

Review of the English Tense System: Decoding Dichotomies and Restructuring Instructional Practice

Vijay Singh Thakur¹, Moosa Ahmed Ali Sulaiman² & Ehsan Elahi¹

¹ Department of English Language and Literature, College of Arts and Applied Sciences, Dhofar University, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman

² Department of Education, College of Arts and Applied Sciences, Dhofar University, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman

Correspondence: Vijay Singh Thakur, Department of English Language and Literature, College of Arts and Applied Sciences, Dhofar University, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman.

Received: March 10, 2021

Accepted: March 29, 2021

Online Published: March 30, 2021

doi: 10.5539/elt.v14n4p77

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v14n4p77>

Abstract

As far as the main purpose of teaching and learning of the Grammar of a language is concerned, it should tell the teachers and learners the principles and parameters of sentence construction in the given language, i.e. English Language in the context of the discussion in this paper. Incidentally, the grammatical device of tense becomes more important and relevant at the level of discourse and communication. However, a predominantly common approach to teaching and learning of the system of tense in English language has been to understand it in synonymous terms with the notion of three timelines of present, past and future, which poses situations of systemic difficulties and makes it confusing and misleading to comprehend and communicate sentences and utterances in terms of communicative clarity within the parametric confines of the linguistic system of the English Language. Focusing on this issue, this paper demonstrates the ways to unfold the dichotomies involved in the traditional ways of teaching and learning of the grammar of tense, times and aspects of verbal action in English Language and suggests an instructional framework to resolve the related pedagogical issues of concern.

Keywords: cognitive grammar, communicative clarity, English tense system, form and meaning, learner's grammar, linguist's grammar, teacher's grammar, tense, time and aspect

1. Introduction

Grammar is generally related to judging on the 'grammaticality' or 'correctness' of sentences. In terms of grammaticality, the grammar of a language is an account of the language as it is, which is based on the descriptions of the conventions used by the native speakers of the language. As far as the purposes of teaching and learning are concerned, grammar of a language should tell us the principles and parameters of sentence construction in that language. In view of its need and purpose, grammar can be contextualized and seen in three categories: the learner's grammar, the teacher's grammar and the linguist's grammar. Learner's grammar is expected to tell the learners what is grammatical and what is not; teach them how to acquire grammatical patterns; and give them enough practice for use. In this sense, learner's grammar is prescriptive. The purpose of the teacher's grammar is to help the teacher teach the language to students. The teacher should be able to explain why's and how's of the language and help the learners discover the principles and parameters underlying the use of the language. Linguist's grammar is the scientific study of the use of language. It explains the mechanism of the language and its purpose is to construct a scientific theory which can explain the facts of the language. In order to teach a language, a teacher should know the nature of what he or she is teaching. Put another way, the teacher should be thoroughly acquainted with the facts of the language. What are the facts of the Tense System in English Language? Are the facts related to the system of tense in English Language unambiguously explained in Grammar books? Are the prevalent instructional practices of the Grammar of the English Tense System in order and effective? This paper is devoted to exploring these facts. But before we get down to do that, it is in the fitness of the discussion to specify the core sections of the paper. What comes next is the literature review of the paper. After that, the functional perspective of language teaching and the existent pedagogy of the English tense system are discussed. Next, the dichotomy that creeps in and exists between the system of tense, time and aspect is discussed and explained. And, the last part of the paper discusses the ways to decode the dichotomies of tense, time and aspects with the help of analytical examples and practice tasks. And, finally, the concluding section recapitulates the focal points of

discussion in the paper and spells out the pedagogical recommendations on how to streamline the instructional practice of the tense system of the English Language for communicative clarity.

2. Literature Review

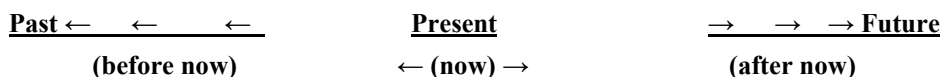
This section of the paper is devoted to the discussion of some of the findings and arguments that have gained prominence in research on the teaching and learning of English language and its grammar. This section focusses on what does research say about the teaching and learning of language in general and of grammar and tense system of English Language in particular.

