

**ESOL**  
in Higher Ed

# Applied Linguistics

Chapter 5  
E. Platt

**Tense, Aspect, & Mode  
In English Language Learning**

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## Framing Information in Terms of Time

Languages have a variety of ways to indicate the time of events.

- They may mark this information by means of grammaticalization, i.e., with morphemes on verbs:  
*“We worked all night.”*
- Or they may do so using temporal adverbs:  
*“I always work at home.”*

# Examples From Other Languages

## *Verb marking: Swahili*

- Aixa a-na-kwenda sokoni. Present
- ‘Aixa [subj agr] [tense morpheme] [go] to market’
- Aixa a-likweneda sokoni. Past
- Aixa a-takwenda sokoni. Future

# Examples From Other Languages

## Adverb: Vietnamese

- Tôi gặp cô Thu **hôm qua**.
- I see Miss Thu **yesterday**.
- ông ấy **sẽ** mua quyển sách.
- He **will** buy [classifier] book.

## Tense Systems

### No Tense Marking:

- Vietnamese, Chinese, Burmese

### Two-Tense Systems:

- Past, non-past: (Germanic languages including English, Iranian languages, Japanese)
- Future, non-future: (Greenlandic, Quechua)

### Three-Tense Systems:

- Past, present, future (Romance, Slavic, Celtic, & Bantu languages)

# Tense & Aspect Defined

“In grammar, *tense* is a category that locates a situation in time, to indicate when the situation takes place.”

(Comrie, 1976)

*Aspect* refers to “the internal constituency of actions, events, states, processes or situations.”

(Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

## Twelve tenses?

Generally speaking, it is more precise to say that for English only simple present and past are *tenses*; progressive and perfective are *aspects*.

Future in English is indicated in many ways:

- With the modals *will* and *shall*
- With *going to*, often pronounced *gonna*
- As simple present + adverb

# **TENSE VS ASPECT: MEANING, USE, FORM**

## Caveat

The information provided in this presentation is brief, so is not as comprehensive as it could be to address all the complex issues of tense, aspect and mode. Although form is quite straightforward, it is particularly difficult to simplify aspects of meaning and use.

## An excellent reference

- Celce-Murcia, M. & Larsen-Freeman, D. (1999). *The grammar book: An ESL/EFL teacher's course*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House/Heinle & Heinle.
- A detailed and thorough resource
- Information on form, meaning, and use of all aspects of grammar
  - Ch 7: Contrasts tense and aspect systems
  - Ch 8: Auxiliaries, including all modals
  - Ch 9: Problems with tense, aspect and mode in discourse
- Helpful teaching suggestions

Tense: absolute location of an event or action in time, present or past

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/internet-grammar/verbs/tense.htm>

- Rosalia works at Home Depot (habitual)
- She left Target last month for better working conditions.
- And then the car crashes into a wall (narrative telling of past event)

## Tenses: Form

- Simple present: Verb is unmarked except in the case of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular:
  - We often go out in the evening.
  - My sister goes shopping at Target
- Simple past: Verb is marked with –ed (regular verbs), changes internally, or is unmarked:
  - The children worked on their lessons.
  - One child lost his pencil.
  - We cut the bread for sandwiches last night.

# Irregular English Verbs

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germanic\\_strong\\_verb](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germanic_strong_verb)

- More than 400
- 200 with distinct roots
- Many irregular verbs: Germanic origin
  - Strong verbs: change of vowel in stem – sing, sang, sung; drive, drove, driven
  - Weak verbs: (many retain dental t/d) bring, brought, brought; keep, kept, kept
  - Regular ending verbs are also weak

# More on Irregular Verbs

- Steven Pinker:  
[http://pinker.wjh.harvard.edu/articles/media/2000\\_03\\_landfall.html](http://pinker.wjh.harvard.edu/articles/media/2000_03_landfall.html)
- Facts about irregular verbs:
  - tell us about the history of the language
  - constitute 70% of verbs we use
  - Include both patterned, and unpredictable forms; essentially not rule-governed

## Aspect: Meaning/Use

- how an event or action is viewed with respect to time, not its actual location in time
- “deals with the internal constituency of actions, events, states, processes or situation (&) ... may indicate that an action is completed or still ongoing.”
- <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/tense-aspect/>

## Aspects: Progressive

### Progressive (continuous)

- Progressive aspect expresses processes, not states (Summer Institute of Linguistics);

<http://www->

[01.sil.org/linguistics/glossaryoflinguisticterms/WhatIsProgressiveAspect.htm](http://www-01.sil.org/linguistics/glossaryoflinguisticterms/WhatIsProgressiveAspect.htm)

- We are working on the problem.
- The frog was sitting on a lily pad.
- The military will be conducting drills here.

