

Fachfragen

Betr.: "Would you have marked it wrong?"
Es handelt sich um vier „Fälle“, die einem Test des Eurocentres, Bournemouth, entnommen wurden und die im Tübinger Studienseminar lebhaft diskutiert wurden. Gestatten Sie mir, Ihnen diese „Fälle“ mitzuteilen und Sie, auch im Namen der Seminarteilnehmer, um Aufklärung zu bitten.

1. Promise me (A. that you will stay in) tonight.

(B. that you stay in)

(C. to stay in)

Und zusätzlich: Promise me to stay in.

Von diesen Möglichkeiten ist nach dem Testschlüssel nur A richtig und nach der Aussage einer (amerikanischen) Informantin ist die zusätzliche Aussage nicht möglich. Könnten Sie uns erklären, warum Möglichkeit B (Redundanz) oder C und die zusätzliche Aussage nicht akzeptabel sind? Liegt das vielleicht an der Befehlsform oder an einer bestimmten Tiefenstruktur?

2. English children start school (A. at) five. (B. with)

Ist die B-Aussage richtig oder unterliegt die (amerikanische) Informantin einem immerhin möglichen Germanismus, wenn sie die B-Aussage als möglich bezeichnet?

3. They laughed (A. at) his long nose. (B. about)

Könnte die Aussage A auch korrekt sein? Welcher Sinnunterschied würde dann gegenüber B eintreten?

4. He is late because he (A. works) (B. was working) (C. has been working)

Nach Aussage der (amerikanischen) Informantin sind alle drei Aussagen korrekt. Welche Bedeutungsunterschiede und insbesondere welche Erklärungen ließen sich für die drei Möglichkeiten geben? Glauben Sie, daß die Aussage durch ein nach "is" eingeführtes "always" und bei C durch ein "today" verdeutlicht würde?

DR. REIMAR PERTSCH · HECHINGEN

1. The basic point about a verb like "promise" is that to be semantically acceptable the structure which it governs must contain a compatible time reference – in the present case, the reference in the verb phrase must be to the future. One cannot have "Promise me that you stayed in yesterday"; nor is the present tense form sufficient, and B is thus unacceptable. One can however refer to future time either explicitly or implicitly in English: the use of the "will" form is an example of explicit reference; the use of a "timeless" form of the verb – in this case, the infinitive, which permits a future interpretation – is a case of implicit reference. C is perfectly possible, and quite common in colloquial speech – particularly if the pronoun is omitted ("Promise to stay in, won't you"). But A is the most widely used construction.
2. I can think of no context, either British or American, where "with" is permissible, in this sentence. If someone said this sentence, my automatic reaction would be: "With five what?,"
3. Both sentences are possible. The main semantic difference is that "laughing at" someone or something is normally done in the presence of the person or object, "laughing about" is normally done when one has distanced oneself from the event in some way. However, it is possible for the alternation not to cause any difference in meaning: "We laughed at it for months" could be used in the sense "We laughed about it for months" – but it would be potentially ambiguous, always allowing the interpretation that the object being laughed at was present to those laughing.
4. It is certainly possible to find contexts for all three of these sentences, though B is less likely to be used on its own. A contains the "habitual" implication, and any adverbial which expresses regularity or continuity of action would thus be an appropriate way of clarifying the meaning. C, using the present perfect, means that the reason for the lateness is of recent origin – probably on account of extra work that day (but not necessarily – the extra work could have built up over a few days, and hence adding "today" might be a misleading restriction). For B to make sense, one has to assume that something else has happened between the time of working and the time of speaking which was also a factor contributing to the lateness, e. g. "He's late because he was working and then he had to go to the garage."

DAVID CRYSTAL

Only recently I happened to read the following sentence in an American newspaper: "District Attorney Edmund Dinis requested that a grand jury look into the case, ..."

This is undoubtedly one of the rare cases (apart from a number of traditional phrases such as: Suffice it to say . . . , Long live the Queen . . . etc.) where you have the subjunctive in modern English.

Could you equally well use the indicative in this case? The sentence then would read (following the rules of the sequence of tenses): "... requested that a grand jury looked into the case, ..." (using an auxiliary): "... requested that a grand jury should look into the case, ..."? Or is it necessary to use the subjunctive in this sub-clause which is dependent on a main clause expressing will or wish? Is perhaps the optative not adequately expressed when using the subjunctive?

