

P01 Grammar / Past Habits - Language Review for LEP521 Talking about Pets with James

Welcome to this episode of Luke's English Podcast Premium where we look carefully at aspects of language which have appeared naturally in episodes of Luke's English Podcast with the aim of improving your grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, ultimately to give you a helping hand in achieving native-like levels of English fluency and accuracy.

This is a language review of episode 521 of LEP in which I talked to my brother about pets.

Remember that?

That's what we're going to be uncovering in this episode - in the sense that we're going to look at some language that you might not have noticed, in this case some grammar.

Don't forget that the pdf for this episode is available in the app

and online. In the app just tap the little gift icon. Online you'll find the pdf available for download under the podcast player - there's a little button. The website is teacherluke.co.uk/premium. You should check it because you'll see all the scripted parts transcribed, there are lots of language notes and you can read almost all of this while you listen. I've taken time to prepare the pdf so do check it out.

Reading the things I'm explaining here can make a big difference to

your English. And, there will be moments later where I'll ask you to repeat after me and it's useful for you to be able to see the sentences you're repeating to make sure you're repeating them correctly. So, do check the pdf. You can also print it out if you wish.

FOLLOW ALONG

Normally what I'd do in these language review episodes is go through a list of vocabulary from the episode.

This time I'm choosing to focus on some grammar that came up.

So, this is a bit of a grammar lesson. Kicking off LEP Premium with a bit of grammar (and some pronunciation later).

I'd just like to make a quick point about the tagline for my podcast and how this is reflected in the way I teach you language on the podcast, especially in these premium episodes.

My tagline is “Real British English”. Why the *real* part?

The reason for that is that I’m teaching you the English that people really speak, really use. We’re using samples of authentic spoken English - in this case, conversations I have on my podcast, as a model for how the language is actually used.

How do you know exactly how the language is used? Do you read the rules in a grammar book, or do you observe the grammar

as it occurs in context? That's what you can get from LEP - exposure to English used naturally in context so you can notice grammar and pick it up naturally. Episodes of my podcast become your window into the English language.

So, I'm not choosing language based on academic studies into which specific grammatical forms should be learned in which sequence. I'm not choosing bits of language because of a made-up syllabus which was

given to me by an academic manager or director of studies at my school, who designed it based on what he or she thinks is a good programme of study based on the academic studies they did.

I'm choosing language for these episodes because it has just come up naturally in my conversations. I'm picking language directly out of real conversations. So this, in a way, is your guarantee that this is English that people really use. Which people? Well, in this case

it's my brother and me. Both of us from the south East of the UK (and the midlands too), both pretty ordinary guys really, both university educated. I'd say we're typical examples of British guys with standard British accents. If you're going to learn British English, you might as well learn to speak it like us, right?

OK, so what I've done here is to pick out some language from a conversation with James and clarify it, package it up and give it to you. In a sense I'm here with

you, holding your hand, pointing out certain things about the language that you might not have noticed, giving you some tips, clarifications and help - all in an effort to give you that extra support that you need to go from just listening to my episodes and really learning the language that you're hearing.

And more and more it is becoming clear that learning from listening, with a bit of support and with a focus on context and plenty of input - this is a verified

and effective way to learn a language. So let's go! I must say I am really up for these premium episodes and I can't wait to publish more and more of them with you over the coming months.

So, let's look at some grammar that James and I were using in episode 521 when we talked about pets, and let's see if you noticed it yourselves and if you use this grammar when you're speaking English too.

Listen - Notice the Grammar

Listen to this extract and just tell me this - are we talking about the past, present or future? How do you know?

This clip is about 1 minute long. I'll show you the script for it in a few minutes.

Play an extract in which we talk about a TV show called Terry & June (we used to watch it as kids and we named the gerbils after the main characters Terry & June) and then the cat & the gerbils

Past, present or future?

How do you know? Try to focus on the linguistic or grammatical evidence, not the contextual evidence.

Answer: It's the past.