2.1 Functional Perspective of Language

Desirably, Grammar, in view of functional perspectives, should be taught for the sake of language use and not merely for Grammar's sake. In this context Nunn (2013) rightly argues that grammatical theory is only useful for the teachers as a theory of practice and it will have no value if it is not applicable in some way and in some context (p. 21). According to Littlewood (1986), "one of the most characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language (p. 1)." It is not sufficient on its own to account for how language is used as a means of communication. The learner, to use Littlewood's (1986) argument, must distinguish between the forms which he/she has mastered as part of his/her linguistic competence, and the communicative functions that they perform. In other words, items mastered as part of one's *linguistic system* must also be understood as part of a *communicative system* (pp. 1-6). Thakur and Al Mahrooqi (2015) rightly argue that a natural language is an instrument of establishing communicative relationships; and if the learners are to achieve a functional command of language, they need to be able to understand and produce context-sensitive and context-effective language (p. 167). Put another way, the learners must become aware of the functional meanings of language forms. Here, a vital pedagogical question arises: *Do all the English Language Grammar books and prevalent instructional practices facilitate a comprehensive functional perspective of the Tense System of English Language?* The main purpose of this paper, led by this probing question, is to find out and answer this question. But before we get down to do that, let us examine how the concept of tense, timelines, and aspects are projected in the Grammar Books and then decode the dichotomies and restructure instructional practice for the purposes of communicative clarity.

2.2 The Existing Pedagogy of the English Tense System

Vaezi and Alizadeh's (2011) research findings claim that mastering the temporal system of a second language and being able to correctly implement this knowledge especially in spontaneous production is a challenging task to accomplish (p.986). As Peterson (2000) argues, the English tense system is quite complicated, but the most common problem is not how to form tenses but in deciding which tense to use in a given situation. In order to choose tenses correctly and easily, the student must understand the meaning of the tense itself and its timeline or time picture. Does the existing pedagogy of grammar of English language help learners establish communicative relationships? Traditional Grammar Books such as Wren and Martin (2000) prescribe three-tense system in English Language namely, present tense, past tense, and future tense. Whereas, other Grammar Books such as Murphy (2012) and Badalamenti & Henner-Stanchina (2007) do not define tense but provide exercises on how to refer to the three timelines of present, past, and future in sentences and utterances. They also do not clearly specify and explicitly explain how many tenses are there in the grammatical system of English Language. Michaelis (2021) states that when describing the meanings of the tenses, linguists have relied on specific instance of the space-time analogy, i.e. the timeline (p. 163). Therefore, the normal practice adopted by teachers is to refer to three tenses in terms of three time lines, namely present, past and future. This tripartite distinction of timelines is predominantly proclaimed in English Grammar Text Books in relation to tenses, either explicitly or implicitly, as shown below in terms of now; before now; and after now.



How are the concepts of tense, timelines, and aspects of action determined in the communicative system of English Language? According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2018), many languages have grammatical means to indicate the time when an action or event occurs, or when a state or process holds. This phenomenon is called *tense*. And, *aspect*, on the other hand, deals with the internal constituency of actions, events, states, processes or situations. Put another way, aspect is a grammatical category that expresses how an action, event, or state, denoted by a verb, extends over time (Binnick, 2021). Then, the questions arise that "Is there one-to-one relationship between the tenses and times in English and the related aspects of action referred to in utterances and sentences?" and "Are there fixed sentence patterns that are capable of clearly specifying the tense and time in

terms of present, past and future and related aspects of completeness and incompleteness of the action referred to by the verb or verb phrases used in sentences?" In view of these questions, this paper aims to demonstrate the system of tense, timelines, and aspects in English unambiguously and drain off the misleading complexities that occur due to the dichotomy that exists in the explanation of the tense system of English Language in the prescriptive Grammar Books and also to a large extent due to its traditional pedagogy. As Bielak and Pawlak (2013) argue, form-focused instruction is usually based on traditional pedagogical descriptions of grammatical features and the comparison of such traditional accounts with cognitive grammar (CG) descriptions seems to favor CG as a basis of pedagogical rules. Let us explore and discuss the pedagogical issues of concern by juxtaposing the two kinds of principles concerning the use of tenses involved in the Grammar of the tense system in English Language.

