



THE CONCEPT OF TENSE AND ASPECT IN ENGLISH VERB MORPHOLOGY. FERGANA STATE UNIVERSITY, FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES, STUDENT OF PHILOLOGY AND TEACHING LANGUAGE (ENGLISH LANGUAGE)

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the concepts of tense and aspect in English verb morphology, analyzing how verbs encode temporal reference and internal temporal structure. Tense situates events relative to the moment of speaking, while aspect describes the flow, completion, or repetition of actions. A qualitative review of grammar literature and linguistic studies shows that understanding both tense and aspect is essential for accurate language description, pedagogy, and effective communication. The paper discusses standard English tense–aspect combinations, theoretical perspectives, and pedagogical implications..

Introduction: Verbs in English convey not only actions but also temporal information. Two major grammatical categories responsible for this are tense and aspect¹. Tense situates an event in time relative to the present (past, present, future), whereas aspect describes how the event unfolds over time—whether it is completed, ongoing, habitual, or viewed as a whole.

Understanding the distinction between tense and aspect is critical for both linguistic theory and language teaching. Many learners treat the twelve standard English verb forms as mere tenses, overlooking the role of aspect². This simplification can lead to misunderstandings in both comprehension and production of English verb forms.

This study aims to clarify the distinction and interaction between tense and aspect, present their combinations in English, and explore theoretical and pedagogical implications³.

Methods: This study employs a qualitative literature review. Sources included descriptive grammars, linguistic articles, and pedagogical studies focusing on English tense and aspect. The analysis aimed to:

Define tense and aspect based on morphological and semantic criteria.

Identify standard tense–aspect combinations in English.

Examine theoretical perspectives on tense–aspect interaction.

¹ Binnick, R. (1991). *Time and the Verb: A Guide to Tense and Aspect*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

² Swan, M. (2005). *Practical English Usage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³ Palmer, F. R. (2001). *Mood and Modality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Consider implications for English language teaching.

By synthesizing evidence across multiple sources, this study presents a coherent understanding of tense and aspect in English verb morphology.

Results: Definition of Tense and Aspect

Tense is a grammatical category indicating the location of an event in time, typically past or present, with future expressed via periphrastic constructions. For example, walked indicates an event prior to now, while walks indicates present action.

Aspect, by contrast, expresses the internal temporal structure of the event. It describes whether an action is ongoing, completed, habitual, or continuous⁴. English distinguishes four primary aspects:

Simple: the base form, without reference to completion or duration (I walk)

Progressive (Continuous): indicates ongoing action (I am walking)⁵

Perfect: indicates completed action with relevance to another time (I have walked)⁷

Perfect Progressive: combines completion and duration (I have been walking)

These aspects interact with tense to form the familiar twelve English verb forms:

Tense Simple Progressive Perfect, Perfect Progressive,

Present I walk, I am walking, I have walked, I have been walking.

Past I walked, I was walking, I had walked, I had been walking

Future tense is usually expressed via auxiliary constructions (will walk, going to walk).

Theoretical Perspectives

Linguists distinguish between lexical aspect (Aktionsart) and grammatical aspect⁶. Lexical aspect refers to the inherent temporal properties of verbs (states, activities, achievements, accomplishments), while grammatical aspect is marked morphologically or syntactically.

Aspect interacts with tense but can remain non-deictic—-independent of the utterance time—whereas tense is deictic⁷. For example, I had been walking expresses past perfect progressive aspect relative to another past moment².

Pedagogical Implications

Understanding the tense–aspect distinction improves teaching and learning. Learners can reason more flexibly about verb choice: I have eaten (present perfect) vs I ate (simple past) reflects different temporal perspectives. Teaching tense and aspect as separate but interacting features, rather than as a list of twelve tenses, enhances comprehension and reduces errors⁸.

Discussion: Tense and aspect serve complementary functions: tense situates events in time, while aspect describes their temporal shape⁹. Their interaction allows speakers to express fine-grained temporal meaning. For instance, English lacks a morphological future tense, but aspectual distinctions remain crucial for understanding ongoing vs completed actions in the future context⁷.

Challenges include:

⁴Smith, C. S. (1997). *The Parameter of Aspect*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic.

⁵Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (2002). *A Communicative Grammar of English*. Harlow: Pearson.

⁶Celce-Murcia, M., & Larsen-Freeman, D. (1999). *The Grammar Book*. Boston: Heinle.

⁷Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman

⁸Swan, M. (2005). *Practical English Usage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁹Vendler, Z. (1967). *Linguistics in Philosophy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Stative verbs resisting progressive forms (I know vs I am knowing)¹⁰

Learners overgeneralizing perfect or progressive forms

Misunderstanding periphrastic future constructions

Pedagogically, teachers should emphasize patterns, temporal reference, and aspectual meaning, rather than rote memorization of verb forms¹¹.

Conclusion

Tense and aspect are central to English verb morphology. Tense situates events in time, while aspect conveys internal temporal structure. Understanding their interaction enhances linguistic analysis, language teaching, and comprehension. A focus on tense–aspect combinations, rather than isolated “tenses,” allows learners to express nuanced temporal meaning accurately.

Future research could explore cross-linguistic comparisons, learner difficulties, and the role of aspect in computational linguistics¹²..

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¹⁰ Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. (1999). *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. London: Longman.

¹² Comrie, B. (1985). *Tense*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹¹ Moens, M., & Steedman, M. (1988). Temporal ontology and temporal reference. *Computational Linguistics*, 14(2), 15–28.

¹² Comrie, B. (1976). *Aspect*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.