How did you know?

The contextual evidence would have given you the answer of course. This means the fact that you knew we were discussing

pets we had in the past. The whole thing was about remembering the past, so of course it's the past. The general context of the conversation gave you the answer.

I think when we're listening we rely mostly on the general context of the conversation. When I'm listening to people speak French, I don't understand every single word. I can't always write down exactly what they're saying, but I use the context a lot in order to

work out what they're talking about.

You probably get the context from the vocabulary - understanding which people, which events, which places are being talked about. You get those elements and put them together and fill in the blanks in your head. You might use the grammar a bit - noticing certain obvious past forms for example, but much less than the contextual clues I just mentioned.

In spoken English the specific, precise grammar is often very hard to notice. The grammar gets mixed up with pronunciation. It's hard to hear the -ed endings because they're connected to other words in the sentence. You don't always hear auxiliary verbs because they're contracted, not pronounced fully or hardly even pronounced at all.

E.g. Did you have a nice weekend? What did you do? Might sound like "Djavunice weekend? Whatchudo?" and it's

not immediately obvious that this is a question about the past, because “did” is not fully pronounced or is buried in the middle of the utterance.

So we probably use vocabulary to work out the context and fill in the gaps with our own guesses. Often those guesses are right, but often they’re not.

That’s understanding.

But also, this affects speaking. It means that you miss certain

aspects of grammar that you then don't actually use yourselves.

It means that you don't notice these subtle forms and then don't use them yourself. As a result your English might end up being a little inaccurate sounding, incomplete or just "foreign sounding".

Let's consider the extract I just played for you.

Just think of the grammar now,
not the fact that you already know
we're talking about the past.

I'd like you to now find the
grammatical forms that we're
using to talk about the past.

Think about all the possible ways
in English that we have to talk
about the past.

I'm going to narrow it down a bit
for you.

What you have to do is...

Count the number of times
someone uses:

- Past simple or past continuous
tenses
- Would
- Used to

If you can't count them all, at
least try to spot them.

Past simple (I went)

Past continuous (I was going)

Would (I'd go)

Used to (I used to go)

This clip is about 1 minute long.

Play the extract again

Extract Script

J: How **would** you describe Terry & June? You'll have to just link it.

L: It's just like a suburban...

J: Farce. Suburban farce.

L: Suburban life with these two people. Terry **was** a bit of an idiot and June **was** really sweet, and they **would**, for example, a lot of the time they'd **d** be sitting in the garden reading the newspaper or something and then something

funny **would** happen with the neighbour

J: Or the sun brolly thing ... sort of sun umbrella **would** fall down or something like that. Kind of.... I can't remember why... We **used to** watch it all the time. I **used to** find it really funny.

L: Everyone **used to** watch it. We **used to** love Terry & June. We **named** our gerbils after Terry & June and the gerbils **would** be running around inside the gerbilarium and Posie **would** trot through the kitchen and they'd be on the floor by the door. He **would**

trot through the kitchen, just casually, and then he **would** just spot one of the gerbils out of the corner of his eye and just go bonkers and just launch himself at the gerbilarium and scrabble in the corner Scrabbling at the corner to try and get one of the gerbils.

J: He **didn't know** that you can't dig through glass.

L: He **didn't really get** glass as a concept.

J: And they **were** metal edged as well, these, this aquarium,

gerbilarium, so he **wasn't ever**
going to get through.

L: The gerbils **weren't** bothered at
all

J: No, they'**d** just look at him and
go "hahahaha"

L: They'**d** just look and carry on

J: Bwa ha ha ha. LOL

Past simple / continuous x8

**(mostly past simple - quite a lot of
"to be" in the past)**

**Would x12! (one of them doesn't
refer to the past)**

Used to x 4

What do you think?

“Would” was the most frequently used word when referring to the past.

Did you notice all the uses of “would”?

Some of them were obvious, others less obvious.

Did you notice “used to”?

Why is ‘would’ being used so much?

