

The Verb: Tense, Aspect, Phase

Lecture 6

The concept of *Time* in different languages

- plays a very important role in human life;
- occupies a very important place in the conceptual picture of reality
- in the semantic space of language though languages may vary greatly in expressing this concept.

- **In most European languages** the expression of time is associated with the grammatical category of tense: present, past and future.
- **Many non-European languages** do not use this time scale: (Buzarra, an Australian aboriginal language).
- **Hopi** have a different concept of time - there are no straightforward past, present and future.
- There are languages (e.g. Burmese) where time does not find a grammatical expression at all.
- There are also languages in which the verb is concerned with spatial rather than temporal relations.

In **English** the concept of time finds
a very elaborate expression

- It is presented by units of various lingual levels: grammatical forms, nouns, adjectives and adverbs.
- Taken together they constitute the **functional-semantic category of temporality**.
- The grammatical category of tense the concept of time represented in aspect and time correlation (phase).

The grammatical category of tense

- is a category which expresses the relation between the time of the action and the moment of speech (now) or temporal relations (then);
- both *now* and *then* denote stretches of time and the boundaries of these stretches are not clearly outlined:
Experience fades. Memory stills;
- the *now* and *then* are not stable but shifting because they present the speaker's moment of speech;
- tense may be compared to the most prototypical deictic words - the pronouns. This fact differentiates the category of tense from the categories of aspect and time correlation (phase).

Complexity of the grammatical category of tense: the number of categorial forms

Linguists differ in the questions related to the scope of this category and to the number of categorial forms

- 1) the relations between tense and the other two verbal categories in which the concept of time is represented (aspect and time correlation /phase);
- 2) the status of *shall/will + Infinitive*, i.e. the problem of Future tense.

Three grammatical categories:

1. **tense** represents the relation of the action to the moment of speech (the speaker's **now**);
2. **aspect** reflects the internal temporal structure of the situation as presented by the speaker, the speaker's 'vision' and interpretation of the temporal situation;
3. **time correlation / phase** presents the action in its correlation to another action or point in time as prior to it.

Syncretism –

Present Perfect Continuous

It has been raining for hours

- an action which began prior to the moment of speech,
- has been going on for a certain period of time up to the moment of speech,
- is still going on, i.e. simultaneous to the moment of speech.

The postulate of the grammatical category

(A.I. Smirnitsky)

A *categorial form* cannot express simultaneously several meanings of the same grammatical category though it can express several meanings of different grammatical categories.

The Category of Tense

Time & Tense

Time – an objective category.

Tense – a verbal category.

Objective Time:

Past

Present

Future

The Problem – how many tenses in English.
What is the status of the future tense?

The Present & Past Tenses

The range of meaning of the verb in the present tense is wide:

1. The moment of speaking: *I hear a noise. I am reading.*
2. A prolonged action: *We live in Novosibirsk.*
3. A timeless action: *The earth moves round the sun.*

The present tense can express **future** actions:

I am leaving tomorrow.

I have dinner with him on Sunday.

The present tense for future - structurally dependent

1. In adverbial clauses of time & condition:
When / if he comes we'll go to the cinema.
2. In object clauses expressing a future action simultaneously with the action of the principle clause:
I'll do what you say. I'll see what he does.
3. The Present Tense for Past action - 'historical' or 'dramatic' for stylistic purpose:
I enter the room and whom do you think I see? Your sister Rachel.

The present tense embraces actions taking place within different periods of time -

its meaning is not clearly defined:

Past vs. Non-past

L.S. Barkhudarov:

The meaning of the **past** – clearly defined (marked member): *worked, played, sang*.

The meaning of the **non-past** (present) – outside the past time sphere (unmarked member).

The Problem of the Future Tense

Threefold division of time: the future tense – an analytical form of the verb (Bloch, Ilyish, etc):

- combinations of an auxiliary verb + a lexical part (*shall/will + infinitive*) – analytical forms;
- only in few patterns *shall/will* have a modal meaning;
- combinations *shall/will + infinitive* have an inherent modal meaning of uncertainty ‘the modality of futurity’.

Twofold system of tenses (Jespersen, Palmer, Barkhudarov, etc.)

- The category of tense in English – the **opposition of the past & non-past (present)**:
live – lived, ring – rang, go – went, etc.