3. Dichotomy between Tenses, Time Distinctions, and Aspects of Verbal Action

Before we get down to discuss the Grammar of the tenses in English Language in details, a warm up activity will be helpful in gearing the students up into the functional mode of discussion and understanding. Doing so will also help to set the tone and tenor of the lesson. The students can be asked to work in groups and define and discuss the traditional concepts of eight parts of speech in view of the metaphorical definitions suggested in the following text on 'Grammar Family'.

3.1 Warm up Activity

Read the following text about the 'Grammar Family' by Leyla (n. a.), focus on the parallels drawn, and relate the metaphoric functions of the family members with the definitions of the grammatical concepts referred to in the text. Incidentally, the purpose of this warm up activity is to set the tone and tenor of this lesson for reflective considerations of the concepts relevant to focus of this paper.

Grammar Family

There is a family in London whose surname is Grammar. There is a couple, Mr. Noun and Mrs. Verb. The couple has three children: a son, Pronoun and two daughters, Adverb and Adjective. The son (pronoun) has to do all the work of his father in his absence. The two daughters love each other but there is a difference in them. Adjective loves her father and brother and keeps praising them. Adverb loves her mother more and she always modifies her when there is a need. There are two servants in the family, Preposition and Conjunction. The Preposition is the chief servant. He is the official servant of his master. Conjunction is the family servant and looks after every member of the family. The Interjection joins the family in times of joy and sorrow.

After this warm up activity, we can take the discussion, explanation and practice activities further into the concepts of tense, times and action aspects in order to develop unambiguous and clearer perspectives to resolve the dichotomies and confusions that often creep into the teaching and learning of the tense system of English Language.

3.2 Brainstorming Activity

Students are first asked to brainstorm and answer the following questions: (a) What do we do with tenses when we use a language?; (b) How many time references are there when we use tenses?; (c) Is each tense related with one time reference every time it is used?; (d) Is the number of tenses the same in English and other languages? Generally, varying responses come from the students in relation to these questions. In order to understand the clearer distinction between tense and time references the students need to work out the following remedial exercise.

3.3 Remedial Exercise

Question 1: How many tenses are there in English?

If the students' answer is three, which is more likely, based on their prior experience of grammar teaching and learning they have gone through, they should proceed to the next question.

Question 2: What is future tense?

The most probable answer is: The verbs that refer to future time are referred to future tense. If students give this answer, they need to answer the next question.

Question 3: What is the tense of the verbs in the following sentences:

- (i) Fatima is leaving for Japan tomorrow?
- (ii) The Vice Chancellor leaves for the Board meeting tomorrow.

Question 4: Do sentences (i) and (ii) above in question 3 refer to present time or future time?

Question 5: On the basis of your answers to question 3 and 4 above, is it logical to say that those verbs which refer to the future time are in future tense? (The answer to this question should, logically, be “No”).

Question 6: How do you know that the verb ‘cook’ is in the present tense whereas ‘cooked’ is in the past tense? (The most likely answer would be based on the inflection –ed in the base form of the verb used to differentiate between present tense and past tense.)

Question 7: What are the tenses of ‘can’ and ‘could’; ‘may’ and ‘might’? (The students are likely to say that ‘can’ and ‘may’ are in the present tense while ‘could’ and ‘might’ are in the past tense.)

Question 8: Do you think that the modals ‘will’ and ‘would’ have the same relationship as that of ‘can’ and ‘could’? (The answer to this question, expectedly, is ‘Yes’.)

Question 9: Will you conclude then that ‘will’ is in the present tense and ‘would’ in the past? (The answer, likely to be given by the students, is ‘Yes’.)

In view of the answers to question 8 and 9 above, the students are asked to answer question number 10 below.

