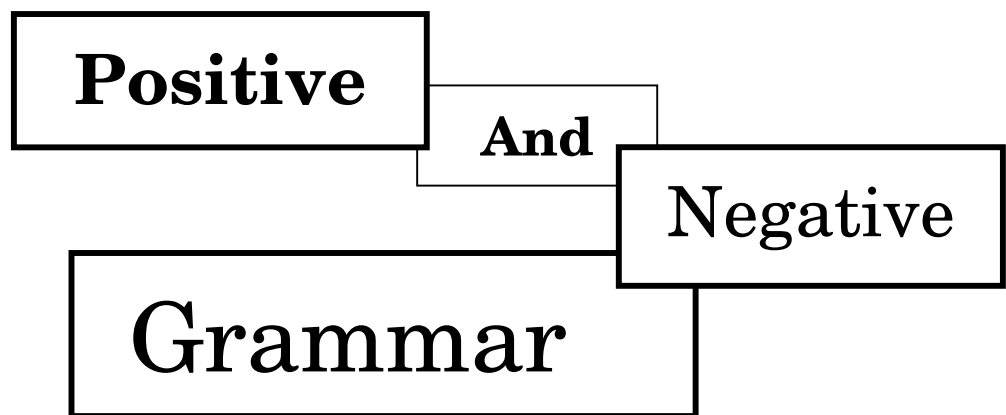


The ELT Verb



Robert A. Buckmaster

**The ELT Verb
Positive and Negative Grammar**

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Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Key Concepts	5
An Analogy	6
Introduction	7
A View Of Language	11
Part One	
Time	15
Distance	22
Objective and Subjective	30
Context and Co-text	31
Progressive Forms: Life's Journeys	35
The Perfect Problem	42
The 'to-infinitive'	47
Part Two	
The First and Second Forms	53
The be + ing Forms	55
The Third Form	57
The Future	59
Modal Verbs	61
Conditionals	65
Part Three	
An Overview: Decision Tree Analysis	68
Conclusion	77
Selective Key	80
Verb Form Terms	83
Bibliography	84

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Progressive Forms: life's journeys **Network** January 2001

Co-text, context and core meaning **Network** October 2000

Thoughts on the to-infinitive **Network** May 2000

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Authentic examples marked by letters and numbers
are taken from the British National Corpus: thank you.

Other examples are taken from a variety of sources,
many from the Daily Telegraph, again, thank you.

Key Concepts and Terms

Context: the general situation of the language eg an informal discussion between friends.

Co-text: the words in a sentence or utterance that surround the item being focussed on.

eg **What a lovely day it is today.** (co-text in bold).

Core-meaning: the proposition that verbs have a core meaning that underlies **all** uses.

Distance: For example, there is distance between '**here**' and '**there**' and between '**now**' and '**then**'.

'**Then**' can be used to talk about the future.

Finished and **Completed:** it is proposed that there is a difference in meaning between these two words.

Finished conveys an idea of ending – the focus is on the end of the action while **completed** has more shape and an idea of the whole.

An Analogy

This book uses a central idea of 'default'. If you turn on your computer and open your wordprocessor programme you do not have to set the font or size – there is a standard default font and size. There are a number of default ideas in English, which will be explored in this book. They are:

- ❖ Default time: 'Non-Past' not 'Past'
- ❖ Default reality: 'Real' not 'Unreal'
- ❖ Default verb forms:
 - in Non-Past Time the default is the 'First Form'.
 - in Past Time the default is the 'Second Form'.
 - in Unreal Non-Past Time the default is the 'Second Form'.
 - in Unreal Past Time the default is 'had + 3rd Form'.

The default time, reality and verb form for Non-Past Time are all '**unmarked forms**'.

Introduction

This book sets out to challenge the orthodox ideas on verb grammar which dominate ELT. The grammar in all coursebooks, materials and reference books is all the same. This does not mean that this coursebook grammar is English grammar, because grammar is only an analysis. The language itself is. Grammar is merely a product of a viewpoint; change the viewpoint and you change the grammar. There are different views of grammar, different analyses and thus different grammars.

This book is not a comprehensive grammar of the English language – that is far too ambitious a task for a working teacher. Rather it is an exploration of some areas of grammar associated with verbs. The book is in two parts. The first part is a collection of essays on neglected perspectives on grammar which challenge the orthodox approach and suggest other viewpoints. The second part looks at verb forms in the light of the concepts presented in the first part and attempts to synthesise the grammar of verbs into a system.

Grammar, grammar and more grammar

Grammar is all pervasive in language teaching methodology and language teaching materials although some authors have tried to redress the balance in favour of vocabulary (for example Willis, 1990 and Lewis 1993) or even to nullify the distinction completely. Yet grammar remains central to English language teaching, despite the communicative revolution of twenty years ago and the proponents of the Lexical Approach.

A teacher has to come to terms with grammar in materials and reference books. Hefting up a copy of Swan's Practical English Usage one is impressed by its size and weight, and looking inside it, by its comprehensiveness. The very existence of this book raises some questions: 'Am I supposed to know all this?' 'How much are my learners supposed to know?' and even, heretically, 'Is this volume useful at all? Is it, in fact, the 'teacher's bible'?'

Swan's Defence of Vested Interests

Michael Swan's knowledge of grammar is extremely impressive – as his book shows. However, the grammar view implicit in Practical English Usage is unhelpful. In a recent critique of an article in ELTJ Swan tears into the approach which this book espouses. I quote:

'Petrovitz's paper exemplifies a line of argument which surfaces from time to time in discussion of pedagogic grammar, and which one might unkindly describe as the 'I have seen the light' approach. It runs as follows:

' We normally teach such-and-such a grammatical topic (the present perfect, articles, prepositions, or whatever) by giving a large number of superficial 'rules of thumb.' These don't really get to the heart of the matter, and they give the impression that the

relevant grammatical area is bitty and arbitrary. In fact, however, there are deeper underlying patterns which guide native speakers' instinctive choices. If we can tease out these patterns and convey them to our students, everything will fall into place, and the relevant structures will cease to be problematic.'

Although these is occasionally something to be said for this view, I think it is generally unproductive.....The reason why teachers think the English tense or article systems, for instance, are complicated and difficult to teach, is – quite simply – that they are.'

(Swan, 2001)

Now, I agreed with Swan's comments re the article he was discussing but not this passage. It is patronising to say the least – you 'have seen the light' but you are wrong. And it is misguided. It is a passage of someone who knows a lot about grammar and probably everything in this book but who has chosen a view on grammar and is sticking with this view. There are other views which should not be so glibly dismissed.

The tense system as it is currently described is **easy** to teach – it is difficult to **learn**. This might partly be because it has been badly described and labelled. There is no alternative systematic attempt to describe English grammar. All published grammar is the same and it does not work.

Some of the problems are these.

1. Labels

The labels applied to verb forms are misleading. Parallels are drawn between the past, present and future and verb forms (Simple Present etc) which are wrong. This leads to grammar explanations like this one from Fast track to CAE (Stanton and Morris, 1999)

'When they (If only/wish) refer to the **present** or **future**, they are followed by the **past** tense.' (p200)

Where is the sense, logic or reason in such a statement? English language teaching materials are full of such nonsense.

2. Verbs and lists

Learners are invariably presented with a long series of verb forms and lists of their uses. It often seems that the present description of verbs was written especially so that it would take a lot of time to deal with them. At no time is the **system** of English verbs presented (and there **is** a system). Learners are expected to make sense of the system and to systematize it for themselves with no help from their teachers. Where is the sense in that? Of course learners have difficulty with the **system** of verbs if you do not teach them a system.

3. False contrasts

Often two forms are contrasted in coursebooks as if there is a choice between them. An example would be the Present Perfect and Simple Past. This book will attempt to show that there is no such choice between these two forms.

4. Teaching too much grammar

Coursebooks are full of grammar. But it's the same grammar, repeated ad infinitum all the way up to Proficiency level. We teach too much grammar – those lists of uses – and teach it too often. Learners on the other hand do not learn enough grammar. Learners never seem to master all those uses. Perhaps if we taught less, learners would learn that and more. How much do we have to teach? In any case, there is precious little evidence in the literature that teaching grammar in what Scott Thornbury terms 'grammar McNuggets' has any impact on learning. And anyway, why is 'grammar' equated so much with verbs?

The alternative

An alternative approach to verbs would be to teach a simple system of grammar in broad brush strokes and for the learners to learn the complexity of the whole system with the help of teachers. Teacher would provide the structure, the learners would colour in the picture. That is, teach less and learn more. This book proposes such an approach and attempts a description of verbs to fit in with it – the system. My own knowledge of grammar is more like a learner's than like Michael Swan's vast knowledge. Grammar is still a journey of discovery for me, as it is for my learners. Yet I can use grammar as a native speaker while my learners cannot. I have complete process knowledge but less knowledge **about** grammar. I feel that my learners need more process knowledge and do not need to know about grammar. In fact they often know more about grammar than I do – they have learnt those lists of uses and lots of terminology– but it hasn't done them much good.

The Graverian view

In Graver's (1986) *Advanced English Practice*, first published in 1963, there is an interesting passage:

Student's at an advanced level should, in any case, be encouraged to develop a healthy scepticism of 'rules' until they have had an opportunity to measure them against the facts of English as they find it. They should be encouraged to keep a record of examples they find.....Provided the teacher provides the necessary framework for investigation students can be asked to examine modern written English of various registers and styles, with a view to finding out, say, when and where the passive is used.....Given the necessary help, students can discover and build up their own grammar of English, in however limited a way. (p13)

I would argue that this applies no less to teachers and learners **at any level**. This book attempts to challenge the orthodox descriptions of English, to raise questions in the minds of teachers and encourage them to undertake an

exploration of English and to 'discover and build up their own grammar of English'. Each learner will construct their own representation of English grammar, probably in relation to their own L1 grammar. In fact you may ask if a native speaker grammar is at all appropriate for learners of English. Should a grammar described by native speakers, for native speakers to teach, be a good basis for teaching grammar for learners to use?

It sometimes seems that verbs have been described in such a way as to make them easier for monolingual native speakers to teach (to multilingual classes). 'Time' is a relatively easy concept for a native speaker to talk about **in English** and represent on a board: complex metalanguage is not needed.

Questions which are not often asked are: should native speakers teach grammar and if so, what grammar should that be?

The key premise of my own personal search is that grammar is simpler than books such as Swan's suggest. You'll be asked to consider different perspectives and then be Graverian in your approach to exploring language. I will use mainly constructed examples to illustrate my points but the ideas discussed here need to be applied to authentic samples of English.

A View of Language

The legacy of history

Our view of language has been shaped by the first codifiers and grammarians who wrote grammar books 200 years ago and basically our view, and what is taught, has not changed and grammar remains at the heart of every best selling course, of every syllabus and every test. This book does not contend that grammar is bad – far from it – attention needs to be paid to form. What is bad about English pedagogical grammar is the grammar itself. Pedagogical grammars have not changed in any significant way for 150 years, despite the advances in every field connected to language.

These last 150 years though, are, in some ways, the least important in the development of English. Oral language, at its heart, is meaning –driven. Until English became a school subject and the grammarians began prescribing how it should be, there were no written, codified rules. Rules only became important relatively recently in language and language teaching. Before then meaning was central and another system – that of convention governed the acceptability of language utterances. Of course convention still governs language, despite the rules which have been drawn up. But it is the rules themselves are foregrounded in language learning as essential learning objectives rather than the conventions.

Meaning-based rather than rule-based

The central proposition of this book is that there are a few central meanings – meanings to words, meanings to verbs, which are always true. It is these meanings which determine use. We use a particular word because it expresses the meaning we want. Looking at language through a series of rules which determine what we say is a mistaken view of the same phenomena.

Thus we do not simply ‘use the present simple to talk about habits.’ but, because the first form of the verb expresses the idea of ‘closeness’ and ‘facts’ so we use it to talk about such things which are ‘close’ to us and ‘factual’ eg habits. This is an important distinction – learn the core meaning and you can use the verbs.

Language is convention

Not everything can be explained. Often the only answer to the question ‘Why?’ is ‘Because.’ Meaning is a convention that has been agreed by the members of a speech community. It may be open to explanation, it may not.

