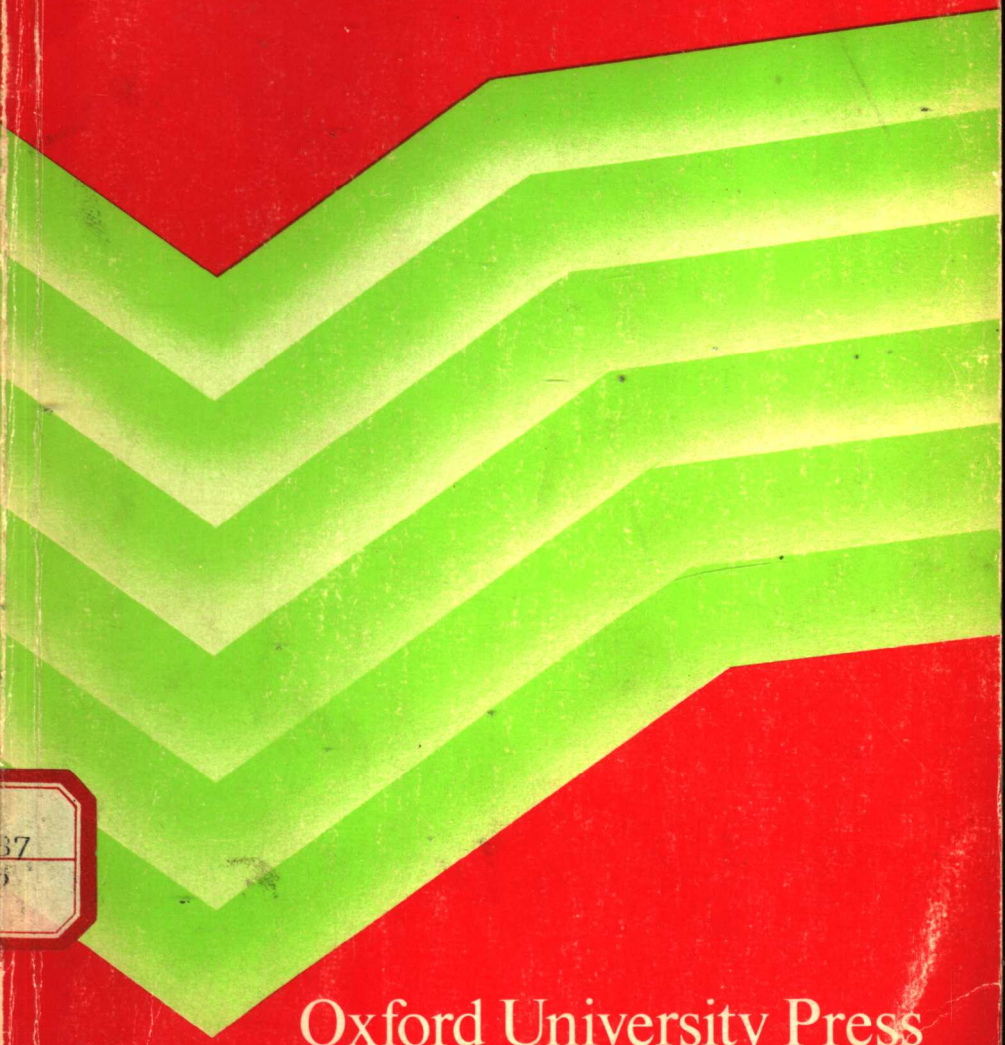
ENGLISH FOR PROFICIENCY

SECOND EDITION

D. H. Spencer



Oxford University Press

English for Proficiency

D. H. SPENCER

SECOND EDITION

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

OXFORD LONDON GLASGOW NEW YORK
TORONTO MELBOURNE WELLINGTON CAPE TOWN
IBADAN NAIROBI DAR ES SALAAM LUSAKA
DELHI BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS KARACHI
KUALA LUMPUR SINGAPORE JAKARTA HONG KONG TOKYO

ISBN 0 19 432155 X

The compiler and publisher wish to thank
the authors for permission to reprint these pieces
all of which were originally broadcast talks
reprinted in *The Listener*