Question 10: What is the tense in the following sentence: ‘Our English Literature Professor will leave for the conference in Malaysia tomorrow.’

Based on the answers given to questions 7, 8 and 9 above the tense denoted by the modal ‘will’ in the sentence above in question 10, is clearly ‘present tense’ but what time does it refer to? Clearly, it refers to the future time.

Based on the above awareness-building discussion, more analytical and reflective discussion and practice is needed to clearly understand the notions of tense, time and aspect as far as the grammar of tense system in English Language is concerned in order to resolve the dichotomy that creeps in when teachers and students start literally synonymizing tense, time, and aspect with each other. What is needed is to adopt a functional approach to Grammar and clearly understand (a) What is *tense*? and (b) What is the *tense system*? (c) Are the tense and time synonymous? As Sarkar (1998, pp. 92-93) analyses, the term *tense* is used to indicate the tense morphology of a language which refers, although not exclusively, to the temporal representation which usually denotes the grammatical category realized by the inflectional element; however, in other sense, the *tense system* is taken to mean the mechanisms of temporal interpretation common to all languages. These two definitions, in Jespersen’s (1924, p. 255) view, correspond to the *syntactic grammatical tense distinction* as opposed to the *notional divisions of the time* represented in a natural language. Taking focus and direction from these two perspectives, the ongoing discussion of tense, time and related semantic aspects is further discussed in order to restructure instructional practice for communicative clarity of the tense and the tense system of English Language.

4. Decoding the System of Tense, Time, and Aspect in English Language

In order to understand the system of tense in English language, we need to unambiguously understand how three interrelated notions of *tense*, *time*, and *aspect* operate. In order to do that let us first look at the formal system of verb in the English Language.

Incidentally, (a) The notion of *tense is related to the form of the verb* used in an utterance or sentence; (b) The notion of *time is related with the meaning that the verb* used in a sentence or utterance represents and conveys; (c) The notion of *aspect is related to the status of the action* referred to in the sentence or utterance, i.e. whether the action is *complete* or *incomplete* or *neutral* i.e. neither complete nor incomplete as it is/was still going on or is/was in progress; and (d) It is the first member in the verb phrase or group that determines or marks the tense of the sentence; which means the notion of tense is directly linked with the form of the verb. By implication then, *the number of verb forms available in the system of English language will equal the number of tense* in it.

However, before we get down to illustrate these three concepts in analytical terms, it would be helpful if we look at how many forms of verbs the system of English language has or allows for use.

4.1 Formal Structure of Verbs in the Tense System of English Language

Let us look at certain facts related to the system of tense in English Language. The following facts should be noted to be examined in sentences or utterances.

- The verb used in a sentence can be a single verb or a verb phrase.
- English verbal system, in terms of form, used in the system of tense, is a dual system, i.e. the verbs used for tense reference are available only in two forms.
- When the verb in the sentence is in the form of a phrase, then the tense is marked by the first member in the verb phrase or group. And, the time reference and complete, incomplete, and neutral aspects of the

verbal action are referred to by the other members of the verb phrase and related linguistic markers used to refer to state or aspect.

- The verb phrase of a sentence consists of the main verb and the auxiliary verbs. The auxiliary verbs include present participle, past participle, do-support for interrogatives and negatives, and modals for conveying semantic modalities.

The tense system of English language involves two types of verbs, namely the main verb and the auxiliary verbs. The main verb conveys the action referred to and the auxiliary verbs are used to convey the complete, incomplete, or completion-neutral status of the action referred to, the mood of the speaker and semantic modalities. And, the logical meaning drawn from the utterance or sentence provides the time reference in terms of present, past or future irrespective of one-to-one correspondence between the one verb and one fixed time reference in terms of present or past or future. Let us, before examining the utterances and sentences, look at different forms of *main verbs* and *auxiliary verbs* that are available for use in the system of English Language.

(a) All the main verbs in English Language are used in four forms, namely present, present participle, past, and past participle. For example, from regular category of verbs, cook-cooked-cooked (present-past-past participle). Another example from the irregular category of verbs, drive-drove-driven (present-past-past participle).