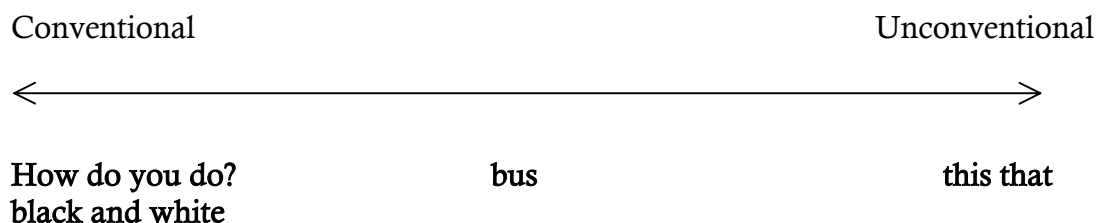
We say ‘a tall man’ not ‘a high man’ because we say ‘a tall man’. It is merely, and powerfully, a question of collocational convention. Similarly we say, thinking about beauty, ‘a handsome man’ but ‘a beautiful woman’. This is entirely determined by convention, yet in some speech communities ‘a beautiful man’ may be a perfectly acceptable collocation.

Conventions also change and new ones are created – this is how language changes. It is often said that language is changing so quickly. It is also changing very slowly. Pick up a copy of *Vanity Fair* (the book) – it is perfectly understandable. Shakespeare can still be understood, not by everyone of course, but the core of the language changes very slowly. Some items change and are lost but the basic core of the language remains remarkably the same.

A spectrum of convention

Spectrums are fashionable at the moment in English language analysis: spectrums of idiomacy and collocation. Both these, in the interests of reductionism, can be viewed as spectrums of convention.

Language varies from the utterly conventional to the unconventional. This can describe both individual words and complete phrases and utterances.



The phrase '**How do you do?**' is a fixed utterance and cannot be changed so it is utterly conventional. 'Black and white' is an irreversible binomial and the order of words cannot be changed, we cannot say '**white and black**', but the individual words themselves can be used with others in limited contexts. 'This' and 'that' are 'unconventional' in that they 'grammatical' words which refer to 'things' which are not themselves and the number of these things is infinite. What they mean is what the speaker intends them to refer to.

Most words appear in the centre of this spectrum eg bus, which can collocate with 'next', 'late', 'night' and 'first'.

For a further discussion of this see Michael Lewis' 'The Lexical Approach'.

Language is words and phrases

From the spectrum of conventionality it can be seen that language is made up of individual words and of phrases, 'chunks', and there is some evidence that the brain has two separate memory stores for these. We use the conventional phrases to express ordinary conventional meanings which have already been expressed and encoded in fixed phrases. Most speech seems to be a series of phrases, already conventionally fixed, interspersed with more novel, less fixed, unconventional language. We use less fixed phrases to express individualised meanings and free words in combinations to express novel meanings which have

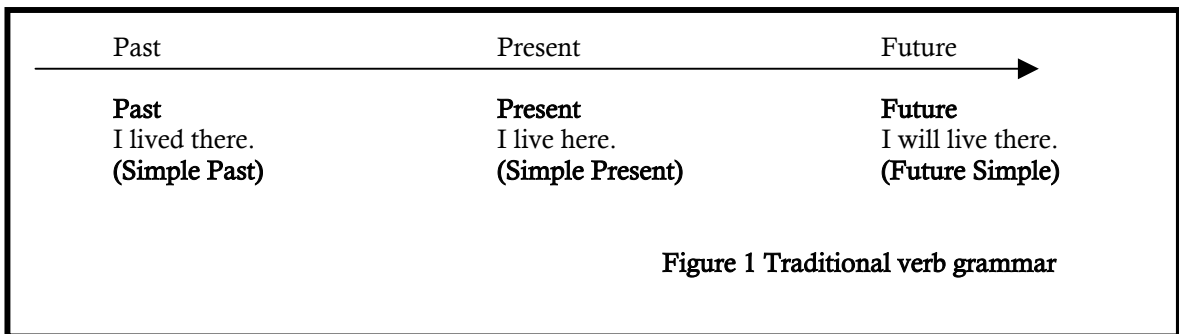
not been encoded into fixed or semi-fixed phrases. These novel expressions have to follow the conventions, eg of word order, and the core meanings of the language in order to be understood so it is the conventions and core meanings that have to be understood in order to understand or learn a language **not** a system of rules. Core meanings can be taught and learned, conventions have to be noticed and learned.

Part One

Time

'The time is out of joint, Oh cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right'
Hamlet

Let us start then with time. Time is a convention that people apply to the perpetual present moment. While the past can be viewed objectively because it is past, the future is more subjective because it has not happened yet. Traditionally time has been viewed as past followed by present followed by future and this was supposedly mirrored in the verb forms and their labels:



This is a case for special pleading for the **'future'** so that the system *seems* regular. Adding **'will'** is not changing the morphology of the verb: only the inflection: **live** to **lived** is valid. The modal **'will'** expresses the speaker's *opinion* of the future and other modals such as **'might'** could equally well fit here: eg 'I might live there.' **'Will' is not the future.**

In a sense there **is** a past, present and future in that 9.14 am precedes 9.15 am and Monday is followed by Tuesday, 1999 by 2000 and so on, but this is a convention of **organising and recording** time, **not** language. This is 'measured past time'.

Some writers go further than this analysis above and add **'past/present'** and **'present/future'** categories to the three times above. This is still unsatisfactory as there are *always* exceptions and complications eg 'the historical present' used to tell stories, the 'future in the past' and the 'past in the future'. It all gets rather complicated as you attempt to label combinations of verbs into different 'forms' which follow 'rules' which learners have to master (and to which there are lots of exceptions).

Task 1 Look at these example sentences and place them in the ‘correct’ category of time: ‘Past’ ‘Present’ or ‘Future’.

Have you ever been to Poland?	It's time we were going.
I often stay up till midnight.	.Hill takes the corner wide...
I was interested in those cuff links in the window.	If I were you, I'd dump him
She's flying to Warsaw tomorrow.	I'll phone you when I get there.
First boil the rice, then fry it.	Ice melts in the hot sun.
I wish I could drive	I promise I'll do it.
John tells me that you are thinking of quitting.	The concert starts at 6pm.
My sister works in a bank.	I didn't know you were married.
I hate maths lessons!	I lived there for ten years.
I had never seen him before in my life.	
P.J. Smith writes in a recent article in the Times that...	
I was walking down the street when I saw her..	
If no-one gave you presents for your birthday, what would you do?	
This man walks into a bar, and he says to the barman.....	
When you've finished that, how about making the beds?	

(See Key)

How did you decide which how to place the example sentences into the different categories? Look at the groups of sentences in each ‘time’ – are there any regularities that you can see? Are there any ‘problem’ sentences?

Past, Present and Future

The division of time into ‘past’ ‘present’ and ‘future’ presents difficulties if we are looking for regularities in **form**. The same form can be used in different ‘times’ with no changes to the morphology. This is why it is unsatisfactory to refer to forms as ‘present’, ‘past’ or ‘future’ forms. This confusion of forms with time is compounded by the labels of verb forms. If you label something as ‘**present**’ you think of it as ‘**present**’. This causes problems to learners dealing with unreality and conditionals.

There is another possible view of time that is more cognitively complex and yet simpler – subtler in fact and **without** exceptions.

It is more complex because the same ‘time’ eg 10am can be viewed in different ways. Imagine it is 10.05 am. ‘10 am’ was ‘5 minutes ago’, **or** part of ‘this morning’ **or** ‘just now’ to give three possible ways of referring to it. **10 am is what we choose to view it as.** The English language gives us different ways of viewing a ‘time’: that is the complexity.

These three ways of referring to 10 am also show us the basic time distinction that the English language makes through verbs. The simplicity is that time can be broadly viewed as ‘**past time**’ and ‘**non-past time**’ rather than the three divisions of ‘past’, ‘present’ and ‘future’.

5 minutes ago		Past Time
this morning		
just now		Non-Past Time

Past and Non-Past

This classification shows fewer irregularities merely by putting ‘Present’ and ‘Future’ together into Non-Past Time and this also includes ‘a general time’ (part of ‘Non-past time’) where sentences are not marked for ‘past’ eg ‘Ice melts in the hot sun’.

‘Non-past time’ is defined **negatively** as anything **not marked for ‘past’** and this is mirrored in the basic verb forms.

The First Form	<i>‘live’</i>	Non-past Time
The Second Form	<i>‘lived’</i>	Past Time

The First Form is an unmarked form. It is ‘Non-Past’ but could also be termed ‘Close’. Events in Non-Past Time are close in importance, relevance etc and do **not** need to be marked as ‘distant’ in time. In a way, **for English verbs**, there is no ‘time’ unless it is ‘past time’. Close verb forms are *‘uninterested in time’* in a way but this is not the whole story.

The Second Form *can* denote time distance but also **other** distances (reality, formality) so should not be referred to as the ‘past form’ or ‘Simple Past’. The verb ‘lived’ is not intrinsically ‘past’: consider ‘If I lived in Paris, I’d be the happiest person alive.’ This is **distant in reality**, not time. The second form then is ‘distant’.

When it is used to express ‘time distance’ it does indeed refer to the ‘past’ but this is only **one** possible, though common, use of the Second Form. Another way to look at this is to consider that there is a strong (but not exclusive correlation) correlation between use of the Second Form and ‘Past Time’.

The future is included in ‘Non-Past’ time because verb forms are **not** marked for future time. We can use all verb forms or a combination of modal verbs and these verb forms to express our views of the future. Future reference is determined by the co-text and context.

The distinction between ‘Past’ and ‘Non-Past’ time reference is an important one. If there is no contextual or co-textual past reference we assume that we are dealing with ‘non-past’ time (the default time). Everything is ‘Non-Past’ unless we say or understand so. ‘Non-past’ time is the **default time** and this is one of the central ideas of this book. The use of the base form of the verb is the most common in speech. This is unsurprising if we consider the central focus of our existence – ourselves as we **are**.

What we have here is two systems – a system of Past and Non-Past Time and a system of verb inflection for distance. When talking about events in the past we use the verb inflections to **agree with** the time distance, but the verb form is **not** intrinsically ‘past’.

Task 2 Now put the same example sentences from **Task 1** into the two categories of ‘**Past Time**’ and ‘**Non-Past Time**’.

(See Key)

How did you decide which how to place the example sentences into the different categories? Look at the groups of sentences in each category – are there any regularities that you can see? Are there any ‘problem’ sentences? Which classification [past/present/future] or [Past/Non-past] has more regularities and fewer ‘problem’ sentences?

Time

Time is often signalled by time phrases eg ‘10am’ or ‘yesterday’. If verb forms signalled ‘time’ there would be no need for these expressions. Verbs describe ‘actions’ or ‘processes’ or ‘states’ of one sort or another – not time.

Task 3 Decide if these time expressions refer to past time or non-past time.

today	10 minutes ago	2 days ago
then	this afternoon	last week
this year	yesterday	last year
since 1990	it’s almost 5 o’clock	soon
this week	in the eighties	the day before yesterday
next week	since I was born	now
tomorrow	in ten minutes	in 1999
at six o’clock	the day after tomorrow	

(See Key)

How did you decide where each phrase belonged? How might this binary distinction be useful in teaching and learning?

A problem

Consider these two examples:

- (1) I had a good breakfast this morning.
- (2) I've done lots of work this morning.

The key is in the question 'When is the speaker speaking?' How do you know? You can reconcile the use in (1) of a Past Time verb form: 'had' with 'this morning' if it is now the afternoon or evening of the same day – not still 'this morning'. The speaker's temporal viewpoint is key.

An Overview

In an attempt to provide a diagrammatic view of time, the two diagrams below (**Figures 2 and 3**) show ways of viewing this binary distinction of time. There are still linear concepts of time within the diagrams but this is one aspect of the concept rather than the be-all and end-all of it.

Two Views of Time

Time is centred on the eternal '**me**' of existence. All time is **Non-Past Time** unless marked for **Past** (by time phrase, the understood time reference *and* the verb inflection). Past time does not quite reach '**me**' yet can be very close. It can be even a moment ago if I conceive it as 'past'. Perhaps 'past' is a misleading term and 'distant time' would be better'?

