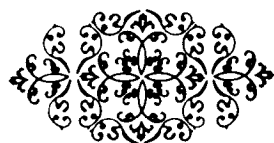


AN
ADVANCED
ENGLISH
PRACTICE
COURSE



James
Day

AN ADVANCED ENGLISH PRACTICE COURSE

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General introduction

The aims and scope of this course

This course has three aims. The students using it will probably have done anything up to six years' fairly intensive study of English at school and possibly at university. There are, however, certain mistakes which even advanced students make again and again. These mistakes vary from nationality to nationality, and largely depend on the mother tongue of the students. The first aim of the course is remedial. It tries to demonstrate how native English writers use certain tricky structures that overseas students sometimes mismanage, and then gives them practice in the correct use of those structures.

The second aim is to improve the students' powers of self-expression by expanding their vocabulary and repertoire of structures. The third is to stimulate them, through reading and discussion of sometimes provocative material, to think about and criticise both the form and the content of the passages that have been chosen to illustrate the structures practised.

The basis of any language communication depends largely on the verb, and the majority of sentences result from the interplay of static elements – nouns and adjectives – with dynamic ones – verbs and adverbs. Most students find that the English tense system needs careful study. So, although the course has been designed so that any one section of it may be used in isolation to illustrate and practise a particular structure, it develops out of a detailed examination first of tense, then of mood, then of the satellites of the verb (adverbials), via verb forms that operate as nouns (gerunds and infinitives), through noun clauses and nouns to adjectivals and adjectives. It thus leads from the simple to the compound; from the immediate to the contingent; from the definite to the indefinite; and from the concrete to the abstract. Each pattern of structures has a group of exercises attached to it. These develop from the almost absurdly simple, which aim at simply drilling the student in the correct use of the structure considered, via exercises with a closed system, where the most suitable answer is probably the most correct one, through exercises involving the student's imaginative use of the structure in a 'controlled' situation, to those where the student is allowed much more freedom of self-expression,

still practising the structure required, in a precise but not too restricted context-situation.

In each section, the purely structural exercises are preceded by a number of comprehension questions about the vocabulary and argument of the passage, and followed by suggestions for discussion and/or essays about the material touched on in the passage and related topics. This constitutes Part 1 of the book.

Part 2 concerns more extended forms of self-expression. Examples are given of different types of style, of ways of constructing a paragraph, of methods used by authors to suit vocabulary to subject, not simply as a technical device, but in order to make the writer's intention absolutely clear. Some of these examples also show how the choice of vocabulary may influence the shape of the paragraph itself.

Part 3 makes suggestions concerning the organisation of students' self-expression on a larger scale still, notably in class-discussion and in essays. So while Part 1 consists largely of expository and practice material, Part 2 attempts to develop the students' imagination, and Part 3 merely gives him what it is hoped is useful advice.

It is not necessary to use the book as a consecutive course, though it has been planned as such. It is perfectly possible to arrange work on it using related themes from certain passages on similar topics, or simply to use sections at random for purely remedial purposes. Nor is it necessary to use all the exercises from one section. The teacher may omit such exercises as he considers too easy for his students. All the same, it is often both useful and encouraging to students to give them something that they are almost certain to get 100 per cent correct first go off, particularly in remedial work. Moreover, what has been designed as a step-by-step process should be more effective when used that way, and it is hoped that the individual steps involved are not so great as to confuse or irritate either teachers or their pupils.