(b) Auxiliary verbs are used in the following forms: (i) Present Participle, e.g. be + main verb + ing (is/am/are or was/were cooking or driving); (ii) Past Participle, e.g. has/have or had + third form of the main verb (has/have cooked or had cooked); (iii) modal + main verb (will + cook or drive and would + cook or drive); Do support, e.g. Do + subject + main verb (Do you cook? or Did you cook?).

Having listed all the possible forms of verbs and verb phrases used in English language, it is time to examine illustrative examples and see the possibilities of number of tenses, timelines and aspects related to the action of verbs available in the system of English Language. This will be helpful in avoiding misconceptions, dichotomies, and confusions in the use of tenses and thereby drawing definite conclusions about the number of tenses and related time lines and aspects.

4.2 Analysis of the Tense System of English Language

Let us use all the forms of the main verbs and auxiliary verbs listed above and analyze the concepts of tense, time and aspects in English language in view of the above discussions.

We will use some main verbs, the auxiliary verbs of different forms of 'be' (is/am/are and was/were); different forms of 'has' (has/have and had); different forms of modals (can/could, will/would, may/might); and different forms of 'do' (do/does and did) for do-support in sentences for illustrative discussions.

First, let us look at how many forms of verb the linguistic system of English Language allows us for the purposes of tense. As we have foregrounded above, the notion of *tense is related to the form of the verb*.

Let us study the following sentences and analyze the *tense, time references, and aspects of verbal action* involved in them.

(i) We **cook** two times a day. / She **cooks** three times a day.

In the sentences included in (i) above, only the main verb is used, which is in the present tense form. The time referred to is present time. The aspect of action referred to in the sentence is neutral as it is neither complete, nor incomplete. It is recurrent in nature, is ongoing, and therefore it is completion-neutral as it is not 'one act' that is undertaken, completed, and discontinued. It continues and is repeated every day; therefore, it is beyond the confines of the fixed time zones of present, past and future.

(ii) She **is cooking** her lunch. / I **am cooking** my lunch. / They **are cooking** their lunch.

In the sentences included in (ii) above, the main verb 'cook' is used in its progressive form with different forms of the auxiliary verb 'be'. The first members in the verb phrase are 'is'/'am'/'are' which are in present tense form; hence, the tense referred to in the three sentences under consideration is present tense. The time referred to is present time. And, the action is incomplete as it is in progressive form, i.e. started but is not yet complete at the time of speaking.

(iii) She **cooked** her dinner.

In the sentence included in (iii) above, only the main verb, in its past tense form, is used and therefore the tense is past. The time referred to is past time. The aspect of action referred to in the sentence is neutral as it was neither complete, nor incomplete. It was recurrent in nature, was ongoing, and therefore it was completion-neutral in the past as it was not 'one act' that was undertaken, completed, and discontinued. It continued over a period of time

and was repeated every day and therefore it goes beyond the confines of the fixed time zones of present, past and future.

(iv) She **was cooking** her lunch when I called her. / We **were cooking** lunch when you called us.

In the two sentences included in (iv) above, the main verb 'cook' is used in its progressive form with different forms of 'be' in the past tense. The first members in the verb phrase are 'was' and 'were', which are in the past tense form; hence, the tense referred to is past tense. The time referred to is the past time. The main verb is in its progressive form; therefore, the action was incomplete at the time of speaking to the person being reported to in the sentence.

(v) She **has cooked** her lunch. / They **have cooked** their lunch.

In the two sentences included in (v) above, the first members in the verb phrases are 'has' and 'have', which are in the present tense form; therefore, the tense referred to is present tense. The main verb used is in the past participle form; therefore, the action reflects complete aspect. And, the time referred to is recent past as the action referred to is completed on the same day.

(vi) She **had cooked** the dinner before we reached.

In the sentence included in (vi) above, the first member in the verb phrase is an auxiliary verb in the past tense form; therefore, the sentence is in the past tense. The time referred to is past time. And, the aspect of the action involved in the main verb was already completed before the speaker reached the person in the sentence referred to.

