ENGLISH GRAMMAR 2 INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

Unit 27 – could (do) and could have (done)

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Could (do) and could have (done)

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COULD FOR POSSIBLE ACTIONS
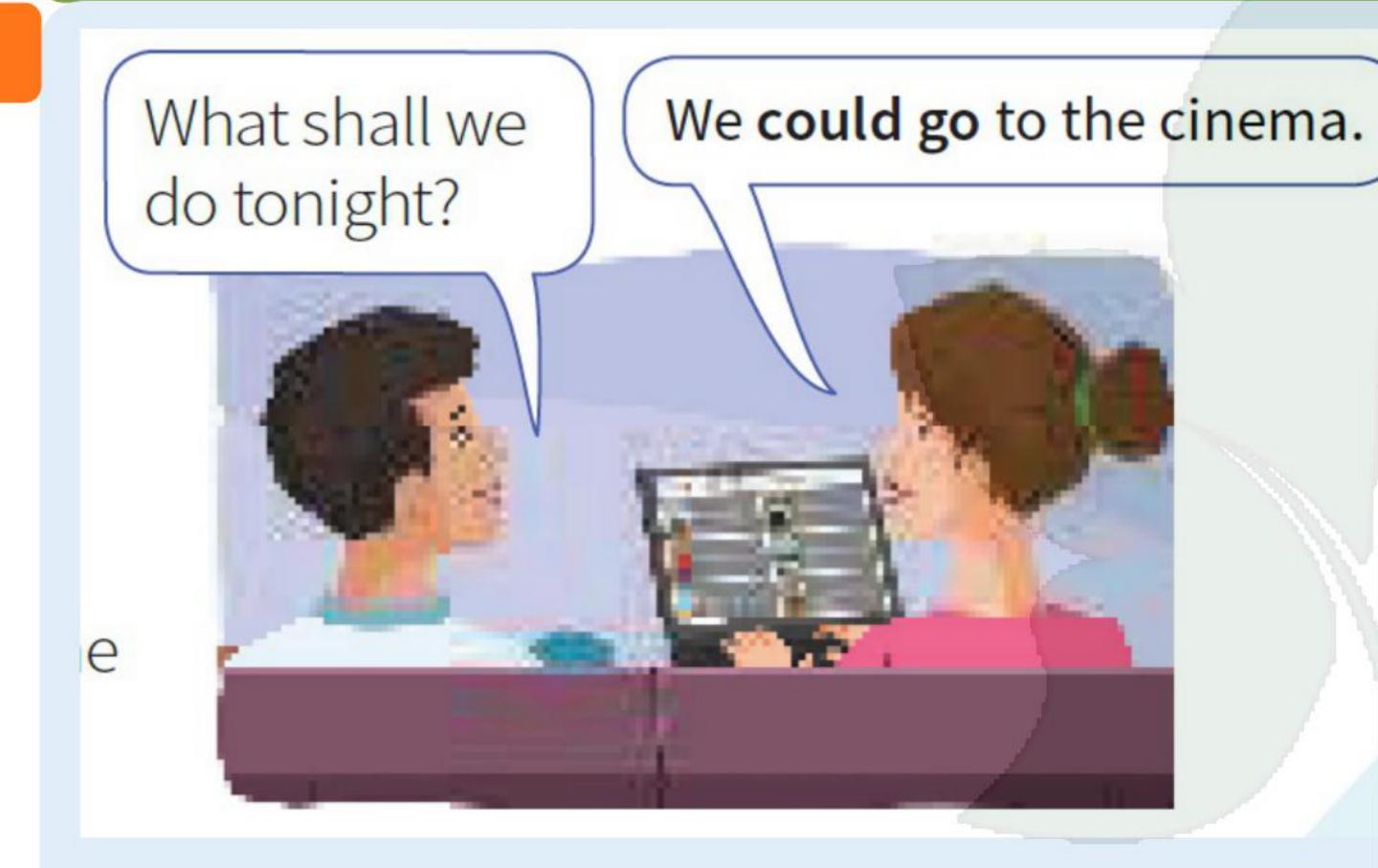
A

> What shall we do tonight?
>
> We **could go** to the cinema.

❖ **Sometimes could is the past of can (see Unit 26):**
  ▪ EX1: Listen. I **can hear** something. (now)
  ▪ EX2: I listened. I **could hear** something. (past)

❖ But **could** is not always past. We also use **could** for possible actions now or in the future, especially to make suggestions. For example:
  ▪ EX3: A: What shall we do tonight?
    B: We **could go** to the cinema.
  ▪ EX4: A: When you go to Paris next month, you **could stay** with Sarah.
    B: Yes, I suppose I could.