First published 1963
Reprinted 1965, 1966, 1967, 1969 and 1971
Second edition 1975
Reprinted 1977

Phototypeset by Tradespools Ltd, Frome, Somerset
Printed in Great Britain by
The Camelot Press Ltd, Southampton

Contents

Preface

THE main purpose of this book is to help students prepare for the Certificate of Proficiency in English examination of the Local Examinations Syndicate of the University of Cambridge. In this new edition half the exercises have been rewritten to meet the requirements of the 1975 syllabus. At the same time the book should prove of value to anyone who has reached a fairly advanced stage in the study of English as a second language. I believe that while there is an abundance of good textbooks for the teaching of English to adult learners in the early stages, it is still not so easy to find suitable books for the later stages.

All the reading passages are taken from broadcast articles published in *The Listener* between 1958 and 1960. They are not simplified in any way, and present examples of contemporary English prose covering a wide range of subjects. Since the majority of people learning English today are doing so not in order to study our literature but in order to improve their professional qualifications, I believe that the English they select for close study should be of the kind that they are likely to need to read and write for themselves, rather than the kind which, for want of a more precise term, is usually described as literary.

The fact that the articles were originally written for broadcasting, that is for speaking, means that the language presents few problems of style. This kind of language might be called 'Considered Spoken English'. With one or two deliberate exceptions, included for the sake of variety, it is neither too colloquial, nor too formal, nor too 'literary'; and such difficulties of vocabulary and idiom as a student at this level might be expected to encounter are explained in footnotes.

All the exercises are derived from the passages. The intention is to oblige the reader to study the text closely, and in this way to focus his attention on the structure of the language. In such exercises as are not of the examination type, sentence patterns of relatively high frequency have been used, the text itself

serving as a model. Obviously, however, the range of patterns covered in this way is limited, and students who desire information on constructions not included are advised to consult an up-to-date work of reference such as A. S. Hornby's *Guide to Patterns and Usage in English*. Exercises in various kinds of free composition also derive their subject matter from the text, so that the burden of finding ideas is not added to the burden of expression in a foreign language.

A word to the teacher. I suggest that students be required to make a preliminary study of each chapter by themselves, so that classroom time is not wasted on reading. The footnotes, though not exhaustive, should be sufficient to obviate the need for frequent recourse to a dictionary or other work of reference. In class the teacher can then make any further explanation which is asked for or which seems necessary, and proceed to do some of the exercises orally. This oral work is a co-operative effort, with the teacher as arbiter to ensure that the responses finally accepted are correct ones. Model answers can often be written on the blackboard. Then, when it comes to doing the exercises in writing, the students will write with more facility and fewer mistakes, and their written work will serve to revise what they have learnt in class. Other exercises based on the same material will no doubt suggest themselves; and I would certainly recommend the occasional dictation and reproduction exercise. With abler classes I have found it possible to use the themes of some passages for free discussion and for short prepared or extempore speeches by the students.

1

On not Answering the Telephone

WILLIAM PLOMER

IF, at the end of a conversation, somebody says to me, 'As soon as I know, I'll ring you up', he is taking too much for granted. He is proposing to attempt the impossible. So I have to say, 'I'm afraid you can't. You see, I'm not on the telephone. I just haven't got a telephone.'

Reactions to this are various. Some people say, 'Oh, but you must have a telephone!' as if they thought I had mislaid[1] it somewhere, or forgotten about it. Some people say, 'How terribly inconvenient! How can you do without a telephone?' And some say, 'Oh, you wise man, how I envy you!' But the usual reaction is astonishment, and although I regard myself as a quiet, conventional sort of character, I find myself being stared at as a wild or wilful eccentric, especially when somebody says, 'Well, if I can't ring you up, perhaps you'll ring me up', and I reply, 'Perhaps; but I'm more likely to write to you.'