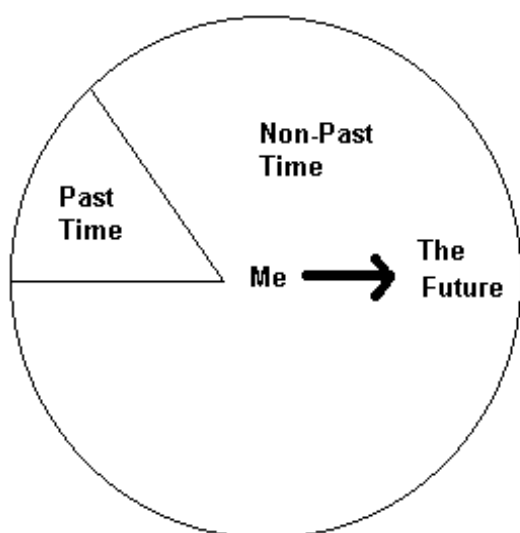


Figure 2 A View of Time

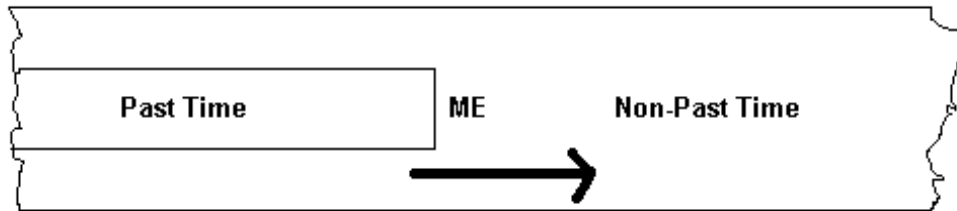


Figure 3 A View of Time 2

Notice that 'Non-Past Time does extend back into 'measured past time'. How we wish to refer to a time depends on our viewpoint. (see Figure 4)

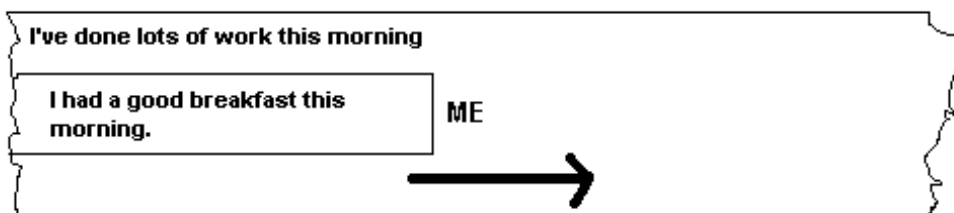


Figure 4 Time with examples

Task 4 Consider the terms 'Past' and 'Distant Time'. What problems do these pose? Which is better? Are there any alternatives?

Summary

- Time can be viewed as belonging to one of two time fields: '**Non-Past**' or '**Past**'.
- That is '**close**' or '**distant**'.
- 'Close/Non-Past Time' is the **default** time used when there is no reason to talk about 'the past' and therefore to mark the verb form for (time) distance.
- A Distant Form of the verb is used to **agree with** the Time Field of '**Past Time**'.

Task 5

- How is 'time' represented in your language?
- If your language has verbs, are they marked for time?

Distance

Distance is a key concept in English. There are many examples:

Close	Distant
I/me	you
we us	them
here now	there then

Figure 5 Distance

The most important, central element of each person's universe is the '**here and now of me**'. This is the central **unmarked** focus of life. Here and now, of course, are mirrored by there and then.

Here	+	There
+		+
Now	+	Then

Figure 6 Key words

These four key words are interesting in the combinations they can make – four binomials: 'here and there', 'now and then', 'here and now' and 'there and then'.

Let's have a look at two examples of 'distance'.

I wish I had a car. (**Distant in reality**)

I had a car last year.
(**Distant in Time**)

I don't have a car.
(**'Me' Real**)

The two forms of distance are expressed in basically the same way – through the distant form of the verb. Distance in **time** needs to be placed in time by context or as in the example by **co-text**: 'last year'. Distance in **reality** is also signalled by co-text - 'I wish' - and the distant form of the verb agrees with the co-text.

Task 6 Look at these pairs of sentences and the kind of distance they show. What regularities do you notice about the representation of distance?

1. I liked cabbage when I was younger. (**Distant in time**)
I like ice-cream. (**'Me' Real, non-past time**)
2. Could you open the window please? (**Formal, distant, non-past time**)
Can you open the window please? (**Informal, close, non-past time**)
3. If I were you, I'd leave her. (**Unreal, distant, non-past time**)
I am me. (**'Me', real, non-past time**)
4. If I went to London, I'd visit Buckingham Palace.
(**Distant, unlikely, non-past time**)
If I go to New York, I'll visit the Empire State Building.
(**Possible, non-past time**)
When I go to Riga, I'll visit the Opera.
(**Close, true, non-past time**)
5. I wish I could drive. (**Unreal, distant, non-past time**)
I can't drive. (**Real, close, non-past time**)
6. I wish I hadn't gone to the party. (**Unreal, distant, 'past' time**)
I went to the party. (**Real, distant, 'past' time**)
7. If I hadn't met you, I wouldn't be in love with you.
(**Unreal, distant in time**) and (**Unreal, distant in reality, non-past time**)
I met you and I love you.
(**Real, distant, past time**) and (**Real, close, non-past time**)

Commentary

The sentences show distances of time (1), formality (2), reality (3, 5, 6,7) and probability (4) and sometimes a combination: time and reality (6,7). These examples are part of the central system of meaning based on the inflection of the verb form: **like** to **liked**, from **close** to **distant**.

All the sentences use this mechanism except:

If I go to New York, I'll visit the Empire State Building.
When I go to Riga, I'll visit the Opera.

These show a difference in the degree of probability by lexical means – the difference in meaning between ‘when’ and ‘if’.

Figure 7 shows this distance system working around ‘**me**’.

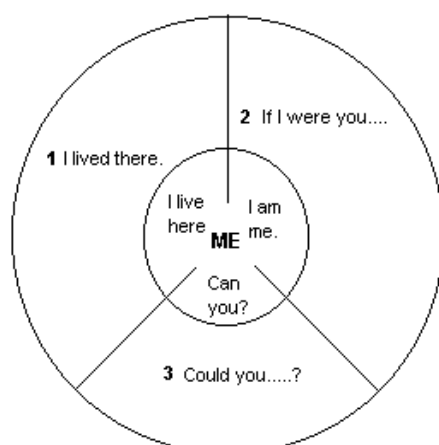


Figure 7 Close and Distant

In **Figure 7** we can see the mechanism working for three ‘distances’.

- Distance 1 is time.
- Distance 2 is reality
- Distance 3 is formality

- Each movement from the inner ‘close’ circle to the outer ‘distant’ one involves what is conventionally described in reported speech as ‘a step back into the past’: from the First Form to the Second Form.

‘Classic’ reported speech, though relatively rare in spoken English, follows this same mechanism but with the added sophistication that we can choose to report

something as close or distant depending on how we see it: as still true ('close') or not ('distant'); did I say it (close) or someone else? (distant); was it said here (close) or there(distant)?; is it still true (close) or not (distant)? This use of the verb system to express these meanings again shows the complete regularity and economy of the system (see Willis, 1994 for a discussion on reported statements).

Figure 8 shows distance related to distant time: **me then**.

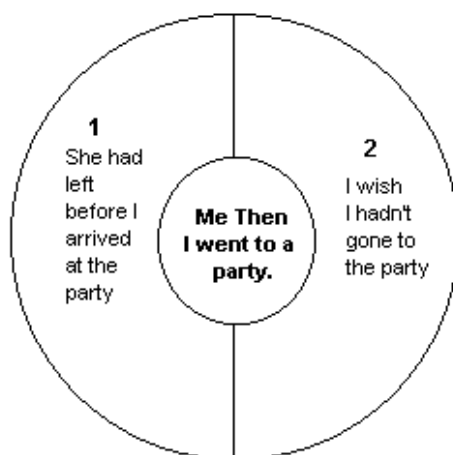


Figure 8 Distant in Time

Figure 8 shows the distance idea connected with **distance in time** itself. The inner circle is 'distant in time', the outer one 'more distant'. Here there are only two distances as formality is a concern of closeness, not distant in time, so it is not found in this Figure. The same mechanism as shown in **Figure 7** is at work here, only this time, in conventional terms, the distance is between past simple ('distant') and past perfect ('more distant').

- Distance 1 is 'time' **but in relation to another point/event in time**.
- Distance 2 is reality

Notice again the complete regularity and notice that only **one** aspect of distance is concerned with time. It must be borne in mind that this perspective is still from 'me' of the first diagram. All this is 'distant' from me. At one time of course, 'me then' was 'me'. 'Me then' is 'a focus point of time' around which we organise our meaning. Learners must know what the 'focus point of time' of an utterance is. The verb forms are **not** time based in themselves but **can** be used in conjunction with context and co-text to refer to time.

Clearly, comparing the two diagrams, 'past' is a misleading label.

In fact these two figures can be combined to give a more complete view of the role of Distance in English verb forms – see **Figure 9**.

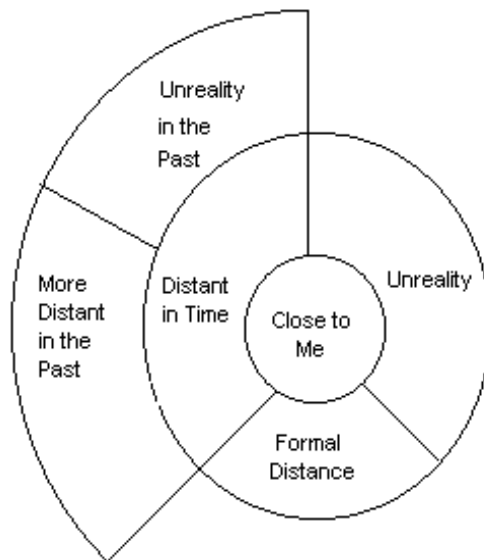


Figure 9 All Distances

If traditional labelling is applied to **Figure 9** this results in **Figure 10** which shows the verb forms for each sector of the diagram.

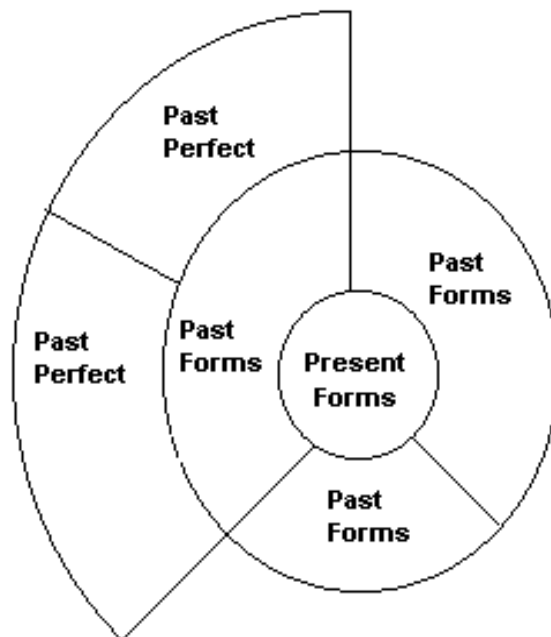


Figure 10 Distance and Verb forms

Authentic Examples

1) would

Mr Lock, 40, a barrister, who has risen rapidly to become a minister in the Lord Chancellor's Department, was quickly on the offensive, decrying his new challenger as an amateur, a single-issue meddler.

Local health care will be all the better for reorganisation, he insists, and the Royal Colleges, as well as many Worcestershire GPs, back the changes. "It **would be** irresponsible for politicians to ignore such a body of medical opinion."

(The Daily Telegraph Saturday May 19th 2001 p10)

In this example **would be** shows that the speaker thinks it unlikely or even unreal for politicians to ignore the opinion – and they will not ignore the opinion.

2) would and will

The Tories **would** introduce legislation to create a presumption that those arriving from ‘safe’ countries, including all EU states, had no claim on refugee status.

“We **will** clear up Labour’s asylum mess, Conservatives **will** ensure that Britain is a safe haven and not a soft touch.”

(The Daily Telegraph Saturday May 19th 2001 p8)

Would is used to report what the Tories rather than the Daily Telegraph propose to do (reported speech as distance). Then **will** is used by William Hague to make a prediction/assertion/promise of what would happen after the election if the Conservatives won (which they did not). {Politicians have to pretend that they will win no matter what the opinion polls might say.}

(3) Unreality 1

If they **were** in a Victorian novel they’d grind the faces of the poor.
(GUU 132)

A clear case of distant forms communicating the unreality of the proposition but with an obvious comment on the characters or behaviour of ‘they’.

