



THE CATEGORY OF TENSE AND ITS GRAMMATICAL EXPRESSION IN ENGLISH

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Abstract: This article examines the category of tense and its grammatical expression in the English language. Tense is one of the central grammatical categories that indicates the time of an action, event, or state in relation to the moment of speaking. In English, tense is mainly expressed through verb forms, auxiliary verbs, and specific grammatical structures. The article analyzes the major tense forms in English, including present, past, and future meanings, as well as their connection with aspect, such as simple, continuous, perfect, and perfect continuous forms. Special attention is given to the grammatical features of tense formation and the semantic differences between various tense forms.

Key words: tense, category of tense, English grammar, grammatical expression, verb forms, auxiliary verbs, aspect, present tense, past tense, future meaning, temporal relations, grammatical category.

Tense is one of the central grammatical categories in the English language, as it helps speakers indicate the time of an action, event, or state in relation to the moment of speaking. In general linguistics, tense is understood as a grammatical means of expressing temporal reference. It shows whether an action takes place in the present, happened in the past, or is connected with the future. However, in English, the category of tense is more complex than a simple division into present, past, and future. It is closely connected with aspect, modality, context, and communicative intention [1].

The English tense system is mainly expressed through verb forms and auxiliary constructions. For example, the difference between *I work*, *I worked*, *I am working*, and *I have worked* is not only a difference of time but also a difference of grammatical meaning. These forms may express regularity, completion, duration, relevance to the present, or a temporary action. Therefore, tense in English should be studied not only as a formal grammatical category but also as a functional system that reflects how speakers organize time in communication [2].

The relevance of this topic lies in the fact that many learners of English face difficulties in understanding and using tense forms correctly. This is especially noticeable when they compare English with languages that express time differently. For instance, the English present perfect tense often creates problems for learners because it connects a past action with the present situation. Similarly, continuous and perfect continuous forms require an understanding of aspect, not merely time. Thus, the study of tense is important for grammar learning, translation, academic writing, and effective communication.



The aim of this article is to analyze the category of tense and its grammatical expression in English. The article focuses on the main tense forms, their structural patterns, semantic functions, and their connection with aspect. It also explains how English tense forms express not only time but also duration, completion, repetition, and relevance to the moment of speaking.

The category of tense in English is traditionally associated with three main time references: present, past, and future. The present tense usually refers to actions, states, habits, general truths, and repeated events. For example, in the sentence *She teaches English*, the present simple form expresses a regular or habitual action. In the sentence *Water boils at 100 degrees Celsius*, the present tense expresses a general truth. Therefore, the present tense does not always mean that an action is happening at the exact moment of speaking; it may also express permanent facts, routines, and general statements [3].


The past tense is used to refer to actions or situations that took place before the moment of speaking. For example, *He visited London last year* clearly indicates a completed action in the past. The past tense may also be used in narratives, reports, historical descriptions, and imaginary situations. In the sentence *If I knew the answer, I would tell you*, the past form *knew* does not refer to real past time but expresses an unreal or hypothetical situation. This shows that tense forms in English may have both temporal and non-temporal meanings depending on context [4].

The future in English is expressed differently from the present and past because English does not have a single inflectional future tense form. Instead, future meaning is commonly expressed through auxiliary constructions such as *will*, *shall*, *be going to*, the present continuous, and the present simple. For example, *I will call you tomorrow* expresses a future decision or prediction, while *She is going to study abroad* may indicate a planned future action. Similarly, *The train leaves at 8 o'clock* uses the present simple form with future meaning. This proves that future time in English is expressed through several grammatical and contextual devices [5].

A key feature of the English tense system is its close relationship with aspect. Aspect describes how an action is viewed: whether it is simple, ongoing, completed, or continuing over a period of time. English has four main aspectual forms: simple, continuous, perfect, and perfect continuous. The simple aspect presents an action as a fact or complete event, as in *They study every day*. The continuous aspect emphasizes the process or duration of an action, as in *They are studying now*. The perfect aspect connects an action with a later point in time, especially the present, as in *They have studied this topic*. The perfect continuous aspect combines duration and relevance, as in *They have been studying for two hours* [6].

The present simple tense is one of the most frequently used tense forms in English. It is used to express habits, routines, permanent situations, general truths, and scheduled events. For example, *My brother works at a school* expresses a regular situation, while *The sun rises in the east* expresses a universal truth. From a grammatical point of view, the present simple





is formed by the base form of the verb, with the addition of *-s* or *-es* in the third person singular. This tense is structurally simple, but its communicative functions are broad.

The present continuous tense is formed with the auxiliary verb *be* and the present participle of the main verb. It is used to describe actions happening at the moment of speaking or temporary situations. For example, *She is reading a book now* expresses an action in progress. In another example, *I am staying with my relatives this week*, the tense shows a temporary situation. The present continuous may also express future arrangements, as in *We are meeting them tomorrow*. This demonstrates that one tense form may perform several functions in communication.


The present perfect tense is formed with *have/has* and the past participle of the main verb. It is used to show a connection between the past and the present. For instance, *I have finished my homework* means that the action is completed and its result is relevant now. The present perfect can also express life experience, as in *She has visited many countries*. This tense is especially important because it does not simply describe past time; it emphasizes the present relevance of a past action.

The past simple tense expresses completed actions in the past. It is commonly used with time expressions such as *yesterday*, *last week*, *in 2020*, and *two days ago*. For example, *They moved to Tashkent in 2021* clearly refers to a finished past event. The past continuous tense, on the other hand, describes an action that was in progress at a particular moment in the past, as in *They were watching TV when I arrived*. The difference between these two forms shows the importance of aspect in the English tense system.

The past perfect tense expresses an action that happened before another past action. For example, *She had left before I arrived* shows that one event was completed earlier than another event in the past. The past perfect continuous tense emphasizes the duration of an action before another past moment, as in *He had been working for three hours before the meeting started*. These forms are useful in narration because they help organize events in chronological order.

In English, tense forms are also important in academic and formal writing. Writers use tense to present facts, describe previous research, report findings, and discuss results. For example, the present simple is often used for general statements: *This theory explains the relationship between language and society*. The past simple is used to describe completed research: *The study examined tense forms in academic texts*. The present perfect is used to connect previous research with the current discussion: *Many scholars have analyzed the English tense system*. Therefore, correct tense usage contributes to clarity and coherence in academic writing.

The analysis shows that the category of tense in English cannot be fully understood without considering aspect and context. Although tense mainly indicates time, its actual meaning depends on how the speaker presents the action. The same time reference may be expressed through different forms depending on whether the speaker wants to emphasize completion, duration, repetition, or relevance. For example, *I wrote the letter*, *I was writing*



the letter, I have written the letter, and I have been writing the letter all refer to writing, but each sentence presents the action differently.

Thus, the grammatical expression of tense in English is a complex system that combines verb forms, auxiliary verbs, aspectual meanings, and contextual interpretation. Tense helps speakers organize events in time, but it also allows them to express additional meanings such as duration, completion, habituality, and current relevance. For learners of English, understanding this system is essential for accurate sentence construction and effective communication.

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