

SEMINAR 7 – TH PAST SIMPLE V. CONTINUOUS; USED TO V. WOULD

THE SIMPLE PAST FOR PAST TIME

- we describe events, actions and situations that occurred in the past and now are finished e.g. Sam **phoned** a moment ago.
- the situation is set at a **definite time** in the past, the sentence often contains a **time adverbial**, or the time is understood from the situation or the context

We refer to:

- a) a single definite event in the past
e.g. The Normans **invaded** England in 1066.
The plane **left** at 9 a.m.
When **did** she arrive?
- b) past habits, events that repeatedly occurred (we can also use the structure *used to*)
e.g. We **spent** our holidays in Spain when we were children.
I **smoked** 30 cigarettes a day till I gave up.
- c) a single unbroken state of affairs in the past (we can also use the structure *used to*)
e.g. I once **liked** reading novels.

Typical expressions used with the past simple tense

- yesterday, yesterday evening
- last week, month, year, last night
- two years ago, many years ago
- when? Questions
- when I was 5 years old, when I was a child
- prepositional phrases: at 4 p.m., in July, on Tuesday
- till he arrived – e.g. I waited till he arrived.
- always, often, never (*expressions used in other tenses as well*)

THE SIMPLE PAST DOES NOT ALWAYS REFER TO PAST TIME, IT CAN ALSO REFER TO PRESENT OR FUTURE TIMES.

1) in indirect speech (or thought) – if the reporting verb is in the past it results in the so called *backshift* – the verb in the subordinate clause is past as well and refers to the present time (the verb can be present too)

e.g. **Did you say** you **had** (or have) no money?

2) with certain verbs e.g. *hope, think, wonder* (verbs of volition and mental state) the past tense reflects the speaker's tentativeness – the past tense is more polite

e.g. Do you want to see me now? → **Did you want** to see me now?

I **wondered** if you could help us. (**I was wondering** ... – is even more polite)

In subordinate clauses, especially if clauses, the past tense can refer to the present or future time. e.g. I wish I **had** a memory like yours.

It's time we **took** a rest.

I'd rather you **came** tomorrow.

THE PAST PROGRESSIVE

- we describe situations or actions that were in progress at some time in the past
e.g. I **was living** abroad in 1987, so I missed the general election.

- often we don't know whether the action is completed or not
e.g. Mary **was working** on her essay last night.

- or the action has duration and is not completed
e.g. One of the boys **was drowning**, but I dived in and saved him.

- using expressions with *all* emphasize continuity
e.g. It **was raining** all night.

They **were quarrelling** the whole time they were together.

- with stative verbs the progressive tense expresses limited duration
e.g. He **was being** silly. X He was silly.
- parallel actions – two different subjects – the actions are equal
e.g. While I **was working** in the garden, my wife **was cooking** dinner.
- repeated actions
e.g. When he worked here, Roger **was always making** mistakes.
Aunt Lucy **was always turning up** without warning and **bringing** us presents.
- polite inquiries – the progressive is more tentative
e.g. I **was wondering** if you could give me a lift.
I **was hoping** to borrow some money.
- with verbs like *knock, tap or bang* (describe events without duration) the progressive implies repetition
e.g. Someone **was tapping** on the window. (= more taps)
Someone tapped on the window. (= one tap)

Past simple + past progressive

- progressive – situation or action in progress in the past (in progress – unfinished)
- simple – a shorter action or event (seen as completed)
e.g. I **cut** my finger while I **was cooking**.
I **met** her when she **was going** to the post office.

Compare the differences:

- a) When I came home, she made dinner.
When I came home, she was making dinner.
- b) The room was full of people and quite noisy, so I couldn't hear what he said.
The room was full of people and quite noisy, so I couldn't hear what he was saying.

d) What did you do when you saw the accident?

What were you doing when you saw the accident?

Used to v. would

- the structure **used to** describes past habits which are no longer true
e.g. I used to smoke a lot when I was young.

- when we speak about actions we can express the past habit using **would**
e.g. When we were children we **would go** (=used to go) skating every winter.

- **used to** can be used about **actions and states**, **would only about actions** – not states!!
e.g. We **used to play** football. / We **would play** football.
But! I used to have a dog. (not I would have!!)

!!!Used to is not possible when we simply say

- a) what happened at a past time – I worked very hard last month.
- b) how long it took - I lived in Chester for three years.
- c) how many times it happened - I went to France 7 times last year.