(4) Unreality 2

‘Ooh I wouldn’t mind buying that, look’ (KD0 1464)

In this example the speaker expresses a desire, which by using a distant form, is tentative: the speaker is not committing themselves to actually buying it.

(5) Unreality 3

I wish I had a girlfriend who’d hug and kiss me when I was going to catch a train. (A74 2087)

An excellent example of a series of distant forms expressing the distance of the wish from the reality of the situation: no girlfriend, no hugs and no kisses, or maybe he has a girlfriend but one who does none of these things.

(6) Closeness

When the exhibition opens Monet **is** 60 years old, and the most famous artist in France. Now wealthy and honoured, he **has been living** at Giverny since 1890, preoccupied with creating the flower garden which after 1900, he **was** to paint obsessively until his death in 1926.

(Weekly Telegraph)

This is the second paragraph from a review of a Monet exhibition: the wider context (not quoted here) is clear. The use of verb forms is interesting though. The reviewer talks of a time in Monet's life which is shown in the first room of the exhibition and looks backwards and forwards from this point using vivid Non-Past forms in conjunction with a very telling 'was + to'.

Task 7

- Does your L1 have concepts of 'closeness' and 'distance'?
- If so, how are they expressed?
 - Lexically?
 - Morphologically?

Objective and Subjective

Another key binary distinction which exists in English is between utterances presented as objective (or factual) and those which are marked as subjective (–possibly factual). This can be shown by contrasting ordinary verbs with modal verbs but also includes lots of other words which are used to mark various forms of subjectivity eg ‘maybe’, ‘supposedly’.

Objective: non-modal verb forms

eg: I live here
I lived there
I am living here.
I have been living here for 10 years.
The train leaves at six.
I’m playing tennis with John on Saturday.
I’m going to Egypt on holiday.

Subjective: modal verb forms

Eg He might be able to help. (I’m not sure)
He could have lived there.
(It’s possible that this happened in the past)
She might be living here. (I’m not sure)
The train should leave at six. (but might not)
I’ll be there. (I’m predicting/promising this)
I might be going to Egypt on holiday.
(but it’s not decided)

Whenever the speaker’s interpretation or doubt is expressed through a modal verb the utterance ceases to be objective or factual. Facts are expressed using non-modal forms. This idea will be explored in more detail later.

Task 8

- Does your L1 have contrasts between objective and subjective ideas?
- If so, how are they expressed?

Context and Co-text

Context and co-text are key factors in determining meaning. This chapter explores the influence of context and co-text and suggests that there is a core meaning to every verb form and that this is not concerned with 'time'. Context and co-text (or lack of it) can supply ideas of 'time'.

Some Explorations: the present

The First Form of the verb, known as the Present Simple, is an '**unmarked form**' used when there are no temporal questions to be answered. Thus sentence (1) is complete. Time is not an issue: we do not ask 'when', we accept the statement as true.

(1) 'I am 35.'

The essential meaning of the First Form is a '**a close fact**' and we understand it as 'close' in the example above because there is no context or co-text to suggest that it is not '**close**'. In any example of the 'present simple' time is not an issue for the verb. The so-called 'present simple' is 'present' by **default**, not in itself intrinsically 'present'. Adding co-text (2) changes the situation and we understand the sentences as referring to the future **because of the co-text**.

(2) When I am 45.....

The label '*present simple*' is extremely misleading because, as can be seen, the form can be used for **non-present** time eg the future (though this is still Non-Past Time). The essential core meaning of the First Form is preserved. Clauses with 'when' (etc) followed by the base form can be paraphrased as 'when this becomes true or a fact...'

Grammar books almost universally give a 'rule' something like: 'After time phrases like 'when', 'as soon as' etc we use a present form'. They never explain 'why' even though the 'why' is the crux of the meaning of 'present' forms. Some have alternative reasons though:

'As soon as he arrives (not will arrive), I will come down and greet him.'

'The main verb of the sentence (I will come down) clearly refers to future time. It's therefore unnecessary for the verb in the subordinate clause (he arrives) to be in the future.'

(Focus on CAE, Stanton and Morris, 1999)

This entry in a coursebook grammar is interesting for two reasons. The first is that it is typical that an Advanced coursebook is **still** going over the same grammar: there is nothing 'advanced' about this grammar. Secondly, that it ignores the real reason that the 'present simple' is used: to show the event conceived as an actual

fact with a modal counterpoint to it in the main clause. I could have chosen almost any coursebook to illustrate this point – it is not a fault of this coursebook alone.

If we examine another verb, ‘read’ we see that again the present nature of the ‘simple present’ is less real than the label would suggest. (3) is a possible (but unlikely) sentence. It is a general statement but how specific can we make it by adding co-text? Can we make it really ‘present’?

- (3) I read.
- (4) I read every day.
- (5) I read a lot.
- (6) * I read now.

Example (3) cannot be made explicitly ‘present’. It is only ‘present’ to the extent that we accept it as true of the speaker when spoken. Again it is in fact present **by default** and because it is being used in the time field of ‘Non-Past’. It is not present in and of itself.

Turning to another ‘present’ form: the (close) be + ing Form (‘present continuous’) can be used to refer to ‘now’: see (7).

- (7) I am reading.

But the ‘present continuous’ works in the same way as the ‘simple present’: it is present by default. Sentence (7) is only understood as referring to now because there is nothing in the utterance to tell us the contrary. Adding co-text changes the time reference in (8) and (9) but the verb form remains the same.

- (8) I’m meeting her soon.
- (9) I’m playing tennis on Saturday with John.

The co-text **or lack of it** expresses the time reference: the verb form itself **does not**.

The ‘Present Perfect’ works in exactly the same way: compare (10) and (11).

- (10) I have read the book, you can have it.
- (11) When I have read the book, you can have it.

Sentence (11) refers to the future because of ‘when’, the co-text tells us that a time other than now is implied. In the three main verb forms used in Non-Past Time, the same mechanism can be seen to be working. They are only ‘present’ in any sense when they are shorn of any co-text to tell us otherwise. The addition of co-text changes the time reference. The verb forms themselves are defined negatively by the lack of co-text or morphological addition to the verb. Time is not an aspect of these verbs. What we have then is Non-past Time in which these verbs can operate **at any point** in this time field and this time reference is dependent on context and co-text, **not** by any meaning inherent in the verbs themselves.

The Past

Does the idea of ‘present by default’ extend to ‘past by default’? See (12) and (13).

(12) I live here.

(13) I lived there.

Example (13) seems incomplete. It begs the question ‘when?’ We can accept it as ‘past’ as it stands but if I did not know the time I would seek to clarify it. There is no co-text to tell us that it is **not** past (ie of another distance eg ‘If I lived there’) but we need a more explicit time reference to place it in time: either explicit in the co-text or implicit in the wider context.

The Second form can be ‘past’, used to **agree with** that time field but we need explicit or implicit signals from context or co-text to be sure that the form is being used with time distance and not another form of distance.

Summary

Time in English is shown in two ways:

- Firstly by explicit time reference (eg next week)
- Secondly by the lack of such reference.

Verb forms themselves are not marked for time (except as a form of distance). Verbs are just words which express actions or states – the idea they show time is just nonsensical. Verbs are either facts, close or distant, aspects of facts, close or distant or express reality, close or distant (unreality). It is these ideas which work with the context and co-text to create meaningful utterances which **may** include ideas of time.

Authentic Examples

(1) First Form and co-text

“At the moment I am very busy concentrating on writing and recording my second album which **is out next year.**”

(Daily Telegraph)

Here the co-text places the event in the future rather than the present. Without the co-text, the album would be out ‘now’ and the whole utterance meaningless.

(2) First Form and context

‘With the Golden Globes and Sundance over, and Oscar noms coming up, we gather buzz on the film world: Private Ryan’s a Lock: It’s WWII’s year. And Academy membership slants old: for them, “The Truman Show” means Harry S. With help from the greatest generation, Spielberg wins again.’

(Newsweek)

In predicting the Oscar winners, Newsweek uses the context of the article – the forthcoming Oscars – and can use the First Form to predict the winner of Best Film. It does not use ‘will’ but a more objective First Form – presenting it as a fact.

Task 9

- What roles do ‘context’ and ‘co-text’ play in your language?

Progressive aspects: life's journeys

Stand not upon the order of your going
But go at once
Lady Macbeth

Progressive or continuous forms often cause problems for learners of English: problems of form and meaning. In Poland, learners often overuse the forms and this chapter seeks to present a simple metaphorical analogy for all, or most of these forms so that learners can grasp the meaning and use of the form without learning a whole list of situations when the forms are used (or not). After looking at the current interpretations of the forms, we move on to examine some language before the metaphor is presented. (For the sake of simplicity this chapter is not going to consider forms such as *present perfect progressive* or any passive forms.)

The State Of Play

The Present Continuous or Progressive form is viewed in ELT misleadingly as a 'tense' and one described as 'present'. The form is really not a tense but an aspect and is not intrinsically 'present' but present by default. We can use both 'present' and 'past progressive' forms for present/future: consider these two constructed examples:

- (1) I was going to meet John at 6 but I can't make it.
- (2) I'm playing tennis with Julia on Saturday.

These mislabellings in themselves cause learners problems. If something is called 'present' then the learner will think of it as 'present' or have to go through mental gymnastics to avoid thinking so. Although these issues are widely known, they are not being addressed by the profession. However, the global term used for these forms in this chapter will be '*progressive aspect*'. (When referring to a specific form, I will indiscriminately use either '*progressive*' or '*continuous*' to reflect the confusion present in materials and coursebooks.)

Different authors have different views on the progressive aspect. Thornbury (1997) quotes three:

Forms containing *(be) + -ing* express the speaker's view of the event as having *limited duration*. (Lewis 1986)

Progressive *be* is so called because its basic meaning is that it presents the situation as being in progress, (Huddleston 1998)

The basic meaning of the progressive is...its depiction of an activity or event as incomplete, changing, temporary, etc (Richards 1985)

In his discussion Thornbury agrees with Huddleston on the basic meaning as '*being in progress*'. (p207)

David Maule (1991) agrees with Lewis 'When we uses the *continuous* it means we see the event as having *limited duration*.' (p85)

Yule (1998) states that: 'With the progressive, a situation is viewed from the inside as potentially ongoing at that point ('in progress'), relative to some other situation.' (p65)

Teaching (1)

Generally, the '*present continuous*' is taught first but in a piecemeal fashion – future uses are ignored at first though this is a **major** use. The teacher often uses misleading contexts to elicit the form (ie the teacher insists that the form is essentially *present* and the learners can clearly see the teacher's actions) and learners practise the form in unconvincing situations far from reality:

Eg (4) Teacher: What am I doing?
Sts: You opening the door (sic)

In contrast with this, in real life the question 'What are you doing?' is used as a request for information (because I don't know or can't see) so that I can evaluate the importance of your activity, or 'What **are** you doing?' as a censure – you are doing something wrong.

Later the '*past progressive*' is introduced and **then** future uses of the '*present progressive*' are introduced and even later other progressive forms. I would argue that the basic meaning is the same and that the '*past progressive*' is a distant form of the '*present progressive*'. Teachers should also ask themselves whether dividing the uses of the present continuous into present uses and future uses is sound.

Explorations in language: some observations on 'go'

It is useful not to start with *progressive aspects* themselves but to take a different starting point: in this case 'go'.

Go is a very common verb in English.

(5) We go to the cinema/go fishing/go shopping/go for a walk/go mad/go out for dinner/
go out with someone etc

This idea of *going* somewhere is very important in English. Other languages may focus on other aspects of the event/sequence of events (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), English chooses 'go'. We can't say:

(6) * Let's be at the cinema to see Gladiator.

Life's journey

The Ancient Greeks conceived of themselves as standing still in life with the future rushing **towards** them from **behind** them and becoming 'the past' that 'lay before their eyes' (Kluckhohn 1960). The dominant metaphor for English, however, is of us moving through life **towards the future** or the future moving towards us from in front of us. The past is behind us. Thus life, in English, is a journey from birth to death. This can be seen in phrases such as 'go our separate ways', 'at a crossroads', 'no turning back', 'going nowhere fast', 'look how far we've come', 'it's been a long, bumpy road' and so on (see Lakoff and Johnson's seminal work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980)). We may live in the perpetual present but we are moving through time from the past to the future. This is why many grammarians have proposed the time-based analysis of the verb system eg *simple past*, *simple present* and *simple future*, which despite its obvious inadequacies and lack of intellectual rigour, is the dominant grammatical analysis in ELT.