L.S. Barkhudarov:

The combination *shall/will + infinitive* **cannot be regarded as a morphological form** – it cannot be singled out as such either formally or semantically:

Shall/will cannot be regarded as a morphological form

- **Form**: combinations *shall/will + infinitive* = *may/can + infinitive*;
- **An analytical form**: combinations *shall/will + infinitive* do not contain **a discontinuous morpheme**;
- *shall/will + infinitive* is **not only construction to express the future**;
- Past form (*should/would*) + *infinitive* may express **Future-in-the-Past** – it is **impossible** to combine past & future;
- The **meaning** of combinations *shall/will + infinitive* – modal meanings are present there. A future action is never real (possible, probable, planned, etc.)

Twofold system of tenses:

- English has no special morphological form of the future tense, and the grammatical category of tense is the **opposition of past and non-past tenses**.
- This point of view prevails among linguists of the American descriptive school.

The Category of Aspect

Common & Continuous Aspects

Aspect – a grammatical category, a meaningful opposition of two form classes:

1. Common (non-continuous) aspect (unmarked):
He plays. He played.
2. Continuous aspect (marked):
He is playing. He was playing.

Their difference is in **the character of the flow of the process** (action or state) itself.

Continuous aspect is marked **formally & semantically**

The verb denotes an action in progress at the moment under consideration (present, past or future) or during a certain period of time:

- *He was watching movies at 5 o'clock*
(moment).
- *He was watching movies all year round*
(period).

Common aspect denotes actions in more general way

The verb denotes **a process (action or state) in progress or represent it as having a limit**, but the form of the verb does not state it:

1. *He **brought** her flowers yesterday* (momentary action).
2. *He **brought** her flowers every day* (recurrent action).
3. *He **sat** in the corner for a long time* (state).

L.S. Barkhudarov:

Common aspect - **non-continuous** aspect.

Its range of meanings is very wide:

1. A momentary action: *She dropped the plate.*
2. A recurrent action: *I get up at 8 o'clock.*
3. An action or state (lasts long): *He lived in Moscow from 1978 to 1993.*
4. An action or state of unlimited duration: *The Volga flows into the Caspian Sea.*

Common aspect – extensive.

Continuous aspect – intensive.

Different interpretations of Aspect

- Three approaches to forms of the *is/was playing* type.
- 1. O. Jespersen: expanded / progressive **tenses**, expressing limited duration.
No aspective distinctions in the English verb, only 4 groups of tenses:
 1. indefinite,
 2. continuous,
 3. perfect,
 4. perfect continuous.

Aspect is not Tense

No tense difference between:

- *He speaks English – He is speaking English* (Present).
- *He spoke English – He was speaking English* (Past).

A prolonged difference in the **character of the flow of the process itself** (Comrie) –
not a temporal one (Bloch).

Aspect & Tense are connected with time

Tense locates situation in time.

Aspect is connected with internal temporal structure of the situation.

The difference between:

- 1) situation-internal time (aspect) &**
- 2) situation-external time (tense).**

Tense & Aspect – different verbal categories.

2. *is/was playing* – **tense-aspect forms**

(H. Sweet) definite tenses

3. **Aspect – a specific category of the verb**

(Barkhudarov, Ilyish, Bloch).

Aspect is not confined to the morphosyntactic category of the verb, it is much wider.

Semantic category of aspect is expressed by **grammatical & lexical means**.

Aspective character of the verb:

1. **Terminative (limitive)** – imply a limit beyond which the action cannot continue (*to nod, to catch, to jump*).
2. **Non-terminative** – do not imply such a limit (*to love, to live, to sit, to stand*).

Polysemantic verbs may be non-terminative or terminative (*to see* – *видеть; увидеть*).

The distinction between **T** : **NT** verbs – is **lexical** (it is clear only from the context).

Formal expression of aspect is carried out by form classes of the type:

He reads – He is reading; He read – He was reading.

The Category of Phase

Perfect – Non-Perfect Phase

- **Phase** – one of the three categories (tense, aspect & phase) expressing **time in relations**.

- **Tense** expresses **situation-external time**:

He is reading – He was reading (present – past time)

- **Aspect** is concerned with **situation-internal time**:

He read – He was reading (non-continuous – continuous aspect)

What is **the status of the category of phase** in expressing **situation time**?