# Aspects: Perfective: Use

- *Present perfect*: used to express an event occurring before the present, but without a specified time
  - I have seen that movie already.
  - My sister hasn't come back yet.
- *Past perfect*: refers to a completed action prior to a past action
  - When you finished your work, I had just started mine.

## Aspect: Perfective: Form

- Present perfect: have/has + verb in past participial form
  - Have you ever been to Bangkok?
  - Jose has never eaten Thai food.
- Past perfect: Had + verb in past participial form
  - We had already finished breakfast when my uncle walked in.

## Mode: Use

- A modal verb (modal, modal auxiliary) is a type of auxiliary verb that is used to indicate modality: likelihood, ability, permission, and obligation.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modal\\_verb](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modal_verb))

- Examples: *can/could, may/might, must, will/would, and shall/should.*

## Modals / Future: Form

- Modals are a closed class, thus can not be conjugated. They precede only unmarked verbs.
  - Future/shall: I shall not pass this way again.
  - Future/will: You will not find cookies in that jar.
  - Future/be going to: He's going to (gonna) be angry with you!

## Future Modals: Meaning / Use

- Will: Conveys sense of promise or commitment  
(Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999)
  - I'll definitely be at Starbucks this evening.
- Also conveys contingency, distance (from present), or speaker control; more formal than *be going to*
  - If you don't eat your vegetables, you won't have strong, healthy bones

## Future Modals: Use

- Shall:
  - Old prescriptive rule: Use with 1<sup>st</sup> persons singular and plural (no longer holds true in North America)
  - Infrequently used in NA English, but is still found in frozen forms or formal commands
    - “Shall we dance?”
    - You shall not leave the dormitories after 10:00 p.m.

**TEACHING SUGGESTIONS:  
TENSE, ASPECT, & FUTURE MODE**

## Tense / Aspect (low interm activity)

- Form: Select texts with natural data in which verb forms have been enhanced (bold, italics, etc.). This is a way to help Ss notice the various forms.
- Form: Create a pack of cards for a concentration game, ½ have unmarked verb form, the other half have irreg past & participle. Ss must match the cards.
- Meaning / Use: Given a list of adverbials used with simple pres, pres perf, and pres prog, have Ss identify the appropriate adverbial with sentences using any of the three forms.

## Tense / Aspect (interm level activities)

- Meaning/use (see previous):, Have Ss make Q/A dialogs using the correct form w/ each adverb or adv phrase.
- Use: Simple past vs past prog: Ss identify important moments in the past in their countries & create Q/As:
  - A: When you heard about X, what were you doing?
  - B: When I heard about X, I was ... (prog form)
- Use: Simple past vs. pres perf. Same type of Q/A dialog:
  - A: Have you ever X (pres perf)?
  - B: Yes, I have?
  - When did you X (simple past)?
  - B: I X (simp past)

## Tense / Aspect (advanced activity)

- Meaning: Ss create (illustrated) charts w/ milestones in their lives indicated in pres tense by year
- Ss ask each other about their charts (or about a third S's chart):
  - Q, pres perf prog: It's 1982. For how long have you been X-ing?
  - Q, past perf prog: In 1994 for how long had you been Y-ing?
  - Q, future perf prog: In 2020 for how many years will you have been Z-ing?

## Future Mode: Upper Intermediate Activities

- Use: Ss each bring photos of famous tourist places in their countries
- T models a narrative about his/her plans to visit such a place using *be going to* (to frame the activity) and *will* (to elaborate)
  - I'm going to visit the Nebraska State capitol in August. I'll take photographs of the mosaics on the floor under the rotunda.
- Ss engage in the activity individually, then in Q/As in pairs or small groups

## Mode: Advanced Activity

- Use: To practice future perf and future perf prog aspects Ss design dialogs of the pattern:
  - A: Maria will arrive at JAX at 11:30 tomorrow night. Who can pick her up?
  - B: By then I will already have gone to bed (so I can't pick her up).
  - C: By then I will have been sleeping for an hour (so you'll have to pick her up).

**That's it!**  
**Any Questions?**



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