The 'Life is a journey' metaphors can be taken a step further: **Life is a whole series of journeys**. Journeys are characterised by beginnings and endings and travelling in-between. Let's go back to the cinema example:

(7) I'm going to the cinema this evening.

This entails a decision to go. From that point on, from that moment of decision, I am on a journey which will involve travelling to the cinema, buying tickets, going to the auditorium, taking my seat, watching the film, and then leaving the cinema at the end of the film. Then my 'journey' will be at an end. Sentence (7) tells you that I am on this journey: between the decision to start the journey and the end of the journey itself, though the actual physical movement to the cinema may be several hours away.

In English this whole journey is all expressed using the verb **go** in the *progressive aspect*. The 'going' form is properly considered a *progressive aspect* of **go** rather than a semi-modal: it looks like any other example of eg the *present continuous* but collocates with **to** and another verb – which is the future action. Its frequency is explained by the frequency of **go** itself in expressing this concept 'Life is a series of journeys'.

Let's consider two more (constructed) examples from an imaginary party. In (8) someone stands up at the end of the evening and says:

(8) Right, I'm going. Goodbye.

In (9) someone signals the end of their stay is near:

(9) I'm going to leave soon.

They are at different stages in their journey. In both cases the decision to leave has been taken. In (8) the leaving is closer – the door looms, is opened, the leaving takes place, the person is on another journey: home? In (9) the same (leaving) journey is signalled but the speaker is at an earlier stage so ‘to leave soon’ is necessary to make the meaning clear.

Other Journeys

Life is a whole series of journeys that are not just limited to **go**. As ‘going’ is a *progressive aspect* (and merely that) it is suggested that other progressive forms share its core meaning.

(10) I’m reading a book.

This example also has a journey idea, I started reading the book and I am on the journey to the end of the book. The *progressive aspect* catches me in ‘motion’ on the journey.

If we look at the first two examples again:

(1) I was going to meet John at 6 but I can’t make it.

(2) I’m playing tennis with Julia on Saturday.

In (1) I was on a journey but now I have abandoned it. In (2) I am still on the journey from the initial (shared) decision to play tennis to the actual match itself on Saturday.

Old journeys

Past progressive forms are used for old journeys which are now distant from the **me** of here and now. Convention though suggests that, in English, we are more interested in the fact of the journey having happened than the journey itself **unless** something interesting or significant happened on the way. So the *simple past* will be more common than the *past continuous*. This causes problems for learners who **overuse** the *past progressive*. Only when something interesting happened on the journey is the event contrasted (in the *simple past*) with the journey (in the *past progressive*) normally though the *journey as a finished event (I went)* is enough to communicate the meaning.

In the present/future (ie Non-Past Time) the fact of being on journeys is itself most interesting. In the Past, the fact that the journey happened is, initially, most interesting, though the speaker may expand on the details of the journey if the interlocutor wishes.

Figure 11 shows a visualization of journeys.

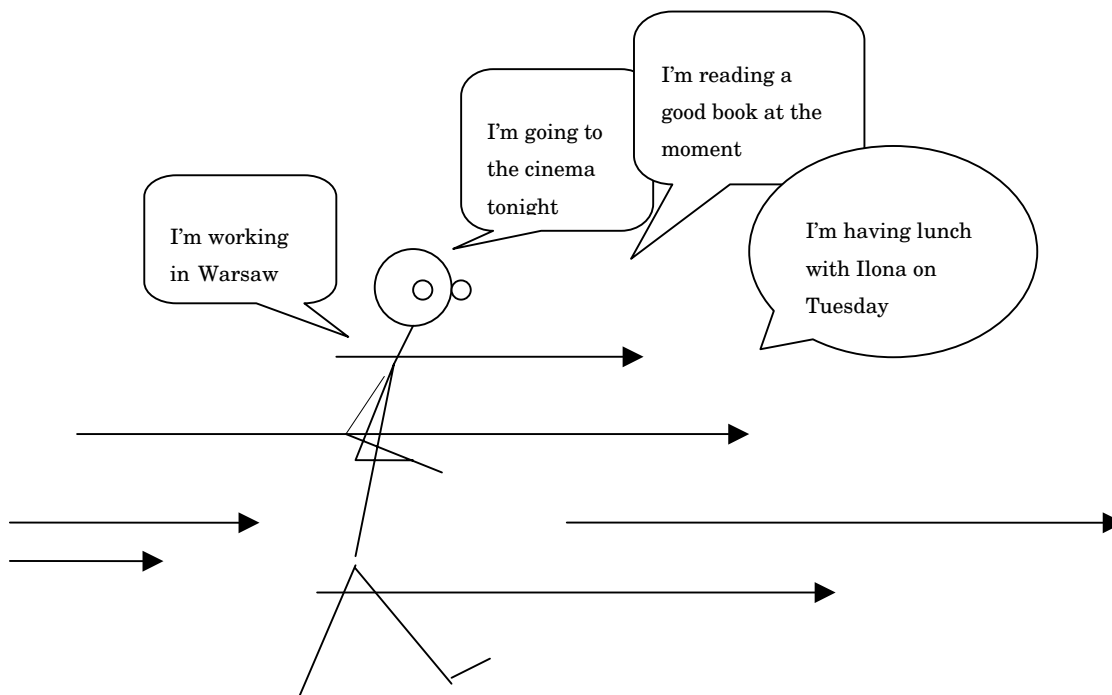


Figure 11 A visualisation of journeys

Task 10

Consider these examples of progressive forms.
Which of them could be usefully presented as *journeys*?
Which are ridiculous as *journeys*? Would you teach them?

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| I'm trying. | It's not working. |
| I'm coming! | You're not trying. |
| Spring is coming. | Where are they hiding? |
| He's writing a new novel. | Is she going with us? |
| You're drinking my beer! | Who are they waving at? |
| Your English is improving. | Who are you waiting for? |
| We're looking forward to it. | They're moving in a few days. |
| You're standing on my foot! | I'm opening the door. |
| I'm learning to drive. | They're coming tomorrow. |
| They're getting married in the summer. | |
| What's the time? My watch isn't working. | |
| I was walking home from work when I met an old school friend. | |
| They were still having lunch when I phoned. | |
| We were just talking about the director when he came in. | |

(from *Ćwiczenia z Gramatyki Angielskiej, Polyglot*)

I'm living in Oxford.
He was leaving when I was coming in. (both Lewis, 1986)

Teaching (2)

The analogy of being on a journey expressed by progressive aspects gives the learner an understanding of the concept underlying the forms without the difficult metalanguage, without having to remember uses and without complicated and misleading rules.

Using this metaphor the ‘rule’ is that if the speaker decides that being on a ‘journey’ is important – they use a progressive aspect, close or distant.

Of course some cases can seem strained when considered as a ‘journey’ but the basic analogy is sound. Journeys have beginnings and endings – so do the actions or states conventionally expressed in progressive forms.

Summary

In English and its philosophy, life is a series of journeys and these are expressed by *progressive forms*. A person is on several journeys at any one time and, of course, on life’s journey towards death. New journeys start, journeys end and such is life. As Walter Raleigh put it in his last words:

‘I have a long journey to take and must bid the company farewell.’

In English we choose to express the idea of a journey by looking at it **in progress**. Of course a journey has a beginning and an end and is limited in duration but these are common to all journeys even the journey of life itself. It is being on the journey that is important in English and which should be made clear to learners.

Authentic Examples

(1) On a legal journey

A dinner party guest is suing her hostess for damages after grazing her bottom when she fell through a glass chair. Margaret Stewart is claiming compensation for personal injuries from Annette Martin, who had invited family and friends round to show off her new home.

(The Daily Telegraph Saturday May 19th 2001
p3)

Margaret Stewart has started a legal process and is on her way to court over the incident.

(2) A past journey

Robert, of Blackheath, south-east London, **was hurrying** to catch a bus home after an evening function at the school, when he was hit by the police car, which **was travelling** at up to 50mph in a 30mph area on the way to a burglary.

(The Daily Telegraph Saturday May 19th 2001
p6)

Here, **was hurrying**, is used adjectivally and verbally to describe and embody a journey home which was interrupted tragically. The police car was also on journey to a crime.

Task 11

- Can you talk about activities in your language?
- Does your language have a metaphor for journeys?
- Does your language have a metaphor which could be applied to activities?

The Perfect Problem

‘The Deputy Finance Minister (of Japan) has resigned on Thursday’
BBC World Thursday 29th January 1998

One of the central problems of English verb grammar is what exactly Perfect Forms mean? The so-called Present and Past Perfect forms pose many problems for learners of English and the rules do not seem to help.

These forms, made up as they are of a form of the verb ‘have’ + ‘past participle’ in their ‘simple’ forms and with the addition of an –ing form when wanted, are **complex forms**. **As such we might expect that the meaning to also be complex.**

The perfect forms are constructed using the verb ‘have’. This is significant in itself as ‘have’ denotes ‘possession’ of some kind. Possession must be an aspect of the meaning of perfect forms.

‘Have got’ the widely used British English equivalent of ‘Have’, as in ‘I’ve got a lovely house in the country’, looks like the present perfect (have + past participle) but is for some reason classified differently – as an idiomatic expression.

If ‘have/possession’ is part of the meaning, are there any other aspects to these perfect forms? Let us examine some prototypical examples of perfect forms contrasted with other forms.

- (1) I’ve read the book.
- (2) I’ve been reading the book.
- (3) I finished reading the book yesterday.

Of these sentences, (3) seems concerned with the end of the action – it is finished. The Second Form seems to express an idea of an ‘end’, of a full stop, of the finish. It is also placed in Past-time as we would expect from an example of the Second Form. (1), however, is not concerned with time but more with the **completion** of the action itself, with the whole ‘shape’ of the event. Time is not important. Sentence (2) suggests that the activity is on-going which is entirely consistent with an –ing form but also not completed: just to express ‘on-going’ would be ‘I’m reading the book’.

- (4) I’ve lived here for ten years.
- (5) I’ve been living here for 10 years.
- (6) I live here.
- (7) I’m living here.

In these examples (4) seems concerned with the total number of years, up to now and could be viewed in a way as talking about an on-going completion. That is ‘as I speak, this is the total.’ Tomorrow or the next time I say it the total may be larger.’ A pedantic person could count the time by the second and at every

moment say 'I've lived here for X years, Y days, Z minutes etc' but in real life we don't need to be so precise. 'Ten years' is vague approximation of the on-going count. (5) is the same but with the added dimension of the emphasis on the activity itself. (6) is unconcerned with anything other than the factual truth of the statement. (7) emphasises the activity itself – I am on that journey from starting to live here and ending my stay here.

Several commentators have noted the retrospective nature of the 'Present Perfect' and would point to (4) and (5) as examples of this, however, as we will see, perfect forms do not always have a retrospective nature.

- (8) Have you done the washing up?
- (9) Have you ever been to America?
- (10) Have you read War and Peace?

Sentence (8) seems to be asking if the task of washing up has been completed – it is not interested in the **time** of completion but the completion itself. (9) and (10) are the same and are asking about these events or actions in the person's lifetime and thus disregarding time. Time is not an issue here. The possession of the experience is more important and is the **only** aspect being focussed on here. The person's whole life is considered part of Non-Past Time and thus the exact past time of these events ceases to matter. Again some might say that we are retrospectively looking back at a person's life from the standpoint of now.

- (11) He's gone to Paris.
- (12) He took the train to Paris yesterday.
- (13) He's been to Paris.

These three sentences are fundamentally different from each other in that (12) is focussed on the 'when' of the finished action. (13) is concerned with the possession of this experience in the Non-Past of the person's life (due to the use of the 'been'). (11) suggests that he's left for Paris and is not here because the act of leaving has been completed.

- (14) I haven't finished yet.
- (15) I finished ten minutes ago.
- (16) I've just finished.