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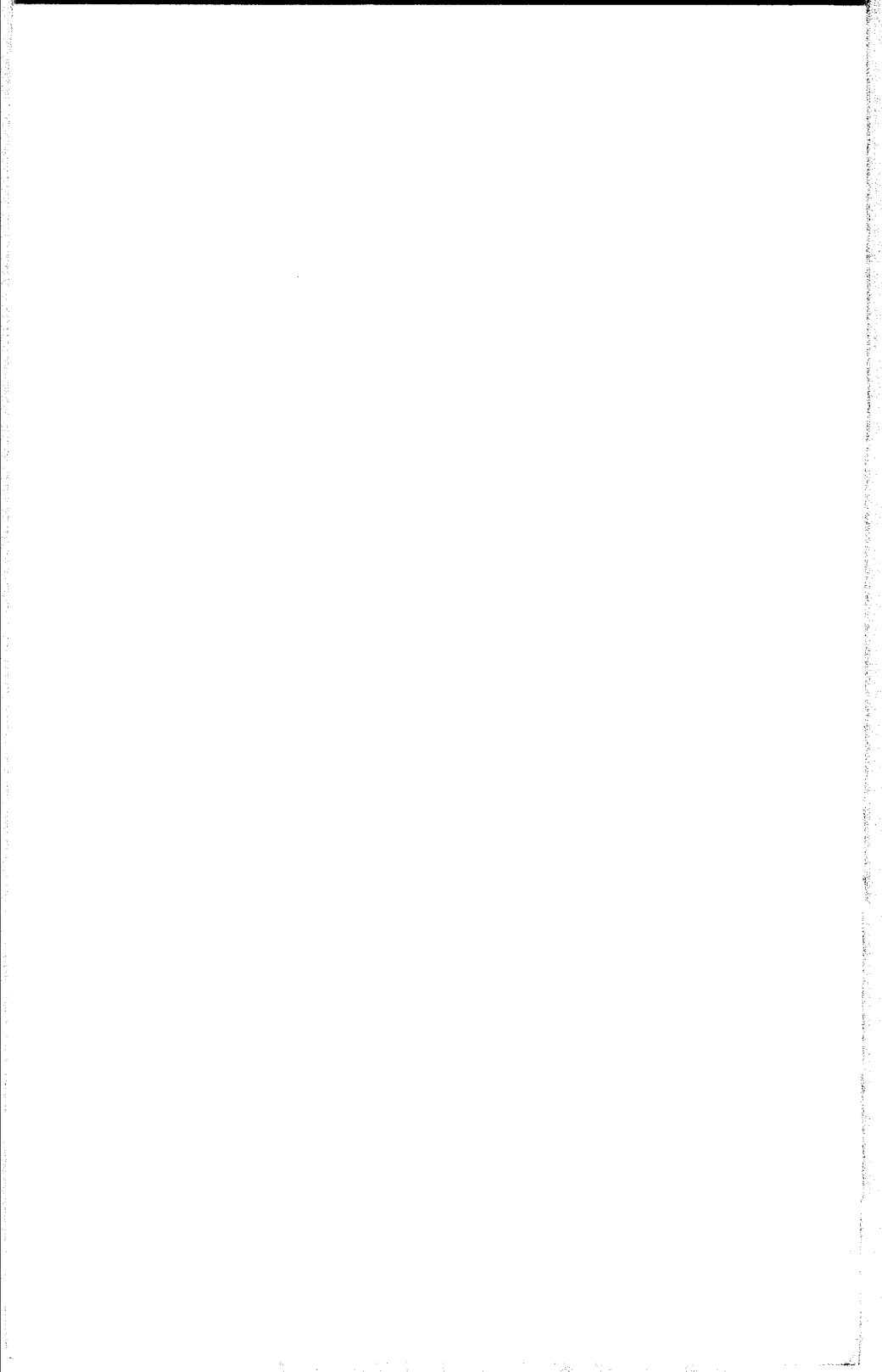
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Part I

STRUCTURES IN
THE SENTENCE



Subdivision I
The verb and
its appendages

A

The tenses

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Nearly all communications in any language fall into three categories. They may convey information, in which case they are called *statements*. They may seek information, in which case they are called *questions*; or they may require action, in which case they are called *commands*. A statement may convey information about an activity or a state of being. The state or activity may be considered as independent of any time context; it may be bound to a particular instant of time; it may be continuous; it may be repeated or habitual, not bound to a given moment or period of time, but liable to recur.