Grammar

The grammar we're looking at here is, in this case "would" to describe past habitual behaviour - ways of talking about things in the past that happened regularly, typically, always, usually...

It's not just "would". There are a few specific ways that we talk about habitual things in the past.

Talking about Past Habits

It's not just past simple verb forms.

I'm not talking about just telling stories in the past using the narrative tenses to describe events that happened one after the other, but describing things that happened again and again in the past.

Typical or habitual past actions.
E.g. what the cat always did, or what the gerbils always did, or what always happened in the TV show Terry & June.

Equally it could be talking about things you always did when you were at school, or things that always happened when you worked in a certain office, or things when you were going out with a girl and the things she always did - any habitual things in the past.

We use certain grammatical forms for this, and some of that grammar is hard to notice - if you don't know what you're looking

for it can be almost invisible actually.

3 Ways to Talk about Habitual Behaviour in the Past

I'm going to talk about at least 3 ways we can talk about habitual behaviour in the past.

Those forms are:

- Would + 'bare infinitive'
- Used to

- Past continuous tense +
always

The first two came up in the extract. The last one (past continuous tense) didn't really.

Let's go through the extract again and I can highlight these forms - 'would' and 'used to'.

I expect you've studied this grammar before. You must have done. It comes up in any decent intermediate grammar book. So

you might think you already know this.

But let's focus on real English here, which is as much about pronunciation as it is about knowing the theoretical rules of grammar. How is this intermediate grammar actually used in real conversations?

Let's go through the extract again and just break it down. I'll explain some of the vocab here as well. Then we'll consider the grammar a bit more, and we'll do some

practice and some pronunciation drills.

- Go through the extract again highlighting certain features and clarifying vocab -

Extract Script

J: How **would** you describe Terry & June? You'll have to just link it.

L: It's just like a suburban...

J: Farce. Suburban farce.

L: Suburban life with these two people. Terry **was** a bit of an idiot and June **was** really sweet, and

they **would**, for example, a lot of the time they'd **be** sitting in the garden reading the newspaper or something and then something funny **would** happen with the neighbour

J: Or the sun brolly thing ... sort of sun umbrella **would** fall down or something like that. Kind of.... I can't remember why... We **used to** watch it all the time. I **used to** find it really funny.

L: Everyone **used to** watch it. We **used to** love Terry & June. We **named** our gerbils after Terry & June and the gerbils **would** be

running around inside the gerbilarium and Posie would trot through the kitchen and they'd be on the floor by the door. He would trot through the kitchen, just casually, and then he would just spot one of the gerbils out of the corner of his eye and just go bonkers and just launch himself at the gerbilarium and scrabble in the corner Scrabbling at the corner to try and get one of the gerbils.

J: He didn't know that you can't dig through glass.

L: He **didn't really get** glass as a concept.

J: And they **were** metal edged as well, these, this aquarium, gerbilarium, so he **wasn't ever going to** get through.

L: The gerbils **weren't** bothered at all

J: No, they'd just look at him and go "hahahaha"

L: They'd just look and carry on

J: Bwa ha ha ha. LOL

Grammar Summary

Let me sum up this grammar

We're talking about how we describe habits in the past.

Much of the time when we're describing the past we are talking about things that happened just once. Like when we tell stories or anecdotes using narrative tenses.

E.g. if you tell your friends about the time when you first met your pet. E.g. the first time I met our pet cat Posie.

tell the story here using some narrative tenses

We heard that my Dad's friend's cat had given birth to loads of kittens and they needed to get rid of them.

So we went to the house and saw all the kittens.

Posie was the cutest. He was adorable. He climbed up my trouser leg and we sort of fell in love with him there.

We thought he was a girl at first because he was so cute and had very long hair so it was hard to

tell, and my dad's friend's daughter had called him Posie which was a girl's name. Later we found out that she was a boy, which was a surprise! Then we removed his balls.