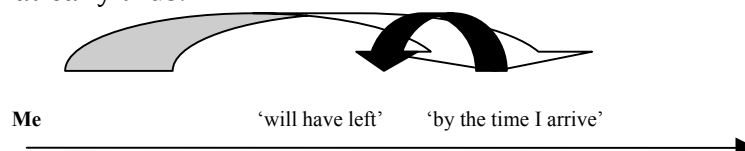
These three sentences illustrate fundamental differences – (14) clearly shows incompleteness. (15) and (16) clearly show the speaker's choice in choosing Past – Time (15) or Non-Past Time (16). Sentence 14 shows that perfect forms are not always concerned with retrospectiveness. Another example would be 'I have almost finished' where I would argue we are also looking **forward** to completion rather than backwards.

- (17) He has left.
- (18) He will have left by the time I arrive.
- (19) He had left by the time I arrived.

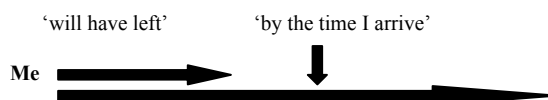
(20) When he has left, tell me.

These final four sentences show different aspects of perfect forms. (17) shows completion and possibly a retrospective view. (18) shows a view **forward** to a future event with a modal 'will' for prediction. Instead of simply looking at this as a case of looking ahead to completion, commentators argue that this 'future perfect', or 'past in the future' is also retrospective from 'by the time I arrive.'

This is shown diagrammatically thus:



An alternative view would be to see the meaning as one created by the tension between the two events and perhaps represented diagrammatically thus:



It seems to me that this so-called 'future perfect' is essentially similar to the 'past perfect' in that it is showing the **relationship between two events and the completion of one in relation to the other**. (19) shows completion of an event in relation to another event in Past Time, while (20) looks ahead to future completion of this event. I think that this relational tension is a key concept of perfect forms. In cases where the 'past perfect' is used, the relationship is between two past events, when the 'future perfect' is used, between two future events and when used as in 'I have lived here for 10 years' the second 'event' is the here and now of the speaker.

It is the special relationship between two 'events which necessitate a perfect form with all its aspects of possession/completion etc.

Maule (1991) argues that the difference between sentences like (20) and (21) is one of greater time difference between the two events in (20) than (21) and so the perfect meaning is one of clear 'beforeness'.

(20) When he has left, tell me.

(21) When he leaves, tell me.

Maule would argue that in (21) the leaving and telling happen close together, while in (22), the two events are further apart.

It can be seen from the discussion above that there are a number of possible aspects to 'Perfect' meaning. There may be an idea of possession, of completion, of retrospectiveness, of 'beforeness' or greater time difference or a combination of these.

Possession:	I have bought a new car.
Completion:	I have just finished.
Incompletion:	I haven't finished yet.
Retrospectiveness:	Have you been to America?
Beforeness/greater time difference:	When he has left, tell me.

Situations like: Q: 'Why are you sweating? A: 'I've been playing tennis.' Seem to show a relationship between a state (sweating) and the cause.

Perhaps this causal or relational element is the key concept in perfect forms. As there is *always* a tension between two 'events' or 'states'. It is this relationship between two 'points' which is the key to the perfect uses. Present verbs emphasize 'closeness', Past forms, some kind of 'distance', and Perfect forms emphasize a relationship between a close event or state and another one in relationship with the first.

Learners will need a great tolerance for ambiguity when it comes to the present perfect and an acceptance that the form is a complex form.

Authentic Examples

(1) Have got for possession

He (Shaun Woodward) added: "I **haven't got** a butler. We just have three people who look after the house. End of story.'

(The Daily Telegraph Saturday May 19th 2001

p9)

Shaun Woodward clearly denies possessing a butler.

(2) Have + 3rd Form

Mr Lock, 40, a barrister, who **has risen** rapidly to become a minister in the Lord Chancellor's Department, was quickly on the offensive, decrying his new challenger as an amateur, a single-issue meddler.

(The Daily Telegraph Saturday May 19th 2001 p10)

Have + 3rd Form is used here to focus on the result of a rise in Mr Lock's fortunes to the position of minister which he holds in Non-Past Time. The 'rise' is also included in Non-Past Time by using the form **has risen**. He has risen as far as minister and might rise further but as of now, minister is his position and the completion of his rise. (Note: Mr Lock lost his seat in the 2001 election and has not risen any further.)

(3) Have + 3rd Form

Thai police **have abandoned** their inquiry into the murder of the Welsh backpacker Kirsty Jones, 23, last August.

(The Daily Telegraph Saturday May 19th 2001 p6)

The investigation is now complete – as far as it will go. The exact ‘when’ it was abandoned is not important so it is not placed in finished Past Time.

(4) Have + 3rd Form

Studies have shown that the stimulating effects of caffeine are offset by other chemicals in coffee called chlorogenic acids.

(The Daily Telegraph Saturday May 19th 2001 p5)

When the studies were done is not important – using Have + 3rd Form brings these studies into Non-Past Time and emphasises the results of the, presumably, completed studies.

(5) Have + 3rd Form and Had + been +ing

A bishop **has ordered** a country vicar to stop paying children for doing odd jobs around the church because some of them spend the money on drink and drugs. The Rev David Streeter **had been paying** children up to £4 an hour for raking up grass cuttings or picking up litter in Stradbroke, near Eye, Suffolk.

(The Daily Telegraph Saturday May 19th 2001 p3)

The Bishop’s order which happened in the past is included in Non-Past Time by using Have + 3rd Form. Rev Streeter’s activity is placed in Past time by using **Had** and its completion and the activity itself is stressed by completing the form **+ been + ing**. This use implies that the activity has stopped, presumably when the Bishop’s order reached the Reverend at some time in Past Time.

(6) Had + 3rd Form

Sean MacStiofain, who as the Provisional IRA’s first chief of staff led the terror group into its bloody campaign more than 30 years ago, died in hospital **yesterday**. He was 73. He **had suffered** a stroke in 1993 and thereafter described himself as “an old retired general”.

(The Daily Telegraph Saturday May 19th 2001 p12)

Here the ‘Past perfect’ places the stroke in relation to the death yesterday. This form is *always* related to another in Past Time.

The to-infinitive

To boldly go where no man has gone before
Captain James T. Kirk

The controversy over the split infinitive is very amusing, as it is a clear case of analysis dictating conclusions. Language **is**, and the way it is analysed determines the rules and advice given about appropriacy and correctness.

Why can we not split the to-infinitive? The answer is simple. We can only **not** split it if we regard it as a **single** unit. If we think of it as two words which co-occur to realise specific meanings, then the problem of splitting it simply vanishes into thin air. This section will argue that the to-infinitive is merely a construct of analysis and does not exist as defined.

A preposition and a marker

A distinction has been made in grammar between the word 'to' as a preposition and as a marker for the infinitive. Why? 'To' always has an idea of movement – whether in time or space. Consider sentences (1) and (2).

- (1) I'm going.
- (2) I'm going to....

Sentence (1) is functionally equivalent to 'I'm leaving.' and refers to present time. Adding 'to' immediately pushes the focus forwards to some future time, from the first verb to the second. Consider (3).

- (3) I want to do it.

This sentence focuses on the present state of wanting and moves forward to the future state of doing. The 'to' projects meaning from the first verb onto the second in the same way as the 'to' preposition shows movement in space.

Time

Swan (1996) claims that the to-infinitives generally do not show time.

'Infinitives are forms like (to) write, (to) stand. Unlike verb tenses (eg writes, stood), infinitives do not usually show the actual times of actions or events.

(Swan, 1996 p259)

This book would argue that 'verb tenses' cannot 'show the actual time of actions or events'. But with to-forms showing movement, so, in a way, is 'relative' time.

The most famous example of the to-infinitive is (4):

(4) To be or not to be, that is the question

If you read the whole soliloquy you will see that Hamlet is not speaking of 'being' or of a timeless state but of the **future** choice open to him – to take action or not, perhaps to die. The whole speech is a meditation on the future in the play – movement from the now of his situation to the future of Act Three.

Labels, damned labels

The to-infinitive is a label placed on a piece of language by grammarians. It is distinguished from the 'present simple' because unlike the 'present simple' there is no third person 's'. Why is this distinction necessary? Why not have an all-embracing form including the base form and 'the infinitive' which, when used after 'to', has no third person 's'?

In the same way, why is a distinction made between the 'present perfect' form and the 'perfect infinitive'? Why not have a 'present perfect' form which, after 'to', has no third person 's'?

Why is the form 'might have been' distinguished as 'modal + perfect infinitive without to' merely because there is no third person form (ie it is not the same as the present perfect in all cases)?

Where does this 'to' belong?

The pattern 'modal + perfect infinitive without to' is interesting because when 'ought' is used in this way it does need a 'to'. The modal verb 'ought' determines whether there is a 'to' or not, not the infinitive itself. The other modals 'must', 'might' etc do not need a 'to' therefore they are not followed by 'to'. They determine the following grammar, not the infinitive. Sentences should be parsed thus:

- (4) {He} {must} {have been} {drunk}
- (5) {She} {ought to} {have noticed} {the car}
- (6) {I} {want to} {do} {it}

Clearly the first verb determines the following grammar. Why is the 'have been' of sentence 4 a 'perfect infinitive without to'. It is a silly label and one that our learners can do without knowing.

Ellipsis and Phonetics

The parsing of sentence (6) above fits in with the conventions of ellipsis (7) where 'do it' can be ellipped.

(7) I want to.

If the to-infinitive were one indivisible unit, it wouldn't be possible to do this.

Phonetically the 'want' and 'to' blend together in connected speech and one 't' is elided. In extreme cases 'want to' is realised as 'wanna' and 'going to' as 'gonna'. Again the 'to' seems to 'belong' to the first verb.

To or ing?

Often forms followed by 'to' or 'ing' are contrasted in coursebooks. The main thing for learners to remember is that 'to' always shows movement from the first verb to the second (8).

(8) I must remember to post the letter.

The remembering happens first and prompts the second verb. The distinction is clear between this sentence (8) and (9).

(9) I remember posting the letter.

Some verbs though have little or no distinction between the two forms and this is due to the nature of the verb itself. Compare (10) and (11).

(10) I like to walk in the rain.

(11) I like walking in the rain.

The verb 'like' has an idea of a state not a momentary whim but rather more prolonged. 'Love', 'prefer' and 'hate' are similar. There is no difference between (10) and (11) and those people who say there is should consider American usage. If 'like to' is good enough for Americans it should be good enough for our learners.

Splitting

Consider the placement of the adverb 'quickly' in these sentences.

(12) I tried quickly to open the door.

(13) I quickly tried to open the door

(14) I tried to open the door quickly.

(15) I tried to quickly open the door.

Of (12) and (13), (13) is most satisfactory as it conforms to standard word order. Of (14) and (15), (15) conveys the idea of the attempted action most effectively.

Purists, of course, would say that (15) is 'splitting the infinitive' and thus wrong. Yet if the 'to' and the 'infinitive' are not an indivisible whole (as they are clearly not: being two words), then there is nothing to split, no 'rule' to break and no problem.

Summary

- 'to' always has an idea of movement
- there is no particular advantage to distinguishing between 'to' as a preposition and 'to' as an infinitive marker
- 'to' shows movement and can thus show relative 'time'
- the labelling of forms in pedagogical grammars could be much simplified and improved
- phonetics should be considered when analysing language
- the 'to-infinitive' is a construct of a particular analysis of the language – it can be analysed in other ways.

Authentic Examples

(1) and (2) be + to

Conran Black, proprietor and chairman of The Telegraph Group, announced yesterday that he **is to** renounce his Canadian citizenship following a court decision preventing him from receiving a peerage.

(The Daily Telegraph Saturday May 19th 2001 p5)

Early warning test kits for foot and mouth disease **are to be** developed by Marks and Spencer in partnership with an Irish company that specialises in health tests for humans and animals.

The Daily Telegraph Saturday May 19th 2001 p12)

Two clear uses of 'to' to show future: from the announcement to the renunciation and from the idea to the development.

(3) ordered to

A bishop **has ordered** a country vicar **to stop paying** children for doing odd jobs around the church because some of them spend the money on drink and drugs.

(The Daily Telegraph Saturday May 19th 2001 p3)

In this case the **paying** started first and continued until the order was received to stop. The order was made **before** the stopping.

(4) proposes to

“Dr Briant proposes to read a short account of his project to you and will then be available for questioning.”

(AN8 554)

Clearly the proposing comes before the reading.

Task 12

- How does the grammar of your language divide up utterances?
- Are there different views?
- What happens if you change the analysis?
- What influence does pronunciation have?