Why don't I have a telephone? Not because I pretend to be wise or pose as unusual. There are two chief reasons: because I don't really like the telephone and because I find I can still work and play, eat, breathe and sleep without it. Why don't I like the telephone? Because I think it is a pest and a time-waster. It may create unnecessary suspense and anxiety, as when you wait for an expected call that doesn't come; or irritating delay, as when you keep ringing a number that is always engaged. As for speaking in a public telephone box, that seems to me really horrible. You would not use it unless you were in a hurry, and because you are in a hurry you will find other people waiting before you. When you do get into the box, you are half asphyxiated[2] by stale, unventilated air, flavoured with cheap face-powder and chain-smoking; and by the time you have begun your conversation your back is chilled by the cold looks of somebody who is fidgeting[3] to take your place.

If you have a telephone in your own house, you will admit

[1] put it by mistake where it could not easily be found
[2] suffocated, deprived of oxygen
[3] to fidget means to move about restlessly, to be uneasy about something

that it tends to ring when you least want it to ring—when you are asleep, or in the middle of a meal or a conversation, or when you are just going out, or when you are in your bath. Are you strong-minded enough to ignore it, to say to yourself, 'Ah, well, it will all be the same in a hundred years' time'? You are not. You think there may be some important news or message for you. Have you never rushed dripping from the bath, or chewing from the table, or dazed from the bed, only to be told that you are a wrong number? You were told the truth. In my opinion all telephone numbers are wrong numbers. If, of course, your telephone rings and you decide not to answer it, then you will have to listen to an idiotic bell ringing and ringing in what is supposed to be the privacy of your own house. You might as well buy a bicycle bell and ring it yourself.

Suppose you ignore the telephone when it rings, and suppose that, for once, somebody has an important message for you. I can assure you that if a message is really important it will reach you sooner or later. Think of the proverb: 'Ill news travels apace'.[4] I must say good news seems to travel just as fast. And think of the saying: 'The truth will out'. It will. But suppose you answer the telephone when it rings. If, when you take off the receiver, you say, 'Hullo!', just think how absurd that is. Why, you might be saying 'Hullo' to a total stranger, a thing you would certainly think twice about before doing in public, if you were English.

But perhaps, when you take off the receiver, you give your number or your name. But you don't even know whom you are giving it to! Perhaps you have been indiscreet enough to have your name and number printed in the telephone directory, a book with a large circulation, a successful book so often reprinted as to make any author envious, a book more in evidence than Shakespeare or the Bible, and found in all sorts of private and public places. By your self-advertisement you have enabled any stranger, bore, intruder, or criminal to engage you in conversation at a moment's notice in what ought to be the privacy of your own home. It serves you right if you find it impossible to escape from some idle or inquisitive chatterbox,[5] or from somebody who wants something for nothing, or from some reporter bent on[6] questioning you about your own affairs or about the private life of some friend who has just eloped[7] or met with a fatal accident.

[4] swiftly
[5] person who talks too much and foolishly
[6] eager to or determined to do something
[7] run away from home with a lover

But, you will say, you need not have your name printed in the telephone directory, and you can have a telephone which is only usable for outgoing calls. Besides, you will say, isn't it important to have a telephone in case of sudden emergency—illness, accident, or fire? Of course, you are right, but here in a thickly populated country like England one is seldom far from a telephone in case of dreadful necessity. All the same, I felt an instant sympathy with a well-known actor whom I heard on the radio the other day. He was asked: 'Suppose you were left alone to live on a desert[8] island, and you were allowed to take just one luxury with you, what would you choose?' 'I would take a telephone', he said, 'and I would push the wire into the sand, and my greatest pleasure would be to sit and look at it, and to think: "It will never ring and I shall never have to answer it."'

If, like me, one is without a telephone, somebody is sure to say, 'Oh, but don't you find you have to write an awful lot of letters?' The answer to that is, 'Yes, but I should have to write an awful lot of letters anyway'. This may bring the remark, 'Ah well, if you don't have a telephone, at least you must have a typewriter'. And the answer to that is 'No'.