All those verbs were things that just happened once in the past. Some verbs in the past simple, some in the past perfect to describe events which took place before the main events of the story.

But we also talk about recurring past events a hell of a lot, and we always use certain grammar to do it, like in my conversation about pets with James.

We talked about things our pets always did - habitual or repeated actions - typical behaviour, but in the past.

The grammar is different and you need to know this.

Let's sum up the ways we talk about habitual past actions.

Used to

This is pretty easy and obvious. You must have studied it. It's a form that all intermediate students know. It's easy. But there are still some things worth considering.

“Used to” + verb.

Spelling

Negatives and questions don't include the 'd' ...

I used to live in Japan.

I didn't use to live in Poland.

Did you use to smoke?

Pronunciation

...but the pronunciation of “use to” and “used to” is exactly the same. The ‘d’ gets lost.

So, it's not “uZED to” or “uSED to”, it's “yoostu”.

Repeat these after me

I used to have some goldfish but they died.

They used to jump out of the tank sometimes.

My sister used to feed my fish too much.

I didn't use to believe in the importance of pets.

Did you use to have a dog?

Did your dog use to sleep in front of the door when your Dad was out?

“Used to” + state/action verbs

We use “used to” with state and action verbs.

State verbs

I used to believe in ghosts.

I used to have a folding bike.

Dinosaurs used to exist on earth.

I used to think it was a good film.

Action verbs

I used to smoke cigarettes but I gave up.

I used to play football every week.

I didn't use to speak French.

Also, watch out for another form, which is “be + used to + ing” or “get + used to + ing”. This is also a common structure but it’s not the same. Generally we use these forms for talking about how things are difficult or easy because you’ve experienced them a lot.

E.g.

I used to live in Japan. (past habit or situation)

It took me ages to get used to the different way of life. For example,

at first I couldn't get used to the different food. After a few months I got used to it. (not talking about a past habit, but about the fact that life was difficult because it was new and different)

Would

This one is far less obvious (harder to notice when listening) and yet extremely common.

This is the one that came up the most in the conversation with James. I hardly ever hear

learners of English using this when talking about the past.

The point is: we use “would + bare infinitive” to talk about things that happened again and again. Habits, in the past.

It’s almost invisible when you’re listening, because the “would” is contracted and often hardly pronounced at all. It can sound like native speakers are just using present simple.

Can you hear the difference? - present simple or would + bare infinitive

He'd come down in the morning.

He come down in the morning.

(not correct)

He'd always leave the TV on.

He always leave the TV on. (not
correct)

We do our homework first, then
play football. (not correct - well,
it's about the present)

We'd do our homework first, then
play football.

So it's not obvious. But watch out
- we most definitely use it and we
use it a LOT. And so should you.

**Don't use 'would' with state
verbs.**

The only difference with 'used to'
is that "would" it's not used with
state verbs. So, just actions.

E.g.

We used to live in the
countryside.

NOT: We'd live in the countryside.

I used to believe in ghosts. (not:
I'd believe in ghosts)

I used to have a folding bike. (not:
I'd have a folding bike)

Dinosaurs used to exist on earth.
(not: Dinos would exist on earth)

I used to think it was a good film.
(not: I'd think it was a good film)

All the wrong examples of “would”
with a state verb sound like
you're talking about the future.

**Pronunciation - listen and
repeat**

Practise doing it. Pronunciation.

Difference between:

We go to the park / we'd go to the park

She come home / she'd come home

He start eating / he'd start eating

**Past continuous with always -
“was always -ing”**

This one didn't come up much in our conversation but it's worth mentioning because it's useful.

To describe typical/habitual behaviour

A Google News search for “she was always” turns up lots of stories about people remembering loved ones who have died, which is a bit sad - but basically this is people talking about someone’s typical behaviour in the past.

She was always smiling and laughing.

She was always helping out her neighbours.

She was always willing to listen to your problems.

Also to describe irritating behaviour / with negative emotion about repeated past actions.

For example, some lines that you might say about your ex-girlfriend.