Phase –

a morphosyntactic category of the verb realized in a set
of opposed perfect & non-perfect forms
(finite & non-finite)

Non-perfect Phase (unmarked)	Perfect Phase (marked)
asks	has asked
asked	had asked
is asking	has been asking
was asking	had been asking
was asked	had been asked
to ask	to have asked
to be asked	to have been asked
to be asking	to have been asking
asking	having asked
being asked	having been asked

Grammatical meaning of Phase

Priority – Non-priority

- **Perfect forms** express **actions prior to other actions** (definite moments) in the past, present & future.
- **Non-perfect forms do not** express priority.

Past tenses may be also seen as expressing priority to the moment of speech.

The difference between

Tense priority	Phase priority
absolute (primary)	relative (secondary)
Past tense shows absolute priority of the action to the moment of speech	The perfect phase expresses its relative priority, limited by some other action or moment, which does not necessarily coincide with the moment of speech.
<p><i>e.g. She had lost her job as a real estate agent and was working as a waitress.</i></p> <p>Past tense in both predicates express absolute priority to the moment of speech</p>	<p>Perfect phase in <i>had lost</i> expresses relative priority of the situation against the situation in <i>was working</i>.</p>

Tense & Phase

express situation-external priority

- **Tense** expresses absolute (primary) priority
- **Phase** expresses relative (secondary) priority.
- Both are opposed to **aspect** expressing situation-internal time.

Tense, aspect & phase - grammatical (morphosyntactic) categories of the verb expressing time relations.

Different interpretations of **Perfect – Non-Perfect forms**

The problem of the perfect forms has long been a controversial one:

- *What is the grammatical meaning of the perfect forms?*
- *To what grammatical category do perfect forms belong?*

There are 4 approaches to answer these questions

Perfect – Non-Perfect forms as Tense

(H.Sweet, O.Jespersen, Ганшина, etc.)

Non-perfect forms – primary tenses: refer as action to a certain period of time in the past, present (the moment of speaking) or future.

Perfect forms – secondary tenses: do not refer an action to a certain point of time but express priority to a point of time in the past, present or future.

- Present Perfect – an action that occur before the moment of speaking.
- Past Perfect – an action that took place before a certain moment in the past.
- Future Perfect – an action will take place before a certain moment in the future.

Perfect – Non-Perfect forms as Aspect

- aspective forms of the verb.

- G.N. Vorontsova: **successive connection** of two events, one expressed by the Perfect (transmissive aspect).
- Present perfect shows a completed action, related to the present – **continuity** between the past & the present.
- B.A. Ilyish: past perfect & future perfect – **relative tenses** (express priority); present perfect – **resultative aspect**.
- **The meaning of succession & limited duration** expressed by perfect forms are aspective by nature. The meaning is not the leading one in the semantics of the Perfect.

Perfect – Non-Perfect forms as Tense-Aspect (I.P. Ivanova)

Perfect forms express **temporal & aspective functions in a blend**.

The **actual double nature** of the form:

1. **temporal** (situation-external time) &
2. **aspective** (situation-internal time) spheres of verbal semantics.

M. Y. Bloch: the conception loses sight of the **categorial nature** of the perfect: it does not explain the difference between:

- tense-aspect forms &
- tense forms & aspect forms

No such category as tense-aspect in English.

Perfect – Non-Perfect forms

as a specific verbal category (A.I. Smirnitsky)

Perfect : Non-Perfect – a specific category (the category of time correlation).

Their difference is not:

- **temporal**: *He had come* – *He came* (past actions),
- **aspective**: *has gone* (special aspect) : *has been going* (resultative & continuous aspects)

Non-Perfect forms are not correlated with another action or moment.

Perfect forms are correlated with another action or moment

Perfect – Non-Perfect forms – grammatical category of correlation (L.S. Barchudarov, B.A. Ilyish)

- The category of retrospective coordination (Bloch).
- The category of order (Rogovskaya).
- The category of **phase**:
current – non-perfect vs. perfect.

Phase shows a special relation between the action & its effect.

Current phase vs. Perfect phase

1. A verb in a current phase shows an action, which is **simultaneous** with its effect (the action is in phase with its effect):

He came in (He was there + He was seen the moment he came).

2. The perfect phase shows an action, the effect of which is **delayed** (the effect of the action is out of phase with it):

He has opened the book (the book is open).

The linguistic **theory of phase** points out **the meaning of the effect of the action.**