

Tenses and aspects of english grammar



Overview

Some basic meaning distinctions between different tense forms are offered in terms of the remote (or not) and factual (or not) status of perceived situations including notes on the future, time expressions, and the historical present. A distinction is made between lexical aspect, concerned with inherent properties of verb meaning such as stative, dynamic, punctual, and durative, and grammatical aspect, concerned with an internal versus an external perspective on situations. Basic forms The basic element in a English sentence is the ver.

We need to talk about tense, to describe different forms of the verb. English has two distinct tense forms, present and past tense, and to two distinct forms for the aspect, perfect and progressive aspect. The modal verb will is included typically as an indication of future reference. Basic English Verbs Forms Verb forms Examples Simple present I love your Mercedes Present progressive you are standing too close to it. Simple past I wanted a car just like it.

Past progressive you were aiming too high. Simple future I will work for it Future progressive you will be working forever Present perfect I have worked hard before Present perfect progressive you have been working for nothing. Past perfect(pluperfect) I had saved my money Past perfect progressive you had been saving pennies Future perfect I will have saved enough Future perfect progressive you will have been saving in vain

We always need a basic verb (e. g. eat,, love, sleep) and a basic tense, either past or present. With a tense (e. g. past) and verb (e. g. eat, we can create

the simple verb structure in I ate. Changes the tense to present and we get I eat. These basic elements, tense and verb are always required. We can add a modal element (e. g will) to get I will eat. We can also include elements that indicate aspect, either perfect or progressive. If we include perfect aspect (i. e have ...+ -en), we get the structure in I have eaten. It is simply conventional to analyze the verb ending in the perfect + -en.

Other verbs actually have different forms as endings,, as in the perfect aspect versions of I have loved and I have slept. We can also choose progressive aspect (i. e. be ... + -ing), so that different forms of the verb be are included before the basic verb, ending with + -ing as in I am eating be is sleeping. The basic structure There is a very regular pattern in the organization of all these elements used to create English verb forms.

Each component influences the form of the component to its right present tense, have ... + en, be... + ing, sleep I have been sleeping. The first element is created from the influence of present tense on have(= have). The next element is created from the influence of + -en (= been). The next element is formed by attaching + -ing to the verb sleep, once again at the end, to create sleep + -ing (= sleeping). When we choose different elements, we get different verb forms. Ex a. past tense, have ... + en, love b. I had loved.

In a the effect of past tense on the have element creates had. The influence of the + -en element on the verb love results in loved, as in b. Notice once again that the + -en element actually becomes -ed at the end of most English verbs.

- past tense, be ing, sleep

- I was sleeping.

In, the past tense element combines with be to create was and the +ING element attaches to the verb sleep to yield sleeping, as in b. Its important for teachers to understand that a grammatical element that consists of two separate parts will always be very difficult to learn. Basic meanings

Tense in English is not based on simple distinctions in time. Tense The basic tense distinction in English is marked by only two forms of the verb, the past tense (I lived there ten) and the present tense (I live here now). Conceptually, the present tense form ties the situation described closely to the remote from the situation of utterance. The past tense form makes the situation described more remote from the situation of utterance. There is a very regular distinction in English which is marked by that versus now, there versus here, that versus then, and past tense versus present tense.

Situations in the future are treated differently. They are inherently non factual, but can be considered as either relatively certain (i. e. perceived as remote from happening) or relatively unlikely or even impossible (i. e. perceived as remote from happening). The verb form that is traditionally called ' the future tense is actually expressed via a modal verb which indicates the relative possibility of an event. This modal also has two forms which convey the closeness (I will live here) or the remoteness (I would live there) of some situation being the case viewed from the situation of utterance.

The Future

Future events are not treated as facts, hence are only possibilities. They are distinguished in terms of being non-remote possibilities versus remote possibilities.

The forms of the verb used in statements about hypothetical (i. e. remote and non factual) such as [10], are usually described as past tense forms, but their reference is clearly not to past time. [10] If I was rich, I would change the world. Reference to time The widely recognized difference in time between situations referred to via the past and the present tense forms can be interpreted in terms of remoteness (or non-remoteness) in time from the time of utterance. Generally, adverbial expressions of time are used to establish time frames within which situations can be described.

