

Fachfragen

In *Harper's Magazine*, March 1972, S. 51 bzw. 52 fand ich folgende Bedingungssätze, die nach der Darstellung vieler Grammatiken falsch sind: "If housewives *would* separate recyclable materials from the rest of their daily trash, municipal refuse disposal costs would be greatly reduced, and recycling would be that much easier."

und

"The Chinese offered to return the hostages if the Western armies *would* withdraw." (Auszeichnungen von mir)

Meine Fragen:

1. Ist dieser Gebrauch so zu verstehen, wie bei Thomson & Martinet, *A Practical English Grammar* (London, 1969) angegeben? Dort heißt es (S. 132, Ziffer 217 a i): "*will / would* used, not in a future sense, but to mean *am / was willing, don't / didn't mind* can be placed after *if*."

2. Ist es, wenn man Thomson & Martinet folgt, noch sinnvoll, den Gebrauch des *conditional* nach "if" überhaupt als falsch anzusehen?

WALTER RAUHAUS ·

KAMP-LINTFORT

This is not quite the use given by Thompson and Martinet, though it is very similar. In section 217 of their book, they are talking only of the use of *will* or *would* in conditional clauses as part of polite or tentative requests, as in "If you would do this, I should be very grateful". Now the above examples are not readily given an interpretation in terms of politeness – particularly the second! The implications are more forceful and negative: the suggestion is that the housewife is *not* going to be doing these things, and that there is some *doubt* about the withdrawal of the armies. Compare the construction *would only*, for instance: "... if the Western armies *would only* withdraw", which indicates the nuance more exactly. The general point here is well dealt with by Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik, in

A grammar of contemporary English (Longman, 1972, p. 747), though they do not use precisely this kind of example. They make a distinction between "open" and "hypothetical" conditions: "The open condition leaves unresolved the question of the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of the condition, and hence also the truth of the proposition expressed by the main clause. A hypothetical condition, on the other hand, conveys the expectation that the condition will *not be fulfilled*." An example of an open condition would be: "If you stroke the cat, she will purr". An example of a hypothetical condition would be: "If you really wanted to, we could get married tomorrow". The examples from *Harper's* are clearly hypothetical conditions. *Would* is unlikely to occur in *if*-clauses expressing open conditions.

It therefore follows that to use the conditional in an *if*-clause is certainly going to be wrong if the above implications are not intended on the part of the speaker.

DAVID CRYSTAL



Can you please explain why the following sentence is impossible: "There are already schools having announced evening classes at which young men can learn baby care."

JENNIFER WOOD · DORTMUND

The general rule here is that perfective aspect cannot normally be expressed in a non-finite construction operating as postmodification to a noun, *when this is restrictive in function*. It is possible to have, for example, "The schools, having announced evening classes, were able to ..."; but it is not possible to have a restrictive use, *"The schools having announced evening classes are in a better position", where a relative clause would have to be used: "The schools who have announced ...". Present aspect is not affected by this: "The schools announcing evening classes are in the majority". And there is a small category of exceptions, when an indefinite nominal head is used: "Anyone having seen the girl should tell the police immediately".

DAVID CRYSTAL

Beilagenhinweis

Diesem Heft liegt ein Prospekt des Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, Paderborn, bei. Wir bitten um Beachtung.

Fachfragen

Unter dem Stichwort „Wie auf einem Pulverfaß sitzen“ fand ich in zwei Nachschlagewerken folgende Angaben:

1. Bei Taylor / Gottschalk, *A German – English Dictionary of Idioms*, München: Hueber, 31969, heißt es:

to be sitting (living) on the top of (on the edge of) a volcano (on a charge of dynamite; on a powder-barrel)

Beispielsatz: Until the population received the reassuring news of the failure of the revolution, they were sitting (living) on the top of (on the edge of) a volcano (on a charge of dynamite; on a powder-barrel).

2. Bei Hackenberg, *Englische idiomatische Redewendungen*, Leipzig: VEB Verlag Enzyklopädie, 21965, heißt es:

to sleep (oder to stand) on a volcano

Beispielsatz: The crisis came to a head, and we were all sleeping on a volcano.

In beiden Beispielsätzen steht die idiomatische Redewendung in der Verlaufsform.

Vielleicht hat das die Autoren Taylor / Gottschalk dazu verleitet, auch das Idiom in der Verlaufsform des Infinitivs zu zitieren.

Meines Erachtens hat Hackenberg recht, die Redewendung im einfachen Infinitiv wiederzugeben.

So heißt es auch in Langenscheidts Großwörterbuch *Englisch-Deutsch* von Heinz Messinger, 1972, unter dem Stichwort: (wie) auf einem Pulverfaß sitzen – to sit on the top of a volcano.

BERNHARD KERSTEN · BEVENSEN

If the aim of an idioms dictionary is to present an idiom in its most frequently used form, in the first instance, then the progressive is certainly the one to use in this case. There is no significance to this other than the reflection of normal usage of the verb *sit*, which in the present tense in the sense of 'place oneself on a chair, etc.' is hardly ever used in the simple form without an additional specific implication – either of habitual activity ('John sits in his study for an hour every day') or of a technical interpretation, e.g. 'The judge sits at Gloucester tomorrow' or 'That jacket sits very well on you'. A dictionary ought not to imply that the idiom could not occur at all in the simple form, however, as one might think from the above quotation from Taylor / Gottschalk. Whereas it is a convention that quoting a form in the simple aspect implies that it can take the progressive (unless there is a specific indication to the contrary), it is not the case that quoting the form in the progressive implies the reverse. The progressive is the linguistically 'marked' form, and by this the reader is made to feel that a special point is being made – as it were, if he wasn't being expected to use the marked form for the idiom, why did the dictionary-writer put it in the first place? Now, for a German-English contrastive dictionary, there is some point in doing this, as it will help attract the German learner away from a use of the simple present, which is the semantically complex use. I would not be critical of Taylor / Gottschalk, then, as long as some reference to the possibility of the simple form were added. (Incidentally, one should note that 'the' is usually omitted in everyday usage: 'We were sitting on top of a volcano ...')