(vii) She **can cook** different types of dishes.

In the sentence included in (vii) above, the first member in the verb phrase is a modal auxiliary in its present tense form and the tense used in the sentence therefore is present tense. As the modal 'can' refers to the ability of the subject in the sentence to cook, the time reference is non-temporal. And the aspect of the action involved in the main verb is neutral for the reason that the semantic focus is on the ability to cook rather than the act of cooking itself.

(viii) She **could cook** different types of dishes.

The auxiliary verb 'could' used in the sentence (viii) above, is the past tense of the modal verb 'can'; hence, the sentence is in the past tense. The time referred to is past time. The aspect of the action or activity referred to is beyond the semantic confines of being complete or incomplete as it is repetitive and recurrent in nature based on the ability of the addressee to do the act whenever needed in the past.

(ix) **Do** you **cook** yourself? / **Does** she **cook** herself?

In the sentences included in (ix) above, the do-support auxiliary verbs, used as first members, are in the present tense form; hence, the tense of the sentence is determined as present tense. The time referred to is present time. As the sentence is related to enquiring about the addressee's ability to cook, the aspect of action being completed or not completed is not applicable as it refers to the whenever-needed kind of situation on a regular basis.

(x) **Did** she **cook** herself?

In the sentence included in (x) above, the do-support auxiliary verb is used in its past tense form; hence, the tense is determined as past tense. The time referred to is clearly the past time. And, the aspect of the action referred to is completion-neutral as the reference of the speaker is to the action referred to in the past time zone, which is repetitive over a continuous period of time based on the ongoing recurrent need and the ability of the subject of the sentence to do the act of cooking on a regular basis.

Based on the examination and discussion of the verb phrases used in the 10 sentences listed above, which cover all the patterns of the verb phrases used in English Language, the following conclusions can be drawn.

- It is evident that the system of English Language does not permit the existence of three-tenses system.
- The form of the first member or the lone member in the verb phrase or verb group used in the sentence or utterance determines the tense.
- There can be only two tenses, i.e. present or past.
- Other members in the verb phrase perform auxiliary functions of determining the complete, incomplete or completion-neutral, i.e. neither complete nor incomplete aspect of the action referred to in the main verb, which may be in-progress or planned or proposed or hypothetical.

- Time reference in the sentence or utterance is a semantic characteristic that is determined by the overall meaning that is aimed at or intended to be communicated to the listener or hearer, which could be of present, past, future, or non-temporal reference.

For scaffolding and consolidating the above findings, some more practice tasks are required for the students. Students need to be given further practice for clearer understanding of the system of tense, time, and aspects that are used for communicative purposes in English language. The following practice task will help students consolidate their knowledge and understanding of the system of tense, time, and aspect that is applicable in English Language.

4.3 Practice Task

Work in groups, examine the following sentences and identify the tense in the verb or verb phrase, time referred to, and the aspect of the action being effected in the following sentences.

1. Roger **teaches** evening classes.
2. Ali **is driving** to Muscat next week.
3. He **is lecturing** now.
4. I **am lecturing** tomorrow.
5. There **are** many good books on Anthropology in the library.
6. I **will go** to Dubai next week.
7. American President **visits** Qatar tomorrow.
8. Back benchers **were sleeping** in today's history class.
9. She **laughed** at my remark in the last week's meeting.
10. If you **went** to Switzerland, when **would** you **return**?
11. Aisha **has looked after** her mother very well.
12. Yesterday's small plant **has turned into** a big tree now.
13. They **have gone** back to London.
14. The Ministry of Health **has sent** new Covid-19 guidelines.
15. We **had written** to them in the month of December.
16. I **can drive** a bike but not a car.
17. She **could swim** during her school days.
18. He **could have passed** the IELTS test in his first attempt.
19. The teacher **might have left** by now.
20. This letter **was signed** by the Vice Chancellor.
21. She **should have been travelling** now.
22. The medical college building **has been built**.
23. The secretary **had been rewarded** in a public function.
24. She **must have worked** really hard to get the distinction.
25. Adil **would have dropped** you at the airport.
26. It **might rain** today.
27. It **might have been raining** in Salalah.
28. My old car **had been troubling** me for years.
29. I **will do** it for you.
30. He **will be** at home now.
31. **Will** you **come** with me for shopping this evening?
32. I **shall take** you out for dinner on Monday.
33. You **must take** good care of your health.