She was always complaining about all the work she had to do.

She was always going on about her ex-boyfriend and talking to her cat in an annoying voice.

He was always scratching the furniture and pooing on the carpet. (the cat, not the boyfriend)

Talk about the annoying flatmate I had once. This is a true story about a guy I used to live with. Just look out for the different grammatical forms, especially past continuous (with always) for the annoying behaviour.

I moved into a shared house once. There was one other guy there that I hardly knew and

I immediately took a dislike to him!

He was always in his room, making music. That wasn't bad, but he never used to use headphones. He'd just sit there playing the same dodgy techno track over and over. I had to keep telling him to turn the music down and he didn't react well. Often the music would go down but then it would creep back up again to the same volume as before.

But there were other things.

Our rooms were right next to each other. I worked on Sundays and he was always coming home late on Saturday nights drunk and then arguing and/or having sex with his girlfriend.

The wall between our rooms was really thin so I could hear everything. It was awful.

They were always arguing with each other, when they weren't drunkenly having it off with each other. Sometimes I'd go to sleep while they were arguing and I'd

wake up to hear them having sex. It was a nightmare.

He was also very messy. He used to shave in the bathroom but then never cleaned the sink afterwards. I was always having to clean up his stubble and soap which was caked all over the sink before I could brush my teeth.

We've all had to deal with similar situations I'm sure.

By the way, whenever I tell a little story like that, it's a chance for

you to work on your English with my storytelling technique. I haven't told you about that yet, but it's very simple. Listen to the story, then pause the podcast. Try to tell the story again in as much detail as you can. Don't worry if you don't remember all the details. Feel free to make up some details that weren't even in my story. Then listen again and this time you pause the podcast and repeat after me. You can use the script to check what you've heard, but don't read and repeat at the same time. Only read after

you've tried to repeat, in order to check that you're correct. You can check any new words you discover and use them to try and remember them. Keep going, listening and repeating. Try to say groups of words as if they're one word. Listen for how I connect the words. Keep going - listening and repeating. Then tell the story again - don't worry about the details. Feel free to be creative. That's it! The next step is to tell a similar story that you have in your mind.

Can you think of someone from your past who annoyed you? Why were they annoying? What were they always doing?

Practice & Consolidation

Now, I'd like to give you a little test or do an exercise that could really help focus your attention on this. Remember that it's important not just to understand language but to be able to use it. English is not just something you know, it's something you can do.

Here's what I'd like you to do. I'm going to ask you some questions. I want you to then pause the podcast and either write down some sentences, or just think some sentences (possibly out loud) as answers. You don't have to do this of course, but you'll find that it will all make more sense if you do.

So you're either saying your ideas out loud in English, or you're making the sentences in your head. Even if you don't say the sentences out loud, saying

them in your head is almost as good.

Try to use “used to”, “would” and “past continuous with always”.

Don’t just use past simple or the usual narrative tenses.

I can’t check your work, but one thing you should avoid doing is using “would” or “past continuous” with state verbs.

So, not “He was never liking the same music as me” or “When I

was a child we'd live in the countryside". It's "He never used to like the same music as me" and "We used to live in the countryside." Only "used to" goes with state verbs in the past like that - or 'past simple' "He didn't like the same music as me" or "We lived in the countryside" - but we're trying not to use 'past simple' all the time, right?

So, here are the questions.

Practice Questions

- Did you have a pet when you were younger? (if you didn't have a pet, you can either use your imagination or just replace the pet with a family member or a friend!)
- What was that pet like?
- Where did you used to live? How did this affect the pet's life?
- What did he/she usually do when you came home each time?
- What did he/she usually do when you were eating?

- What did he/she tend to do when he/she was hungry or sleepy?
- Did he/she ever make noise?
What kind of noise?
- Where did he/she sleep?
- Did he/she ever cause any damage? What happened?
- Did he/she ever do anything annoying or irritating?