'What, no telephone and no typewriter! Do please explain why.' Well, I am a professional man of letters, and when I was younger I thought a typewriter would be convenient. I even thought it was necessary, and that editors and publishers would expect anything sent to them to be typewritten. So I bought myself a typewriter and taught myself to type, and for some years I typed away busily. But I did not enjoy typing. I happen to enjoy the act of writing. I enjoy forming letters or words with a pen, and I never could enjoy tapping the keys of a typewriter. There again, there was a bell—only a little bell that rang at the end of each line—but still, a bell. And the fact is, I am not mechanically minded, and the typewriter is a machine. I have never been really drawn to machines. I don't like oiling, cleaning or mending them. I do not enjoy making them work. To control them gives me no sense of power—or not the kind of power that I find interesting. And machines do not like me. When I touch them they tend to break down, get jammed,[9] catch fire, or blow up.

As with telephones and typewriters, so with cars. I obtained my first driving licence in South Africa at the age of seventeen, having been taught to drive in the rush hours[10] in the middle of the busy city of Johannesburg. I needed the car for use in

[8] uninhabited [9] immovable, tightly squeezed or wedged together
[10] the hours at which traffic is busiest; particularly in the mornings and evenings when people are going to and returning from work

another part of Africa where in those days there was hardly any motor traffic. The actual process of driving soon became automatic, and my sole idea was to get from one place to another as soon as possible. I therefore drove fast, and within a week or two the speedometer was broken. I never had it mended. I was not a reckless driver, I did not lose control of the car, even on rocky or sandy tracks or driving with chains through deep mud. I never killed or injured anybody. But I was bored, and if circumstances had allowed I should have preferred to walk. Nowadays, living in an over-crowded country where traffic is continuously on the increase and often congested,[11] and where driving is controlled by a great many rules and regulations, I feel no temptation whatever to drive a car.

But, you may say, am I not aware that we are living in a machine age? Am I trying to put the clock back? Am I an escapist, a crank[12], a simple-lifer? Not at all. It is a matter of preference, not principle, that I choose, as far as possible, to do without these things—a telephone, a typewriter, and a car. If other people are willing—and they seem entirely willing and even eager—to make and use these machines for my benefit, I am not less willing to let them do so. I am perfectly ready to pay to be driven about in trains, cars, or aircraft, to take lifts instead of walking upstairs, and to use moving staircases instead of unmoving ones. But I do not wish to be dominated by machines. I do not want to oil them, mend them, or clean them. I do not want to feed a typewriter with sheets of paper, to lose the use of my legs by travelling always by car, or to be summoned, with or without warning, by the telephone.

Is there any conclusion to be drawn from my obstinacy and wilfulness, my escapism, if you like to call it that? I think perhaps I had better try to justify myself by trying to prove that what I like is good. At least I have proved to myself that what many people think necessary is not necessary at all. I admit that in different circumstances—if I were a tycoon,[13] for instance, or bedridden—I might find a telephone essential. But then if I were a secretary or taxi-driver I should find a typewriter or a car essential. Let me put it another way: there are two things for which the English seem to show particular aptitude: one is mechanical invention, the other is literature. My own business happens to be with the use of words—but I see I must now stop using them. I have just been handed a slip

[11] overfull, very crowded
[12] eccentric person, one whose behaviour is unconventional
[13] wealthy and powerful business man

of paper to say that somebody is waiting to speak to me on the telephone. I think I had better answer it. After all, one never knows, it may be something important.

EXERCISES

1 *After each of the unfinished statements or questions you will find four possible ways of finishing it. Choose the one which fits best in the context.*

(a) The author says (ll. 32–46) telephones tend to ring
- **A** at inconvenient times.
- **B** during the night.
- **C** when the house is empty.
- **D** before breakfast.

(b) If your name and number are printed in a telephone directory (ll. 58–73) you may
- **A** be accused of self-advertisement.
- **B** be rung up by undesirable strangers.
- **C** have to pay more for your telephone.
- **D** never have a moment's privacy.

(c) The actor (ll. 80–7) said he would take a telephone with him to the desert island in order to
- **A** have at least one luxury available.
- **B** keep in touch with civilization.
- **C** save himself from boredom.
- **D** enjoy the fact that it would never ring.