34. It **will rain** tomorrow.

35. **Shall** we **plan** a trip to London during the summer vacation this year?

Practice Task Answers

The tense, time reference, and aspect relevant to the above sentences are as follow:

1. **Tense:** present; **Time:** non-temporal time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
2. **Tense:** present; **Time:** future time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
3. **Tense:** present; **Time:** present time reference; **Aspect:** incomplete
4. **Tense:** present; **Time:** future time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
5. **Tense:** present; **Time:** present time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
6. **Tense:** present; **Time:** future time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
7. **Tense:** present; **Time:** future time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
8. **Tense:** past; **Time:** recent past time reference; **Aspect:** incomplete
9. **Tense:** past; **Time:** past time reference; **Aspect:** complete
10. **Tense:** past; **Time:** future time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
11. **Tense:** present; **Time:** past time reference; **Aspect:** complete
12. **Tense:** present; **Time:** past time reference; **Aspect:** complete
13. **Tense:** present; **Time:** recent past time reference; **Aspect:** complete
14. **Tense:** present; **Time:** recent past time reference; **Aspect:** complete
15. **Tense:** past; **Time:** past time reference; **Aspect:** complete
16. **Tense:** present; **Time:** habitual present time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
17. **Tense:** past; **Time:** non-temporal habitual past time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
18. **Tense:** past; **Time:** hypothetical past time reference; **Aspect:** incomplete
19. **Tense:** past; **Time:** recent past time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
20. **Tense:** past; **Time:** past time reference; **Aspect:** complete
21. **Tense:** past; **Time:** tentative present time reference; **Aspect:** incomplete
22. **Tense:** present; **Time:** recent past time reference; **Aspect:** complete
23. **Tense:** past; **Time:** past time reference; **Aspect:** complete
24. **Tense:** present; **Time:** past time reference; **Aspect:** complete
25. **Tense:** past; **Time:** hypothetical past time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
26. **Tense:** past; **Time:** present time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
27. **Tense:** past; **Time:** hypothetical present time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
28. **Tense:** past; **Time:** habitual past time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
29. **Tense:** present; **Time:** future time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
30. **Tense:** present; **Time:** present time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
31. **Tense:** present; **Time:** near future time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
32. **Tense:** present; **Time:** future time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
33. **Tense:** present; **Time:** present time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
34. **Tense:** present; **Time:** future time reference; **Aspect:** neutral
35. **Tense:** present; **Time:** future time reference; **Aspect:** neutral

The above tripartite distinction of tense, time reference and aspect of the action involved in the verb forms used in the illustrative examples of sentences can be highly helpful and useful in minimizing the confusions and bringing in clarity in teaching and learning of the form, functions and meaning of the tenses involved in the sentences used in different communicative contexts.

5. Conclusions

The time distinctions of present, past and future are typically expressed in the verb phrase of sentences. However, based on the reflective and analytical discussion of the tense system, time references and the status of the action aspect presented in this paper, it can be confidently claimed that the linguistic system of English Language does not allow the provision of three-tense system in correspondence with the three clear-cut time line distinctions. In the linguistic system of English language, only two types of tense forming verbs are available, which are in present tense and past tense. The other forms of verb phrases namely, present participle and past participle forms are typically used to refer to incomplete and complete aspects of action respectively, not the tense. Furthermore, there is no matching relationship between the tense of a verb or a verb phrase and the time it corresponds with. Therefore, as Lund University's academic content (March 2014) on tense and time explains, a combination of auxiliary verbs and main verbs are typically required to express future time in English. When discussing the time expression in the verb phrase, it is expected to maintain a distinction between grammatical forms, e.g. present tense and past tense and the real-world notion of time and timelines. Thus, English verb phrases can have only two tenses, present and past; however, they can also refer to the future time with the help of semantic markers. And, in addition to this, they can offer a variety of temporal perspectives on events and states as highlighted in the analytical discussion in this paper with the help of state markers. Therefore, to use Michaelis' (2021) argument, we can say anything rigorous about the interplay between the functions of tense markers and the functions of aspectual markers only by carefully distinguishing between the functions of the two systems (pp. 163-182).

