

## Fachfragen

In einem Beiheft zum Schulfunk des Westdeutschen Rundfunks *English for Seniors* findet sich folgender Satz:

Beerbohm's own memories of an occasion *in* school when he was unwilling to share a gift of food with the other boys are used to prove that he did not have the instinct of a host, with a desire to dominate other people, rather than that he was greedy.

Wörterbücher geben für den Begriff *auf* oder *in der Schule* nur die Übersetzung *at school* an. Auch die Nachschlagewerke *The Learner's Dictionary of English Grammar* und *Grammatisches Wörterbuch – Englisch* enthalten diesbezüglich nur den Satz: "The children are at school."

Wie erklärt sich dieses seltsame *in school* im obigen Satz?

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The question of choice of preposition cannot be decided without distinguishing the two main senses of *school* involved. In its concrete sense – a particular place of education – one may use either *at* or *in*, depending on whether the school is being seen as a single unit, like a point on a map, or as a physical domain within which various activities take place. In the first perspective, *at* is the expected preposition, e.g. "Where are the children? They're at school"; in the second, *in* would be normal, e.g. "Would you behave like that in school?" Often, however, no clear distinction is intended, and the two prepositions are in free variation, e.g. "What did you do in/at school today?" In an abstract sense, *school* can refer to the period of time during which one's schooling took place; this being a single notion, distant (in a temporal or physical sense) from the speaker, it relates more to the first sense above, and *at* is the expected preposition, e.g. "Where were you at school?", "Where are you at school?" (= Where do you go to school?). *In* in these examples would be either impossible or demand a special interpretation, e.g. "Where are you in school?" might mean "What position are you in your class?" In the example quoted, then, either the "physically

within" sense is being intended (and opposed, for example, to the sort of thing the boys did out of school), or it is a performance "blending" of the physical with the temporarily distant meanings, the *in* being used, unpredictably.

DAVID CRYSTAL

Im englischen Grammatikunterricht stößt man immer wieder auf Schwierigkeiten, wenn die Ergänzung zu einem *noun* durch den *infinitive* oder das *gerund* behandelt werden soll. Wann steht nur der *infinitive*, wann nur das *gerund*, wann sind beide möglich (*ability to do*, *delight in doing*, *honour to speak/of speaking*)?

Alle bisherigen Versuche, hier Regeln zu geben, scheinen nicht geglückt. Jespersen und Hornby haben sich damit beschäftigt; Fritz Fiedler hat eine Zusammenstellung der häufigsten *nouns* (neben Verben und Adjektiven) gemacht (vgl. *Englischer Sprachgebrauch und englische Schulgrammatik*), aber auch er bleibt dabei im lexikalischen Bereich, ohne zur Kompetenz vorzudringen.

Gibt es für die aufgeworfene Frage verlässliche Kriterien, die, über den Einzelfall hinausweisend, generelle Anwendbarkeit besitzen?

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This area is indeed one of the most complex and unstudied of English grammar, and the tendency has been to cite lists of lexical items that conform to one or the other pattern, with little attempt at providing any kind of general explanation in grammatical terms. I do not myself profess to be able to present a comprehensive classification and explanation of all the syntactic restrictions involved, but I do think it is possible to identify the general nature of the grammatical problem. In my opinion, the difficulty arises due to one's having to talk about the noun phrase using a metalanguage which was designed for talking about the verb phrase – and which until recently was not commonly used even there. The issue is one of aspect, familiar when one is discussing simple vs. continuous verb forms, stative or dynamic verbs, or perfect and preterite tense forms, but not so familiar when talking about the meanings of nouns. When both forms of postmodification are possible, the main aspectual distinction seems to be that the infinitival construction suggests a specific context for the application of the noun, whereas the participial construction is more suggestive of a general, ongoing state of affairs. The point

applies also to verb complementation generally: Quirk *et al.*, in *A grammar of contemporary English* (1972, p. 835), talk about the sense of "fulfilment" of the participle compared with that of "potentiality" for the infinitive, though they emphasise that the distinction is not always of importance. The following pairs of examples illustrate the general tendency:

- (1) I'll remember visiting Spain (all my life).  
I'll remember to visit Spain (when I go abroad next).
- (2) I heard the door bang (suddenly, at 11 o'clock).  
I heard the door banging (repeatedly, all night).
- (3) There are two ways of solving this problem (and you can look them up in this textbook).  
There are two ways to solve this problem (in my opinion. Here's my first proposal).

The fact that in some circumstances the two sentences may be synonymous does not mean that there is no potential for making a meaning contrast, when the context requires it.

Now, if some such distinction of an aspectual kind is valid, it may help to explain those cases of nouns where only one construction is possible. Hypothetically, (a) if the head noun is one which relates to a general, ongoing, routine, etc. state of affairs,

then one would expect a participial postmodification; (b) if, on the other hand, the noun is specific, referring to a determinate phenomenon, one would expect the infinitive; and (c) if the noun is ambiguous in these respects, one would expect both.

- (a) There is the possibility of voting by post.  
He takes a delight in being out when we call.  
He's discovered a new method of cooking eels.
- (b) Has he the ability to climb that mountain?  
I don't know how I got the strength to hit him.  
It's not a nice place to go.
- (c) There's more than one way of doing/to do it.  
Will I have the opportunity of speaking/to speak to Max Smith? (= both "Will the situation generally be opportune?" and "Will a specific occasion arise?")

I am well aware of the difficulties involved in making a view of this kind precise: apart from the problem of specifying the meanings involved with precision, the hypothesis needs to be tested against a wide range of nouns. I cite it, therefore, not as a definitive view, but as an illustration of the *kind* of general factor that needs to be considered in attempting to come to grips with this problem. I hope there will be further discussion.

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