Moreover, a statement need not necessarily involve the present or actual situation. It may describe a past state or action; it may be a conjecture about the future or a wish-projection about the present; it may express regret about a past opportunity missed or mishandled. So when using language, the questions of tense, time and mood are vitally important.

Most important of all for the overseas student is the fact that the two words *tense* and *time* mean different things in English, although certain languages (e.g. French, German, Italian) use one word to name both concepts. A tense is simply a conventional verb form. It may involve a mutation of the basic form of the verb (the infinitive). It may involve, instead or in addition, the use of an auxiliary verb. It may have no time-connotation at all. It may be rigidly tied to a particular aspect of time or action. Some tenses even appear to have contradictory usages.

Traditionally the tenses in English are divided into past, present and future; their aspects into simple, continuous and perfect. Some describe states, some activities. Some indicate that the activity or state described is complete in itself, others that it is incomplete, habitual or repetitive. Some forms not normally considered as tenses indicate such things as predictions, suggestions or wish-projections. The auxiliary verbs used in some of these cases overlap with those used to form certain tenses.

The first section of this course attempts to illustrate how certain

modern writers have used the various tense forms that exist in English. As far as possible the author has tried to choose texts where the tenses are used in relation to one another, so that their various uses may be more easily differentiated. The whole of Section A of the course is devoted to this work.

Section B gives examples of conditional or conjectural statements. The writer tries to say what he wishes to happen, what he thinks or hopes will happen, or what he feels might have happened, should happen, or should have happened. This inevitably involves a study of the uses of the so-called anomalous finite verbs. Section C examines how adverbial expressions of all kinds affect the structure of the sentence.

If the verb in any sentence is regarded as the central force upon which all the others depend, the nouns or pronouns acted on by the verb may be regarded as the static force which the verb is trying to shift, so to speak. The Subdivisions II, III and IV of Part 1 deal with aspects of nouns and adjectives in a manner similar to that used in Subdivision I with verbs and adverbials. The Introductory Notes to each section should help indicate its purpose.

§1 *The use of the simple present tense
to express universal statements*

The simple present usually refers to a repeated action or else forms part of a statement whose validity is independent of any time context. It is often, therefore, not a *present* form at all. It is true that certain verbs (see below, §4, page 18) are rarely used in the true present (i.e. present progressive) form. But most verbs used in the simple present form occur in a context which clearly indicates a permanent state or repeated action. The latter case is usually indicated through an adverb or adverbial clause of frequency (such as one beginning with *whenever*). The following passage from a book on evolution shows how verbs, both active and passive, are used in the simple present form to express facts that the author considers to be true at all times anywhere.

PASSAGE I

No animal or plant *lives* in a vacuum. A living organism is constantly exchanging substances with its environment. A tree *absorbs* water and salts through its roots, and *loses* water and *absorbs* carbon dioxide through the leaves. A mammal *absorbs* water and food substances in the intestine and oxygen in the lungs. Without these exchanges, life is impossible, although some seeds, spores, and encysted animals¹ *can maintain* their organization in a vacuum, and *resume* their living activity when normal conditions *are restored*. Life therefore is an active equilibrium between the living organism and its surroundings, an equilibrium which *can be maintained* only if the environment *suits* the particular animal or plant, which *is then said to be 'adapted'* to that environment. If the animal *is placed* in an environment which *differs* too greatly from that which it *is adapted*, the equilibrium *breaks down*; a fish out of water will die.

JOHN MAYNARD SMITH: *The Theory of Evolution*

Comment

At first sight it appears that there are two exceptions to the principle stated in the introduction. In the second sentence there is the phrase 'A living organism *is constantly exchanging* substances . . .' This unusual idiom is found with certain adverbs implying a frequency so great that

¹ *encysted animal*; an animal which can enclose itself in a kind of bladder.