**4.1** **Talking about ability**

1. ***can* and *be able to***

* We normally use *can* / *can’t* to talk about ability in the present. We can also use *be able to* although it is less common.

Jack can speak Chinese.

Jack is able to speak six languages.

* We normally use *will be able to* to talk about ability in the future.

I'm sure people will be able to travel to Mars before too long.

However, we often use *can* / *can’t* to talk about future arrangements.

I can't come to the cinema with you this evening.

* We use *be able to* when we need an infinitive *(can* has no infinitive form).

I should be able to finish all my homework by 10.

* We use *being able to* when we need an *-ing* form.

I hate not being able to speak any foreign languages.

* We use *be able* to when we want to use the present perfect tense *(can* has no present perfect form).

Sue hasn't been able to walk since her accident.

1. **Talking about ability in the past**

* We use *could* for general ability in the past.

I could read when I was four.

When we’re talking about one occasion, we use a different expression, such as *managed to do* or *succeeded in doing.* We can also use *was/were able to.*

How did you manage to repair the washing machine?

They were able to win the match despite having only ten players.

* However, we use the negative *couldn’*t whether we are talking about general ability or one occasion.

Carla couldn't read until she was seven.

I couldn't wake up this morning.

* We use *could* with verbs of perception, like *see, smell, hear, taste, feel,* even if it is one occasion.

I couldn't hear what the teacher was saying.

1. **Complete the sentences with the correct form of *can* or *be able to.* Wherever possible, use *can.***
2. … you speak Russian?
3. … you me at seven o’clock this evening?
4. If you keep going to the evening classes, in a few months you … speak French really well.
5. I might … help you if you meet tell me what’s the matter.
6. I hate … receive satellite TV. There are so many good programmes I want to watch.
7. I’m sorry I … come to your party last Friday.
8. If property prices rise any more, we … afford to buy a house.
9. Kate should … to pass her driving test - she’s had about fifty lessons.
10. I … receive any emails since my computer went wrong.
11. **Complete the sentences with *could, couldn’t,* or *managed to.***
12. By the time I was ten, I … swim really fast.
13. I … to reach the top shelf by standing on a chair.
14. We …carry the wardrobe upstairs because it was too wide.
15. … you talk before you … walk?
16. Anne wasn’t at home but I …to contact her on her mobile.
17. We … get bread at the supermarket because it was sold out. However, we … get some at the corner shop.
18. It took a long time but I finally … find my keys.
19. My dad was born Paris but he … speak French.