Is there a difference between American and British usage of English?

Or could it be explained by differences between spoken and written or colloquial and literary English (thus being a matter of style)?

STASS BERTHOLD WÖLFL · FULDA

There is certainly a difference between American and British English usage in this construction: it is far more common in the former, and quite normal in American formal speech, such as would be found in a courtroom or business meeting. If one were parodying an American speaking on a formal occasion, then one would sprinkle this construction liberally throughout the discourse. American films and literature being so influential, the usage is now perfectly familiar on this side of the Atlantic, and it is rather more frequent in British English these days than a few years ago. But the normal way of making the point in British English, using this type of construction, is by using "should look". The trouble with this is that it is sometimes ambiguous in writing: in the above example, it could mean that the District Attorney had asked either "could the jury look into this case (please)" or "Surely the jury *ought* to look into this case" (i. e. there isn't really any choice in the matter). In speech, the ambiguity would not usually arise, of course, because for the latter interpretation, the "should" would be strongly emphasised. Despite this, however, the "should"

form is the more likely. I would *not* expect to see the straightforward indicative used ("requested that a grand jury looked into . . ."). Having said all this, one should remember that all the possibilities mentioned so far are relatively formal, stylistically: normal conversational English would use "He asked the jury to look into the case".

DAVID CRYSTAL

Fachfragen

Anläßlich einer Lehrprobe erhob sich hier folgende Streitfrage, für deren Beantwortung wir dankbar wären:

Kann der Lehrer fragen: "Have you done your homework?" oder muß es heißen: "Did you do your homework?" Er fragt während des Unterrichts, die Hausaufgabe wurde am Tag vorher gemacht, aber das present perfect läßt sich doch wohl damit rechtfertigen, daß die fertige Hausaufgabe ja jetzt verbessert werden soll?

OSTR' DR. SUSANNE EISELE ·

ALZENAU

It is quite possible to use the Present Perfect tense form in this context. Moreover, there is very little difference in meaning. Both sentences could be used as casual queries by the teacher. It is not essential to maintain a rigid distinction between perfect and past

forms on *all* occasions when past time is being referred to: the different time-references of the two tenses can often produce sharp contrasts in meaning in English, but not in the present example. I cannot think of an occasion where the teacher could use one and could not also use the other. If one wanted to force a meaning distinction in, then one might find people willing to argue that the use of the present perfect form implies more readily that the event has implications which are about to be followed up (e. g. correcting the homework); but it is by no means a clear-cut interpretation.

DAVID CRYSTAL

Fachfragen

Bei einer Nacherzählung schrieb eine amerikanische Austauschschülerin: "He sat down and began to play the Thirteenth Nocturne from Chopin." Nun wird jedoch der Autor oder Urheber in einem solchen Falle normalerweise mit "by" angeschlossen. Ist es aber vielleicht möglich, "from" zu sagen, wenn nicht an den Autor oder Komponisten als Person, sondern an sein Werk gedacht wird, aus dem das betreffende Stück gewählt wird? Oder handelt es sich doch um einen Fehler in der Wahl der Präposition, wie er auch einmal einem "native" unterlaufen kann?

StR KLAUS-RUDOLF SCHRÖDER ·
LÜNEBURG

The contrast between "from" and "by" in this kind of context is usually very clear: as the writer suggests, "from" implies the totality of an individual's work, from which a selection has been made, whereas "by" refers to the author viewed as a person. The crucial point, however, is that the statement about the choice made must be in *non-specific* terms: that is, one may say, for instance, "a selection from Beethoven" or "... by Beethoven", "a lovely tune from Beethoven" or "... by Beethoven", but *not* "the Sixth Symphony from Beethoven" - here only "by" is possible; likewise, one may say "I shall now read you something from (or by) Shakespeare" but not "I shall now read you *Hamlet* from Shakespeare". To anyone who knows Chopin, then, the above sentence will sound quite wrong. To someone, however, for whom the Thirteenth Nocturne is "just another nocturne", who may not be sure what a nocturne is anyway ("a tune for sleepwalkers", it was once said), or who sees the term as having primarily the general sense of "tune", the sentence would be more acceptable. But, for a general rule, "by" is the safe form to use when individual authors are being mentioned, "from" when it is the name of their works (as in "from the Sixth Symphony").

DAVID CRYSTAL