

ANSWER to question # 20: Answers 1, 2 & 3 are correct.

English and other European languages have a SUBJUNCTIVE verb tense for expressing the idea of a condition contrary to fact, such as “if I could.” The Japanese language doesn’t have this tense. Instead, Japanese employs THREE CONDITIONAL FORMS that we discussed in Answer 13 to express the idea of a condition contrary to fact. These are the と (to), たら (tara) and ば (ba) forms.

In Answer 1, we start with the verb 行く (iku) = “go” and change it to 行ける (ikeru) = “can go,” its POTENTIAL form. Then we add と (to) = “if.” The result is 行けるといい (ikeru to ii) = “if I can go, it’s good.” This could mean “I wish I could go.”

However, this answer, 行けるといい (ikeru to ii), could also be interpreted to mean “if you can go, it will be good,” or “why don’t you go?” The same misinterpretation could potentially occur with Answers 2 and 3. To avoid confusion, my Japanese consultants suggest including either けど (KEDO) = “but” or な (NA) = “exclamation point” at the ends of these answers, to make it clear that the speaker is expressing regret, as implied by the English word “wish.”

Therefore, ANSWER # 1 is CORRECT.

In Answer 2, we convert the potential verb 行ける (ikeru) to its たら (tara) form 行けたら (iketara). The result is 行けたらいい (iketara ii) = “if I can go, it’s good” = “I wish I could go.” Again, we should add けど (kedo) = “but” or な (na) = “exclamation point” at the end of the sentence, to be clear.

Therefore, ANSWER # 2 is also CORRECT.

In Answer 3, we convert the potential verb 行ける (ikeru) to its ば (ba) form 行ければ (ikereba). The result is 行ければいい (ikereba ii) = “if I can go, it’s good” = “I wish I could go.” Again, we should add けど (kedo) = “but” or な (na) = “exclamation point” at the end of the sentence, to be clear.

Therefore, ANSWER # 3 is also CORRECT.

Answer 4 uses the ても (TEMO) form that we discussed in the Answer to Question 19. As you recall, this form is used to give PERMISSION. So 行ってもいいけど (itte mo ii kedo) = “it’s OK if you go, but...”

Therefore, ANSWER # 4 is INCORRECT.

なら (NARA) = “in the case that” can also be considered a conditional form. However, the sentence 行けるならいいけど (ikeru nara ii kedo) SOUNDS WRONG to my Japanese consultants, if we mean to say “I wish I could.” This sentence could be translated “in case I can go, it will be good, but...,” but somehow this fails to capture the sense of regret implied by the word “wish.”

[What would happen if we used the PLAIN NON-PAST form of the verb, rather than the potential form, in the first three answers? In other words, what would it mean if we said 行くといい (iku to ii), 行ったらいい (ittara ii) or 行けばいい (ikeba ii)?

The answer is that all three of these sentences mean “if I go, it’s good.” In other words, they all mean “it would be better if I went” rather than “I wish I could go.” Another way to say this is 行った方がいい (itta hoo ga ii) = “it would be better if I went.”]

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Question # 20: “I wish I could, but ...”

You want to say, “I wish I could go, but...” Which of the following 4 Japanese sentences is correct?

1. 行けるといいけど (ikeru to ii kedo).
2. 行けたらいいけど (iketara ii kedo).
3. 行ければいいけど (ikereba ii kedo).
4. 行ってもいいけど (itte mo ii kedo).