They do not determine how the speaker may choose to mark the relative remoteness of the event via tense. Thus, an expression like today can establish a time frame for talking about events that the speaker can describe as remote, via the past tense(e. g I slept late), or non remote, via the present tense(e. g. I'm tired). The speakers now These observations on tense in English would suggest that the widely used image of a time-line running from the past (yesterday) through the present (today) to the future (tomorrow) is not, in fact, the basis of the grammatical category of tense.

The speaker's perspective The time -line perspective Past time- present time - future time The speaker's perspective Remote non remote remote (non-factual) The common use of the past tense in English to represent reported speech, as 16 b, would seem to fit a more remote interpretation better than a' past time' interpretation. The difference between the direct speech of 16a

and indirect speech of 16b is not a matter of time, but of distance from the reporting situation. 16 a. She said. ' I am waiting here. B. She said that she was waiting here.

Aspect In order to talk about aspect, we have to look inside the situation, In terms of its internal dimensions, a situation may be represented as fixed or changing, it may be treated as lasting for only a moment or having duration, and it can be viewed as complete or as ongoing. These are aspectual distinctions. Because aspect has to do with the kind of situation perceived or experienced, it can be expressed both lexically and grammatically. The grammatical expression of aspect is accomplished via the perfect and progressive forms of the verb. Stative dynamic

Verbs commonly used with stative meanings apply to situations that are relatively constant over time and describe cognitive (i. e mental) states such as knowledge (know, understand), and emotion (hate, like) or relations (be, have). Most verbs are not used with stative meanings, but have the concept of change as an essential characteristic and apply to dynamic situations. Dynamic situations can be divided into those viewed as having almost no duration (non durative) versus those having duration (durative). Punctual or durative Verbs used with non-durative meanings typically describe isolated acts (kick, hit, smash).

Another term for non-durative is punctual aspect, related to the point in time interpretation of expressions (fire a gun, smash a window) which do not extend through time. Durative aspect is an essential feature of verbs that denote activities(run, eat).

Acts Activities Processes Believe be hit eat become Hate belong jump run
change Know contain kick swim flow Like have stab walk grow Understand own
strike work harden Want resemble throw write learn | Those verbs that denote
stative concepts in English tend not to be used with progressive forms.

Those verbs that are typically used with punctual aspect, describing
momentary acts (kick, cough), take on a slightly different meaning when
used in the progressive form. Grammatical aspect The basic grammatical
distinction in english aspect is marked by two forms of the verb. These are
traditionally described as versions of the verb be with the present participle
(Verb+ ing) for the progressive, as in [20a], and versions of have with the
past participle (Verb + -en/ed) for the perfect, as in [20b]. 20. a. I am/was
eating b. I have/had eaten Grammatical aspect Concept of situation
Progressive viewed from the inside, in progress.

Perfect viewed from the outside, in retrospect. Combining lexical and
grammatical aspect Grammatical aspect Lexical aspect Implicated meaning
Perfect + dynamic Completed activity retrospectively viewed Perfect +
stative Pre-existing state retrospectively viewed. Progressive + dynamic
ongoing activity internally viewed Progressive + stative Temporary state
internally viewed The tense of the verb will that implicated meaning to the
situation of utterance. Meaning components of verb forms

i present have+-en/ed be + -ing work very hard Time of utterance external
view i present have+-en/ed be + -ing work very hard Time of utterance
external view internal view dynamic activity in retrospect in progress(= at
this time I look back at myself in an activity viewed internally as in progress.
You past have+-en/ed be + -ing learn a lot Remote from external view

internal view dynamic process
Time of in retrospect in progress utterance (= at that I looked back at you in a process viewed internally as in progress).

The distinction in tense between remote (past) and non remote (present) has a typical application in organization information in discourse. Information that is treated as part of the background will tend to be expressed in the past tense. Information that is of current concern, in the foreground, will be expressed in the present tense. Background scene setting, particularly in stories, is often expressed in the past progressive. In narratives In less technical writing, a similar distinction can be maintained between, present tense for presenting general statements and past tense for specific events. In narrative text, there can also be a general background versus foreground effect associated with different tenses.

There is no obvious reason, in terms of narrating the events, why the fate of two people should be described in the past tense and that of another in the present. Within narratives that only use past tense, there is often a background role given to the past progressive and a foreground role for the simple past. In spoken discourse The speaker uses the past progressive for the initial background, or scene-setting, then shifts into the present tense to highlight the salient event in the story and her own internal reaction. Background and foreground information
Background information past tense (Specific acts, events, old focus, settings)
Foreground information present tense (General statements, facts, new focus, changes).