The main contribution of this paper is that it has provided the analytical framework of examining the three timelines (present, past, future) and three aspects (complete, incomplete, neutral) with the help of two tense system of present and past in English Language. The major takeaway from the findings of this paper, recommended for the teachers and students of English Language Grammar, is that keep the formal identity of tense; semantic identity of time; and the pragmatic identity of aspect in sentences separate while analyzing its intended meaning. Mixing these three concepts together will bring in dichotomy and semantic confusion and make the teaching and learning of the tense system misleading and difficult. Therefore, the concepts of tense, time referred to, and the aspect involved in the action verb of the sentence need to be worked out and analyzed separately.

The main finding of the analytical discussion in this paper that tense, aspect, and temporal state are semantically distinct calls for further research on investigating the whole gamut of interplay between the distinguishing functions of the tense markers, aspectual operators, and temporal state markers and how the separability of tense, time, and aspect is assumed in the system of tense in English Language.

References

- Badalamenti, V., & Henner-Stanchina, C. (2007). *Grammar dimensions: Form-meaning-use*. USA: Thompson Heinle.
- Bielak, J., & Pawlak, M. (2013). Applying Cognitive Grammar in the classroom: Teaching English tense and aspect. In J. Beilak & M. Pawlak (Eds.), *Applying Cognitive Grammar in the Foreign Language Classroom*. Heidelberg: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-27455-8>
- Binnick, R. I. (2021). Aspect and Aspectuality. In B. Aarts, A. McMahon, & L. Hinrichs (Eds.), *The Handbook of English Linguistics* (pp. 183-206). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119540618.ch11>
- Jespersen, O. (1965). *Philosophy of grammar*. W. W. Norton & Co.
- Leyla. (n. a.). *Grammar family*. Retrieved from <https://www.italki.com/post/discussion-192293>
- Littlewood, W. (1986). *Communicative language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lund University Content Manager. (March 12, 2014). *Time and tense*. Retrieved from <https://awelu.srv.lu.se/grammar-and-words/selective-mini-grammar/verb-phrases/time-and-tense/>
- Michaelis, L. A. (2021). Time and tense. In B. Aarts, A. McMahon, & L. Hinrichs (Eds.), *The Handbook of English Linguistics* (pp. 163-182). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Nunn, R. (2013). Teaching English grammar in a local variety of English: The case for text construction. *Yashashri: International Journal of English Language and Literature*, VI(2), 31-36.
- Peterson, P. W. (2000). *Changing times, changing tense systems: A review of the English tense system*. Washington: United States Department of State.

- Reppen, R. (2012). *Grammar and beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139344067>
- Sarkar, A. (1998). The conflict between future tense and modality: The case of will in English. *Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics*, 5(2). Retrieved from <https://repository.upenn.edu/pwpl/vol5/iss2/6>
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (2018). *Tense and Aspect*. Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/tense-aspect/>
- Thakur, V. S., & Al-Mahrooqi, R. (2015). Teaching grammar beyond the borders of sentence: An integrated approach to grammar in context. *ESBB: English scholars beyond borders*, 1(1), 165-176. Retrieved from <https://www.englishscholarsbeyondborders.org/46-2/publications/>
- Vaezi, S., & Alizadeh, M. (2011). How learners cope with English tenses: Evidence from think-aloud protocols. In *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences* (pp. 986-993). Elsevier Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.11.332>
- Wren, P. C., & Martin, H. (2000). *High school English grammar*. New Delhi: S Chand & Co.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).