Part Two

The First and Second Forms

'If we look at Saddam Hussain's regime. He comes to power in 1979.....'
Tony Blair BBC World 18th December 1998

The (Close) First Form

This form is commonly known as the Present Simple. These sentences are examples of this form:

- (1) I like you.
- (2) He is 60 years old.
- (3) I live here.
- (4) When I move there,
- (5) To be or not to be.....
- (6) I like to read in the evenings.
- (7) Eat your vegetables.
- (8) The train leaves at 6 pm tomorrow.
- (9) This man walks into a bar, and he say's to the barman.....
- (10) If it rains.....

Under the term 'Base Form' or 'First Form' I am including 'infinitives' and 'imperatives' because I don't see a need to make the distinction. The First Form always has the same form except when used as a **main** verb for 'he', 'she' and 'it' where it takes an 's'. When used as a secondary verb like 'read' in (6) or like 'eat' in (7) there are no changes.

The First Form has these ideas associated with its meaning.

- It is **real** not unreal.
- It is **close** not distant.
- Thus it is **unmarked** for time.
- It is a fact or presented as such.
- It expresses states or actions.

Sentence (4) refers to the future by virtue of the co-text '**when**'. Sentence (8) also refers to the future by virtue of the co-text '**at 6pm tomorrow**'. The essential meaning and form of the verb does not change.

Example (9) is part of a joke and is presented as '**close**' by use of First Forms. Conventionally jokes are accepted as '**real**' and '**factual**'.

Example (10): 'If it rains..' can be paraphrased as 'If this becomes true/a fact.....'. and is a clear use of co-text working with the **core meaning** of the First Form.

The (Distant) Second Form

This form is commonly known as the Past Simple. These sentences are examples of this form:

- (1) I worked in Paris for 2 years.
- (2) If I had a dog I would get more exercise.
- (3) It's time you went to bed.
- (4) If I were you, I wouldn't do it.
- (5) I used to live in London.
- (6) If he did it he should go to prison.

The Second Form always has the same form – there is no third person 's'. It has these ideas associated with its meaning:

- It can be **real or unreal**.
- It is **distant** not close.
- It is marked for **distance** not time.
- It expresses facts or states or actions presented as such (unless unreal).
- The Distant Form expresses the idea of an event as 'finished' and focuses attention on the end of the state or action. Finished and distant from **me now**.

Sentence (4) uses the 'subjunctive'. There is no need to make this distinction to learners.

The First and Second Forms

These two forms are a binary pair. The First is close, the Second distant (and thus can refer to unreal events/situations). The First Form is the default form – used when there is no special reason not to – in Non-Past Time. The Second Form is the default form – used when there is no special reason not to – in Past Time.

The be + -ing Forms

The Close be + -ing Form

This form is commonly known as the present continuous or the present progressive. These sentences are examples of this form.

- (1) I'm playing tennis on Saturday with John.
- (2) I'm always learning you know.
- (3) I'm having a party tomorrow – interested?
- (4) If you aren't doing anything special – what about a cup of coffee.
- (5) If you aren't doing anything special tonight – what about dinner?
- (6) Have you heard? She's going to have a baby in June!
- (7) I'm staying here for a few days – a short holiday.
- (8) What is he doing! I wish he'd hurry up?
- (9) What are you playing at?
- (10) I'm thinking of quitting my job – what do you think?

This form has these ideas associated with its meaning:

- it is **close** not distant
- the speaker views themselves or the subject of the utterance as **within** the activity
- it is **real** not unreal (because it is close)
- it is **only used when the activity is important in some way**

The Distant be + -ing Form

This form is commonly known as the past continuous or the past progressive. These sentences are examples of this form:

- (1) I was thinking of calling you.
- (2) It was a lovely day; the sun was shining, the birds were singing.....
- (3) If you weren't getting married, would you.....
- (4) I was washing my hair when the phone rang – so I didn't answer it.
- (5) You weren't seriously thinking of quitting your job were you?
- (6) I was wondering if you could help me.
- (7) What exactly were you doing between 6am and 11am on that Tuesday.

This form has these ideas associated with its meaning:

- it is **distant** not close
- the speaker views themselves or the subject of the utterance as within the activity
- it can be **real or unreal** (because it is distant)
- it is marked for **distance** not time
- **it is only used when the activity is important in some way**

The Close and Distant be +-ing forms

These two forms are a binary pair in the same way as the First and Second Forms are. They are used as an alternative or contrast to the First and Second Forms only when the speaker wants to emphasize the activity.

The Third Form

The Close Have + 3rd Form and Have + been + ing

These forms are commonly referred to as the present perfect simple and continuous or progressive. These sentences are examples of these forms:

- (1) I've lived here all my life and I don't want to move.
- (2) When I've finished the book, you can borrow it.
- (3) I've just finished.
- (4) I've always thought of her as my best friend.
- (5) I haven't finished yet – give me a chance.
- (6) I've never been to America and never want to go.
- (7) When I've been to the bank, I'll call her.
- (8) Have you been sleeping?
- (9) I've been having trouble with my back recently.
- (10) I've been thinking about what we can buy her for her birthday.

These forms have these ideas associated with its meaning:

- they are **close** not distant
- they are **real** not unreal (because they are close)

The Close Have + 3rd Form

- the speaker views completion or incompleteness of the state or action as important. In contrast to the Second Form which views events as 'finished', these forms focus attention more on the whole '**shape**' of the event or action.
- In some cases the speaker is expressing an idea of 'before'
- The verb 'have' has an idea of 'possession' and forms using 'have' might also be expressing this idea.
- The forms **must** be used in relation with another 'event' in Non-Past Time.

The Close Have + been + ing

In addition to all the above ideas the Close Have + been + ing forms include these concepts.

- the speaker views themselves or the subject of the utterance as within the activity
- it is only used when the activity is important in some way

The Distant Had + 3rd Form and Had + been + ing

These forms are commonly referred to as the past perfect simple and continuous (or progressive). These sentences are examples of these forms:

- (1) She had left before I arrived.
- (2) If I had known I would never have agreed to do it.
- (3) As soon as she had buried the body she set about burning the clothes.
- (4) She arrived before I had finished cooking the meal.
- (5) He didn't come – just as I had expected.
- (6) It had been a good year for John....
- (7) I had been expecting to be sacked so it came as no surprise.
- (8) We had been playing for only an hour when the heavens opened and we all got soaked.

These forms have these ideas associated with its meaning:

- they are **distant** not close
- they can be **real or unreal** (because they are distant)

The Distant Had + 3rd Form

- the speaker views completion or incompleteness of the state or action as important. In contrast to the Second Form which views events as 'finished', these forms focus attention more on the whole '**shape**' of the event or action.
- In some cases the speaker is expressing an idea of 'before'
- The verb 'have' has an idea of 'possession' and forms using 'have' might also be expressing this idea.
- The forms **must** be used in relation with another 'event' in Past Time.

The Distant Had + been + ing

In addition to all the above ideas the Distant Had + been + ing forms include these concepts.

- the speaker views themselves or the subject of the utterance as within the activity
- it is only used when the activity is important in some way

The Future

The future is not what it used to be

As has been said before, the future is, to a large extent, unknown. So the way we refer to the future is determined by how we see it from the essential here and now of existence. These sentences are examples of future reference:

- (1) The train leaves at six.
- (2) I might be ready by then.
- (3) If I go to Riga next week I'll go to the Opera to see Carmen.
- (4) I'm going to paint the living room one day.
- (5) I'm playing tennis on Saturday with John.
- (6) I'll be lying on a beach while you're working hard.
- (7) I'll have finished before you.
- (8) As soon as I finish/have finished, I'll let you know.
- (9) I would take you there but I'm busy and I won't be finished for a long time.
- (10) There's going to be trouble.

Notice:

- that the future is referred to using a combination of verb forms, context and co-text.
- the importance of co-text and context to place the sentence exactly 'when' in Non-Past Time
- that all verb forms associated with Non-Past Time can be used.
- that different modal verbs can be used – not just will.

Will and Going to

The use of 'will' and 'going to' is often contrasted. The essential difference is that 'will' is a modal verb and thus coloured by the speaker's interpretation. Even in a sentence such as 'I will die.' The speaker's assumption is that they are not immortal: immortality is a possible state. This use of 'will' can be contrasted with the use of other modals such as 'might'. 'Going to' is a close be + -ing form. There is no real need to distinguish between 'going to' and other be + ing forms which can be used to refer to the future.

The verb 'go' is a very common word strongly collocated with 'to'. We 'go to' places eg 'go to the cinema', 'go to London.' And we 'go' into the future. Metaphorically the use of 'go to' can be used to extend a concept from me, here and now, travelling 'going', to some future action, event or fact. We are on the path to that event, within the activity and thus can use an -ing form. It is a metaphorical extension of the journey metaphor which convention allows us to use in non-journey situations. Eg 'I'm going to paint the living room.' Thus while

'going to' is a metaphor, it still obeys the core meanings and distance ideas of the analysis presented here in the book.

'Going to' is **close** not distant, it is **real** not unreal and **the speaker views the subject of the utterance as within the activity**.

Authentic Example

Will 'The proposed reforms to CAP, unveiled by the European Commission...on July 10, are designed to sever the longstanding links between how much farmers produce and the level of direct subsidies they receive. Instead, farms **will** receive a single allocation of income support and any direct production subsidies **will** be conditional on respect for environmental, animal welfare and food safety laws.

(The Baltic Times, July 25th to 31st, 2002)

Nothing has been agreed about these proposals, in fact half of Europe is against them. This is a clear modal use of will, not a 'pure future' or 'future as fact' that some grammars will have you believe.

Modal Verbs

'If President Clinton is impeached, the future will judge his Presidency as a tainted one, indeed it may already have done so.'
BBC World 12th December 1998

Modals are more complex than ordinary verbs as they deal, not with facts, but with opinions and probabilities. It has been said that a search for a simple scheme of modals is doomed to failure. These two pages will attempt to draw out some common regularities of the modals and to see how far modals behave similarly to other verbs in relation to distance, Past and Non-Past Time and how context and co-text combine with them to produce meaningful utterances.

Will and Would

Consider: I would do it.....but..... (**distant in reality**)

|
Me Now I'll do it when I get home
(**close, prediction, future reference from co-text**)

Will (close) and would (distant) behave in the same way as other verbs: would is the distant form of will.

Consider: (1) I would have called you but I didn't have your mobile number

(Distant in reality: I didn't call you; and time: Past (we know 'when'); 'have called' supplies idea of completion, here, unfulfilled)

'Someone called you last night'
(2) 'Oh, that will have been John.'
get back

me now (3) I'll have done it by the time you

(close, deduction/assertion) (close, prediction of completion)

In (2) we could say 'Oh, that was John' but only if we knew it was a fact. 'was' would indicate the factuality. Here 'will' supplies a modality of deduction which cannot be combined with the pure factuality of 'was' the default verb form. The sentence: * 'That will was John.' is illogical and incorrect as it does not obey the conventions of English. Sentence (2) is **close** because the deduction is made by me now.

In (3) the context (what is it?) and the co-text (by the time you get back) supply the future reference in relation to **me now**. The verb form 'have done' emphasizes the completion and the relationship between the two events.

Regularities

We can see from these examples that will and would do follow the norms of distance, Past and Non-Past Time and the use of context and co-text to create meaning.

The Other Modals

Close	can	may	must	shall
Distant	could	might		should

Must

As a modal 'must' expresses the speaker's subjective necessity. This can **only** be close. In the Past there is no subjectiveness – all is objective so there is **no** distant form of must. Necessity in the Past Time is expressed objectively using the distant form of 'have' + to – an external/objective necessity.

Consider these examples: which are internal/subjective, which external/objective?

I must go - I have no choice. You don't have to go if you don't want to. You must never do that again. I have to be in London by 2pm. It had to be done. You didn't have to do that – but of course you did.

Can and Could

Consider these examples of can and could – do they conform to the language conventions discussed in this book?

I can drive.	I could drive when I was 17.
She said I could go.	You can go now.
Could you help me please?	I could do it if I wanted
I suppose you could go.	I wish I could drive.
I could call him instead of writing.	

May and Might

Consider these examples of may and might – do they conform to the language conventions discussed in this book?

May I go now?	Might I make a suggestion?
I might do it.	
I might be able to help you.	Might I have that in writing please?
Might I go now?	May I have another cup of tea, please?

Shall and should

Consider these examples of shall and should – do they conform to the language conventions discussed in this book?