(d) The author doesn't own a typewriter (ll. 88–111) because
- **A** he enjoys the physical act of writing.
- **B** he cannot afford one.
- **C** he doesn't like bells.
- **D** he has never learnt to use one.

(e) Why did he learn to drive in South Africa? (ll. 112–28)
- **A** It was essential for his work in Johannesburg.
- **B** He loved the idea of speed.
- **C** He needed a car elsewhere in Africa.
- **D** His employers insisted he should be able to drive.

2 *Answer the following questions:*

(a) What do the three things the author particularly dislikes have in common, and why does he dislike them?

(b) Explain why the author so obviously exaggerates the disadvantages of having a telephone.

(c) Comment on the saying: *The truth will out* (l. 52).

(d) What do you think is meant by *instant sympathy* in line 81?
(e) Explain the point of the sentence: *And machines do not like me* (l. 109).
(f) Why doesn't the author like driving a car in England?
(g) Describe the kind of person who might be called *a simple-lifer*.
(h) How does the author deny that he is a crank?

3 *Fill each of the blanks with a suitable word or phrase:*
(a) If he were a business-man, . . . a telephone.
(b) One of the things he learnt to do in South Africa as a young man . . . a car.
(c) He shivered as he came in and said: 'How . . . !'
(d) The more he drove, . . .
(e) 'We can go by bus if you like, but it's not far.' 'Then we . . .'

4 *Study these sentences:*
How terribly inconvenient! (l. 8)
How can you do without a telephone? (l. 9)
How I envy you! (l. 10)
How absurd that is! (l. 54)
Now write two sentences of your own to illustrate each of these structures beginning with how *(eight sentences in all).*

5 *Study these sentences:*
Are you strong-minded *enough* to ignore it? (ll. 35–6)
Perhaps you have been indiscreet *enough* to have your name printed in the telephone directory. (ll. 60–1)
Now write five sentences of your own, each using the word enough *in the same way (adjective + enough + infinitive).*

6 *The following two sentences contain examples of the causative use of* have *(to have something done):*
Perhaps you have been indiscreet enough to *have your name and number printed* in the telephone directory. (ll. 60–1)
I never *had it mended.* (l. 120)
Write five sentences of your own illustrating this use of have. *Vary the tense.*

7 *Study these sentences:*
When you *do* get into the box . . . (l. 27)
Do please explain why. (ll. 94–5)
Do, does *and* did *may be used in affirmative sentences to show special emphasis. In speaking, these words would then carry stress.*

Rewrite the second of the following pairs of sentences to show special emphasis:

(a) Isn't her dress pretty? I like it.
(b) Why didn't you see him when I told you to? I went to see him, but he was out.
(c) I'm very fond of garlic. So am I, but it smells rather strongly.
(d) Why didn't you call on me yesterday? Well, I rang you up, but there was no answer.
(e) The party begins at 8 p.m. Come if you can.
(f) She's won first prize again. I think she's lucky.
(g) Are you sure you won't come? Ring me up if you change your mind.
(h) I'm sorry if you missed the appointment. But I gave you plenty of warning.
(i) Is that a new coat she's wearing? Her husband spends a lot of money on her.
(j) When are you going away? Please let me know in good time.

8 *Study these sentences:*

I don't like oiling, cleaning or mending them. I do not enjoy making them work. (ll. 106–7)

A few common verbs are followed by the gerund as a direct object. Complete the following sentences:

(a) It has stopped . . .
(b) Have you finished . . .
(c) Would you mind . . .
(d) If you can't mend it with a nail, try . . .
(e) I shall never forget . . .
(f) It is necessary to go on . . .
(g) Do you remember . . .
(h) We all enjoy . . .
(i) She prefers . . .
(j) When did you begin . . .
(k) Don't start . . .
(l) Most people love . . .
(m) Lots of people hate . . .
(n) They continued . . .
(o) I really can't bear . . .

(Note that some of these verbs can also be followed by an infinitive with to, *in which case the meaning is sometimes different.)*

9 *The last four sentences—beginning with* My own business happens to be with the use of words—*supply a neat ending to*

the essay. Try to provide a different ending, using approximately the same number of words (59).