OK, pause the podcast and create some English in order to answer those questions. When you've done that, you can carry on and I'll give you some sample

answers, which you can repeat after me.

*Pause

*Continue

Alright, I'm assuming you've done that now.

What grammar did you use?

All my questions were about the past. So you've probably used past tenses.

My questions weren't just about things that happened just once in the past. They were about things that happened again and again.

Did you use 'would' or 'used to' as well? How about "past continuous with always"?

My Sample Answers

Let me give some sample answers to those questions. I'm making these answers up by the way. You'll notice that some of them are quite ridiculous - but

that's just for fun. Sometimes using your creativity and coming up with silly examples can be a fun way of making sure things don't get boring! Your examples don't always have to be true by the way. We're just trying to practise language here.

- Did you have a pet when you were younger? (if you didn't have a pet, you can either use your imagination or just replace the pet with a family member or a friend!)

Yes, I did. I had a pet rabbit called fluffy.

- What was that pet like?

Well, as the name suggests - he was very fluffy, and extremely cute. He was also very intelligent. He learned to speak English in just 3 months so we'd often have quite in-depth conversations about life, the universe and everything. Sometimes we'd play chess and he'd usually win. We'd also play poker together with friends. Sometimes I suspected that he was cheating but he'd always get away with it.

- Where did you used to live?
How did this affect the pet's life?

We used to live in the downtown area of a big city. Fluffy used to love going clubbing at the weekends. Often he'd stay out all night and then sleep all day the next day.

- What did he/she usually do when you came home each time?

When I came home fluffy would jump up and down in his little cage, gnawing at the bars and kicking his little feet.

- What did he/she usually do when you were eating?

When I was eating, fluffy used to sit at my feet, staring up at me.

He'd always try to persuade me to give him some food, but my parents always refused to let me feed him from the table.

- What did he/she tend to do when he/she was hungry or sleepy?

When he was sleepy Fluffy would find a nice warm place to lie

down. He'd often fall asleep on my laptop or on top of a radiator.

When he was hungry, fluffy would

sometimes order food from Deliveroo or just make himself a sandwich.

- Did he/she ever make noise?

What kind of noise?

Fluffy used to hum songs to himself all day long. He used to be a big fan of The Bee Gees and I'd often hear him humming some of their classic hits like "Night Fever" and "staying alive".

- Where did he/she sleep?

I've already answered that question so I flatly refuse to answer it again.

- Did he/she ever cause any damage? What happened?
Fluffy was always gnawing and chewing on things and this included a lot of objects in the house. He'd always gnaw at the bars on his cage, but also other objects like chair legs and my feet. Once I woke up in the morning to discover that he'd bitten through one of my legs and my knee had fallen off. That was annoying!

- Did he/she ever do anything annoying or irritating? (See above)

Repeat these lines

Try to repeat these with the same sentence stress as me. Also, try to copy my connected speech.

We'd often have quite in-depth conversations about life, the universe and everything.

Sometimes we'd play chess and he'd usually win.

We'd also play poker together with friends.

Sometimes I suspected that he was cheating but he'd always get away with it.

Every Sunday we used to go to the local pub for a roast lunch.

When I came home fluffy would jump up and down in his little cage, gnawing at the bars and kicking his little feet.

When I was eating, fluffy used to sit at my feet, staring up at me.

(pausing is important here)

He'd always try to persuade me to give him some food, but my parents always refused to let me feed him from the table.

When he was sleepy Fluffy would find a nice warm place to lie

down. He'd often fall asleep on my laptop or on top of a radiator. Fluffy used to hum songs to himself all day long. He used to be a big fan of The Bee Gees and I'd often hear him humming some of their classic hits.

Fluffy was always gnawing and chewing on things and this included a lot of objects in the house.

That's it!

From now on, listen out for these grammatical forms, and also try

to use them when it's appropriate because if you don't use it, you lose it.

Thank you for supporting my work with your subscription to LEP Premium. Let's make the world a better place, starting with your English.