DAVID CRYSTAL

Fachfragen

In einer Klassenarbeit tauchte folgender Satz (in einer Übersetzung eines Handelsbriefes) auf: "We are of the opinion that the deviation between the shipping samples and the *basic ones* does not ...". Die Anfrage lautet: a) kann der Satz in dieser Konstruktion angenommen werden? b) kann hier überhaupt mit *basic ones* übersetzt werden? Müßte dieser Satz nicht von Grund auf umgeändert werden?

CARL HEINZ RUPPERT.
BREMERHAVEN

Grammatically, this sentence follows the rules, but it is very awkward stylistically. *One* is used as a replacive for a previous countable noun (excluding proper nouns), which must usually be undefined ('He asked for the letter I'd written, and I gave him one' is anomalous). There are two possibilities: *one* may refer back to the whole of a previous indefinite Noun Phrase (as in 'John's got a new car, and I have one too'), or it may refer back to the head of the Noun Phrase only (as in 'Would you like a new edition? No, I already have a satisfactory one, thanks'). In the second case, which is the present example, there must be some

premodification for the noun, to ensure that the reference goes to the head of the previous NP only, and not to the whole phrase ('I already have one' = 'a new edition', in the second example). It should also be noted that the plurals differ: the plural of the NP-replacive is *some*; the plural of the Noun-head replacive is *ones*, as here. *Sample* is countable; *one* is referring to the head only (as the correlative construction makes clear); and so there is no grammatical problem, and the sentence does not need to be re-cast.

But it is stylistically awkward. A contrast is being made between *shipping samples* and *basic ones*. As *ones* is semantically empty, the whole weight of the contrast is thrown back onto the opposition between *shipping* and *basic* – which is an odd opposition, at first sight. A more obvious lexical opposition here would be '... between the shipping samples and the docking ones ...', for instance (though I do not know if this makes any commercial sense or not), and the awkwardness disappears. In other words, any difficulties with this sentence arise out of our uncertainty as to what *shipping samples* means, and about the naturalness of the opposition between *shipping* and *basic*. Context would presumably resolve this uncertainty. To eliminate the awkwardness in the present

example, however, one would have to avoid the use of *one* altogether, and this could lead to even greater stylistic problems, e.g. replacing it by *samples* might be criticised as repetitious, and reordering ('... between the shipping and the basic samples ...') could be ambiguous, if *shipping* were taken as a noun. Frankly, I prefer the version as it stands.

DAVID CRYSTAL



In einer Englischarbeit wird die Aufgabe gestellt, den Satz "The doctor called up his patient's mother saying: 'I shall keep you informed about your daughter's state of health at any time'" in *indirect speech* zu transformieren. Die Version des Schülers: "The doctor called up his patient's mother saying that he *would* keep her informed ...". Der Lehrer verbesserte: "The doctor ... saying that he *should* keep her informed ...". Würde der Gebrauch von "should" in diesem Falle nicht eine (moralische) Verpflichtung ausdrücken, einen Sinn also, der dem der direkten Rede im ursprünglichen Satz nicht entspricht?

RAINER HELLWICH · HANNOVER

This correction is more than simply unnecessary: it is positively misleading, in that it does allow an additional interpretation which could alter the whole sense of the message. One of the most dominant uses of *should* is in the sense of 'ought to', and it is likely that this meaning would be read into the teacher's version, particularly if any emphasis is placed on the word *should*. The teacher's sentence might then continue: 'The doctor called up the patient's mother, saying that he should keep her informed, but that he wasn't going to, because he had more important things to do that day'. This implication is not possible with *would*.

In traditional terms, of course, it is unacceptable to have *would* as the reported correlate of *shall*, but here is another case where the traditional rules have been left behind by the movement of the language. The difference in meaning between *shall* and *will* in the present indicative, in non-emphatic uses, is now largely lost, as is well-known. It

is not semantically odd, then, to find *would* being used for *shall* – or, for that matter, *should* being used for *will*. For example, ‘He will do it on Thursday’ might become ‘He said he should do it on Thursday’, though of course the latter use carries with it an implication of tentativeness. *Should* has many so-called marginal uses which allow it to be used in relation to the semantic range of *would*, and which are in fact extremely common in everyday conversation. Apart from the tentativeness use just mentioned, there is the ‘putative’ use, as in ‘I am surprised that this should have happened’, or the polite, formal substitute for *would*, so common in the speech of characters in nineteenth century novels, but now sounding a little archaic, as in ‘He said in his letter that as usual he should get the six o’clock train’. Bearing in mind the fluid state of the language in its auxiliary system, and the fact that we are often dealing with emotional meanings in this area, then, it will not be surprising to find ambiguities and overlaps in English usage, and I would expect queries such as the above to be common, and possibly even to increase over the next few years.

DAVID CRYSTAL