is very **unlikely** because the condition (*if the weather were good*) is **not met now**.

In French, the cases (a) and (b) are expressed differently, using the conjunction **si** (if, in case) along with specific tenses. Below are the translations for the two sentences:

(a') *S'il fait beau demain, on ira à la plage.*

(b') *S'il faisait beau, on pourrait aller à la plage.*

You can already notice that the difference between both sentences lies in the use of different tenses; be careful about this, as these patterns are quite fixed in French!

(1) To express a regular hypothesis about the future or the present, we use the ***indicatif présent*** in the ***si*-clause** and the ***indicatif futur simple*** in the **main clause**. :

- *Si tu viens , je te paierai à boire.*
- *Si elle ne dit rien , je ne dirai rien non plus .*
- *Si nous partons à temps , nous pourrons prendre un train direct.*
- *Si tu te moques de moi , je te casserai la figure.*

(2) To express a hypothesis about the present that is not fulfilled or is unlikely to be fulfilled in the near future, we use a ***si*-clause** with the ***indicatif imparfait*** and a ***conditionnel présent*** in the **main clause.**

- *Si j' avais une fortune , j' achèterais une Porsche.*

- *Si j' étais toi , je ne dirais rien à la police .*

- *Si nous partions à temps , nous pourrions prendre un train direct*

*** Notes :**

(1) It is also possible to use, instead of the *futur simple*, the ***indicatif présent*** or an ***impératif***. In that case, you express a general truth or a recommendation/advice.

- *Si on mange mal, on risque de tomber malade.*

- *Si tu sors ce soir, ne bois pas de bière !*

(2) Be careful not to confuse the conjunction ***quand*** with ***si***. When we use **quand** with the **futur simple**, we actually express **certainty** and not a **hypothesis/possibility :**

- *Quand je gagnerai au lotto, j'achèterai une Porsche.*
  [When I win the lottery (=certainty), I will buy myself a Porsche.]

- *Si je gagne au lotto, j'achèterai une Porsche.*
  [If I win the lottery (=possibility), I will buy myself a Porsche.]

(3) The construction ***si + imparfait*** without a main clause is often used to make ***suggestions*** or ***proposals***.

-*Si on allait au ciné ce soir ?* [What if we went to the cinema?]

-*Si nous restions à la maison ce soir ?*

(4) The conjunction ***si + il(s)*** always becomes ***s'il(s)***, but ***si + elle(s)*** / ***si + on*** remain as ***si elle(s)*** / ***si on***.