10 *Either* (a) *Describe how you yourself learnt to use a particular tool of your trade.*

Or (b) *Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of having a motor-car.*

2

The Bradford Schoolmaster

J. B. PRIESTLEY

THE Bradford[1] schoolmaster in the title of this talk was my father, Jonathan Priestley. He died thirty-five years ago; but all my recollections of him are still clear, bright, fresh, and the last walk we took together, not long before he died, is sharper in my memory than most of the events of the last few years.

Many writers—it is a familiar pattern—were never able to achieve a satisfying and pleasant relationship with their fathers, whom they came later to see as symbols of a society they felt compelled to denounce.[2] This was not my experience. During my middle teens[3] my father and I might have been at odds now and again, as we shall see, but earlier and later we enjoyed a very happy relationship. He was stocky,[4] round-headed, red-faced, with bright blue eyes, fair hair, a gingerish[5] moustache; and he was of mixed West Riding[6] and Scots blood. He walked eight miles a day to and from his school, played a useful game of cricket with a local league side, and, like so many Bradford people then, spent much time walking in the Dales.[7]

His father, my grandfather, was a working man, employed in one of the local mills, but by some miracle of thrift[8] he was able to send my father to a teachers' training college. Finally, after years of teaching, my father was appointed headmaster of a large new elementary school,[9] called Green Lane. And it was at this school, more than fifty years ago, that the first school

[1] Bradford is a large industrial town in the county of Yorkshire in Northern England
[2] to speak against; accuse
[3] the ages between 13 and 19 inclusive
[4] short and strong
[5] of a red colour, reddish
[6] the county of Yorkshire has three divisions known as West, East, and North Riding. The word has the same root as 'third'
[7] a dale is a valley in northern England and Scotland. The Yorkshire Dales are famous for their beauty
[8] economy, care in spending money
[9] primary school

meals in England were served. Bradford at that time was a progressive city, with Labour very much in evidence.[10] Margaret Macmillan,[11] for whom my father had a high regard, was working then in Bradford. The pioneers[12] were on the move.

A determinedly moderate man in his pleasures and style of life, my father was passionate about two things: education and socialism. He was himself a born teacher. Indeed, he could never restrain himself from teaching, and as a small boy I was frequently embarrassed by his desire to instruct everybody—people in railway carriages, for instance—though I realized even then that it was an innocent desire, quite free from vanity. He was equally ready to receive instruction. Education, to men of his generation and temperament, was something it has largely ceased to be nowadays. It was the great golden gateway to the enchanted countries of the mind. It was not merely something you had to have in order to get on in the world, to obtain a job with the district council[13] or with the big combine.[14] It was a glorious end in itself. But it could also work miracles, they believed, ridding people of ignorance, stupidity, prejudice, narrowness, greed, and indifference to the public good. True, there were plenty of men who had been expensively educated but who yet seemed anything but perfect citizens, but these were victims of class prejudice.

Here I must add that, growing up as I did in a northern industrial town, I was hardly aware of all the ramifications[15] and tests and traps of the English class system. For although in Bradford then some people might have a lot of money and others hardly any at all, there was a good deal of downright[16] social democracy.

My father's socialism belonged to the earlier and more idealistic phase of the movement, with more William Morris[17] than Karl Marx[18] in it. In one sense my father was the ideal socialist citizen. He did not want too much himself and hated to see others have too little. He was essentially a man who could

[10] the Labour (Socialist) political party's influence was easily seen
[11] one of two sisters who led a movement for reform in the education of young children
[12] a pioneer is a person who does something or goes somewhere first
[13] a group of citizens elected to administer a district
[14] a group of firms of the same kind, joined together for business
[15] the different branches or subdivisions
[16] complete, absolute
[17] William Morris (1834–96), author, painter, and decorator, with liberal socialist beliefs
[18] Karl Marx (1818–83), a pioneer Socialist and author of *Das Kapital*. His views were much more radical than those of William Morris