

UNIT 27 Could (do) and could have (done)

- a) We use **could (do)** in a number of ways. Sometimes it is the past of **can (do)** (see Unit 26), but sometimes it has a *present* or *future* meaning. For example, we sometimes use **could** to talk about possible future actions, especially when we make suggestions:

- 'What shall we do this evening?' 'We **could** go to the cinema.'
- When you go to New York, you **could** stay with Linda.

Can is also possible in these sentences. ('We **can** go to the cinema.'). **Could** is more unsure than **can**.

We also use **could** to talk about possible future happenings:

- There **could be** another rise in the price of petrol soon. (= It is possible that there will be.)

Sometimes **could** means **would be able to**:

- Why doesn't Tom apply for the job? He **could** get it.
- I don't know how she works 14 hours a day. I **couldn't** do it.

- b) The past of **could (do)** is **could have (done)**. We use **could have (done)** to say that we had the ability or the opportunity to do something but did *not* do it:

- We didn't go out last night. We **could have gone** to the cinema but we decided to stay at home. (We had the opportunity to go out but we didn't.)
- Why did you stay at a hotel in New York? You **could have stayed** with Linda. (You had the opportunity to stay with her but you didn't.)
- Why didn't Tom apply for the job? He **could have got** it. (He had the ability to get it.)

We also use **could have (done)** to say something was a possibility but *didn't* happen:

- He was lucky when he fell off the ladder. He **could have hurt** himself.

- c) Now here are some examples of **couldn't have (done)**. 'I **couldn't have done** something' = I wouldn't have been able to do it if I had wanted or tried to do it:

- When I went to New York last year, I decided not to stay with Linda. Later I found out that she was away while I was there, so I **couldn't have stayed** with her anyway.
- The football match was cancelled last week. Tom **couldn't have played** anyway because he was ill.
- Ann did really well to pass the examination. It was really difficult. I'm sure I **couldn't have passed** it.

For **could/couldn't** see also Units 26, 28b, 29c, 31.

For **could** in *if* sentences see Units 36-8.

UNIT 27 Exercises

27.1 In this exercise you have to make suggestions. Use **could**.

Example: Where shall we go for our holidays? (Scotland) We could go to Scotland.

- 1 What shall we have for dinner tonight? (fish)
- 2 When shall we go and see Tom? (on Friday)
- 3 What shall I give Ann for her birthday? (a book)

27.2 This time you have to use **could have**. Answer the questions in the way shown.

Example: 'Did you go to the cinema?'

'No. We could have gone to the cinema but we decided not to.'

- 1 'Did you go to the concert last night?' 'No. We
- 2 'Did John take the examination?' 'No. He
- 3 'Did you buy a new car?' 'No. I

27.3 In this exercise you have to write sentences with **could** or **could have**.

Examples: She doesn't want to stay with Linda. But she could stay with Linda.

She didn't want to stay with Linda. But she could have stayed with Linda.

- 1 He didn't want to help us. But he
- 2 He doesn't want to help us. But
- 3 They don't want to lend us any money. But
- 4 She didn't want to have anything to eat.

27.4 In this exercise first read this information about Ken:

Ken doesn't know any Spanish.

Ken doesn't know anything about machines.

Ken is very rich and generous.

Ken can't drive.

Ken was ill on Friday night.

Ken was free on Monday afternoon.

A lot of people wanted Ken to do different things last week but they couldn't contact him. So he didn't do any of these things. You have to say whether he could have done or couldn't have done these things (if he had known).

Example: His aunt wanted him to drive her to the station.

He couldn't have driven her to the station (because he can't drive).

- 1 Ann wanted him to come to a party on Friday night.
He because
- 2 Jim wanted him to play tennis on Monday afternoon.
He
- 3 Sue wanted him to translate a Spanish newspaper article into English.
..... because
- 4 Jack wanted Ken to lend him £20.
.....
- 5 Ken's mother wanted him to repair her washing machine.
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