❖ **Can** is also possible in these sentences ('We can go to the cinema.' etc.). **Could is less sure than can.**

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COULD – NOT REALISTIC AND IN SPECIFIC SITUATION

B

❖ We also use **could** (not can) for actions that are not realistic. For example:

- EX5: I'm so tired, I **could sleep** for a week. *(not I can sleep for a week)*

❖ Compare can and could:

- EX6: I **can stay** with Sarah when I go to Paris. (realistic)

- EX7: Maybe **I could stay** with Sarah when I go to Paris. (possible, but less sure)

- EX8: This is a wonderful place. I **could stay** here for ever. (unrealistic)

C

❖ We also use **could** (not can) to say that something is possible now or in the future:

- EX9: The story **could be** true, but I don't think it is. (not can be true)

- EX10: I don't know what time Lisa is coming. She **could get** here at any time.

❖ Compare can and could:

- EX11: The weather **can change** very quickly in the mountains. *(in general)*

- EX12: The weather is nice now, but it **could change** later. *(the weather now, not in general)*

Could (do) and could have (done)

COULD HAVE DONE

D

We use could have (done) to talk about the past. Compare:

- EX13: I'm so tired, I **could sleep** for a week. (now)

  I was so tired, I could have slept for a week. (past)

- EX14: The situation is bad, but it **could be** worse. (now)

  The situation was bad, but it **could have been** worse. (past)

Something could have happened = it was possible, but did not happen:

- EX15: Why did you stay at a hotel? You **could have stayed** with me.

  *Sao bạn lại ở khách sạn? **Lẽ ra bạn đã có thể ở** chỗ tôi.*

- EX16: David was lucky. He **could have hurt** himself when he fell, but he's all right.

  *David đã gặp may. Cậu ấy **lẽ ra đã có thể bị thương** khi ngã, nhưng cậu ấy đã không bị sao.*

Could (do) and could have (done)

COULDN'T DO

E

❖ **I couldn't do something = it would not be possible:**

  ▪ EX17: I **couldn't live** in a big city. I'd hate it. (= it wouldn't be possible for me)

  ▪ EX18: Everything is fine right now. Things **couldn't be** better.

❖ **For the past we use couldn't have … (= would not have been possible):**

  ▪ EX19: We had a really good holiday. It **couldn't have been** better.

❖ **Note that 'I couldn't do something' has two meanings:**

  1. **I couldn't** = it would not be possible now, I would not be able:

    ▪ EX20: I **couldn't run** ten kilometers now. I'm not fit enough. (= I would not be able)

  2. **I couldn't** = I was not able (past)

    ▪ EX21: I **couldn't run** yesterday because I'd hurt my leg. (= I was not able)

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Select the option which best completes the sentences below:

We had a really good holiday. It _____ better.

A. couldn't have been

B. couldn't be

C. wasn't possible to be

D. can't be

Could (do) and could have (done)

TÓM TẮT

1. **"Could"** ngoài vai trò làm thể quá khứ của **"can,"** **"could"** còn có thể chỉ một hành động có thể xảy ra ở hiện tại hoặc tương lai, đặc biệt là để đưa ra một đề nghị - *When you go to Paris next month, you **could stay** with Sarah.* **"Could"** thường có nghĩa kém chắc chắn hơn **"can"**

2. Một số tình huống chúng ta chỉ dùng **could** mà không dùng can:
   - Khi nói về một hành động **không thực tế** - *I'm so tired, I **could sleep** for a week.*
   - Khi nói về một việc gì đó có thể xảy ra ở hiện tại hoặc trong tương lai - *The story **could be** true, but I don't think it is.*

3. **"could have done"** chỉ một hành động có khả năng đã xảy ra nhưng lại đã không diễn tiến như vậy - *Why did you stay at a hotel? You **could have stayed** with me.*

4. Cần lưu ý **"couldn't do"** có thể có 2 nghĩa, 1 nghĩa hiện tại (không thể làm một việc gì đó bây giờ,) - *I **couldn't run** ten kilometres now. I'm not fit enough* - 1 nghĩa quá khứ (đã không thể làm một việc gí đó trong quá khứ) - *I **couldn't run** yesterday because I'd hurt my leg.*