Shall I carry that for you?	I should love to come for dinner.
Shall we go?	
It should work – let's try it.	I shouldn't think so.
Should you need any help please do not hesitate to ask.	

Likelihood: core meaning

All modals carry an element of likelihood as a core meaning.

Consider these clines in **Figure 12**.

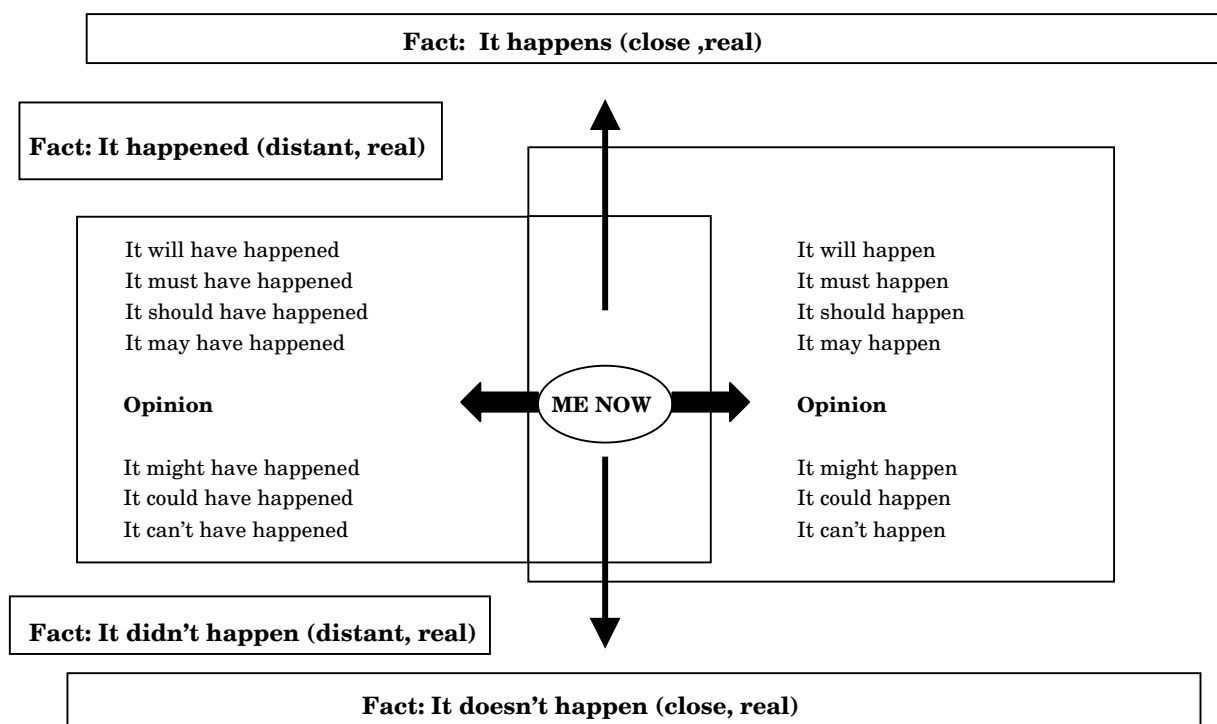


Figure 12 Modals and likelihood

Notes:

- opinion is always connected with 'me now', even when we are making deductions about the past .
- 'modals of past deduction' are misnamed and should be known as 'modals of deduction about the past' – the deduction always happens from the perspective of 'me'.

Authentic Examples

(1) May not might

Coffee **may** one day provide an unlikely source of new drugs for heart disorders, insomnia and hyperactivity, researchers said yesterday.

(The Daily Telegraph Saturday May 19th 2001 p5)

Try this sentence with **might** not **may** – the difference is clear. **Might** is less certain – more distant – than **may**.

Conditionals

Conditionals are not difficult. The conditional tense has been abandoned by most grammarians, though you will still find books in libraries which refer to such things. Conditionals are merely groups of words that combine to produce meaning and the core meanings of the verbs and words remains the same. The verbs are the same, the modals the same and distance and context and co-text play their part. If learners have a clear grasp of verb meaning and modal meaning they should have no problem with conditionals. Problems arise when, because they have been taught that 'had' is past (not distant in time or reality), they think this sentence refers to the past:

If I had time, I would do it.

Examples such as these are usually accompanied by the absurd 'rule': 'the form is past but the meaning is not'.

The problem lies not in the complexity of the language but in the grammatical view that has ignored the regularities of the English language and focussed on tense and time.

Task 13

Look through a number of coursebooks and see how many explain conditionals using appropriate metalanguage.

Authentic Examples

(1) Could not will

If development work **goes** to plan, simple versions of the kits **could be** available within a year.

(The Daily Telegraph Saturday May 19th 2001 p12)

In this example **could** adds a further element of doubt.

(2) A complex conditional

‘If President Clinton is impeached, the future will judge his Presidency as a tainted one, indeed it may already have done so.’

(BBC World 12th December 1998)

In order to understand this sentence you need to be able to understand the individual verb forms – not a conditional pattern.

(3) The First Form

If you **ask** your manager first and he **agrees**, then an overdraft **is** a convenient and economic way of borrowing money.

(EE0 248)

The First Form behaves exactly the same in conditionals as it does elsewhere: essentially as a timeless factual proposition.

Part Three

An Overview: Decision Tree Analysis

This analysis is an attempt to model the process of choosing the correct verb form to express meaning. It moves from basic fields to more specific differentiation in core meaning of different verb forms. It is not a complete picture of a very complex process but an attempt to gain insights into the process in order to aid the learner's understanding of the system that underlies the use of verbs. Instead of viewing verb forms as having several uses the analysis concentrates on core distinctions.

The basic field is, perhaps surprisingly, time. This is not because verb forms tell us the 'time' but the system operates within two time fields – 'past time' and 'non-past time'. In these two fields, verb forms operate **within** the field once the primary choice has been made. Verbs correlate highly but not exclusively with a particular field. For example the **Second Form** operates in both fields but for different functions.

So the basic distinction is time:

Question: is it Past Time or Non-Past-Time?

Answer: Past Time

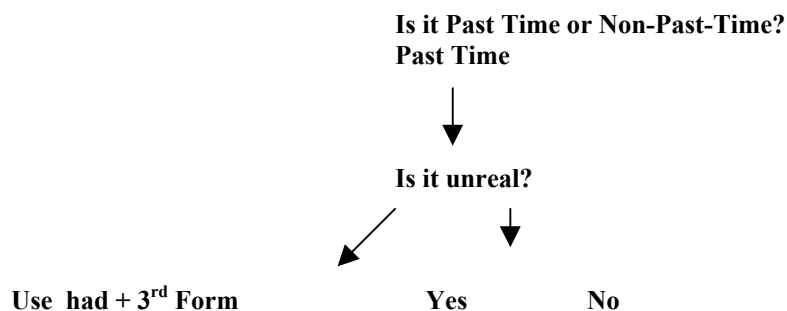
If past time is chosen then the speaker is limited to the Second Form or Had + 3rd Form or Distant be + ing. How does the speaker chose between these? The following analysis attempts to reduce the differences between form uses to simple yes/no questions.

Question: is it unreal?

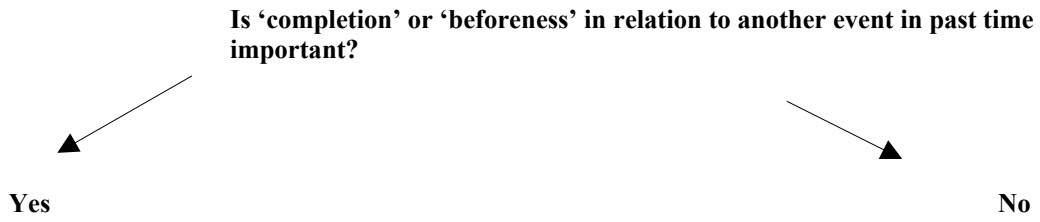
Answer: Yes – so use had + 3rd Form

Answer: No

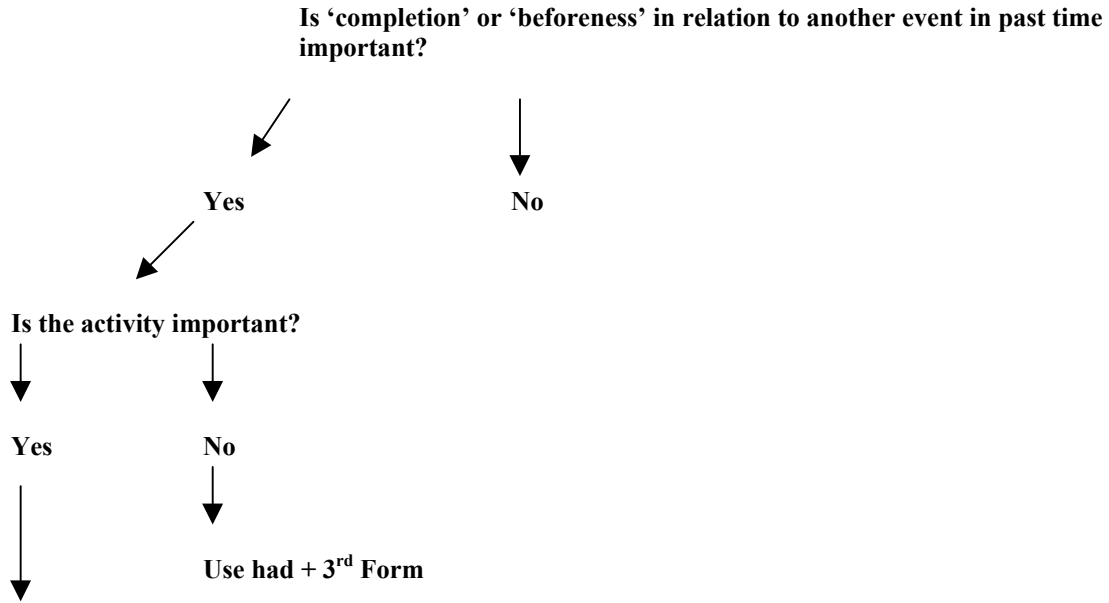
At this stage we can start to construct a diagram of questions and answers:



If the answer is 'no' then we ask another question.

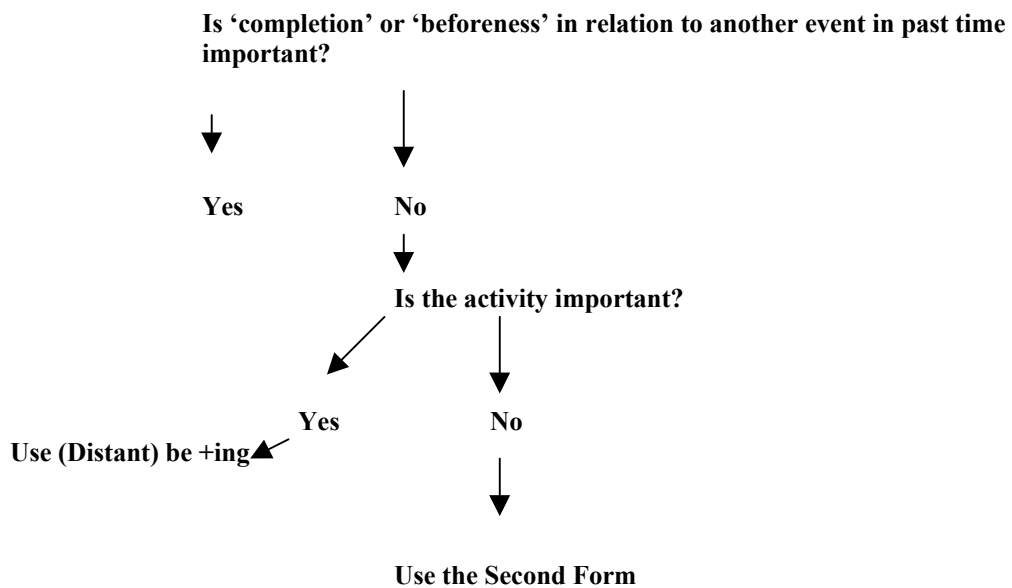


If 'yes' then we ask a further question: is the activity important? Yes or no?



Use had + been + ing

If the answer was 'no' to the second question then we ask a further question: is the activity important? Yes or no?



The complete diagram for **Past Time** looks like this:

Is it Past Time or Non-Past-Time?

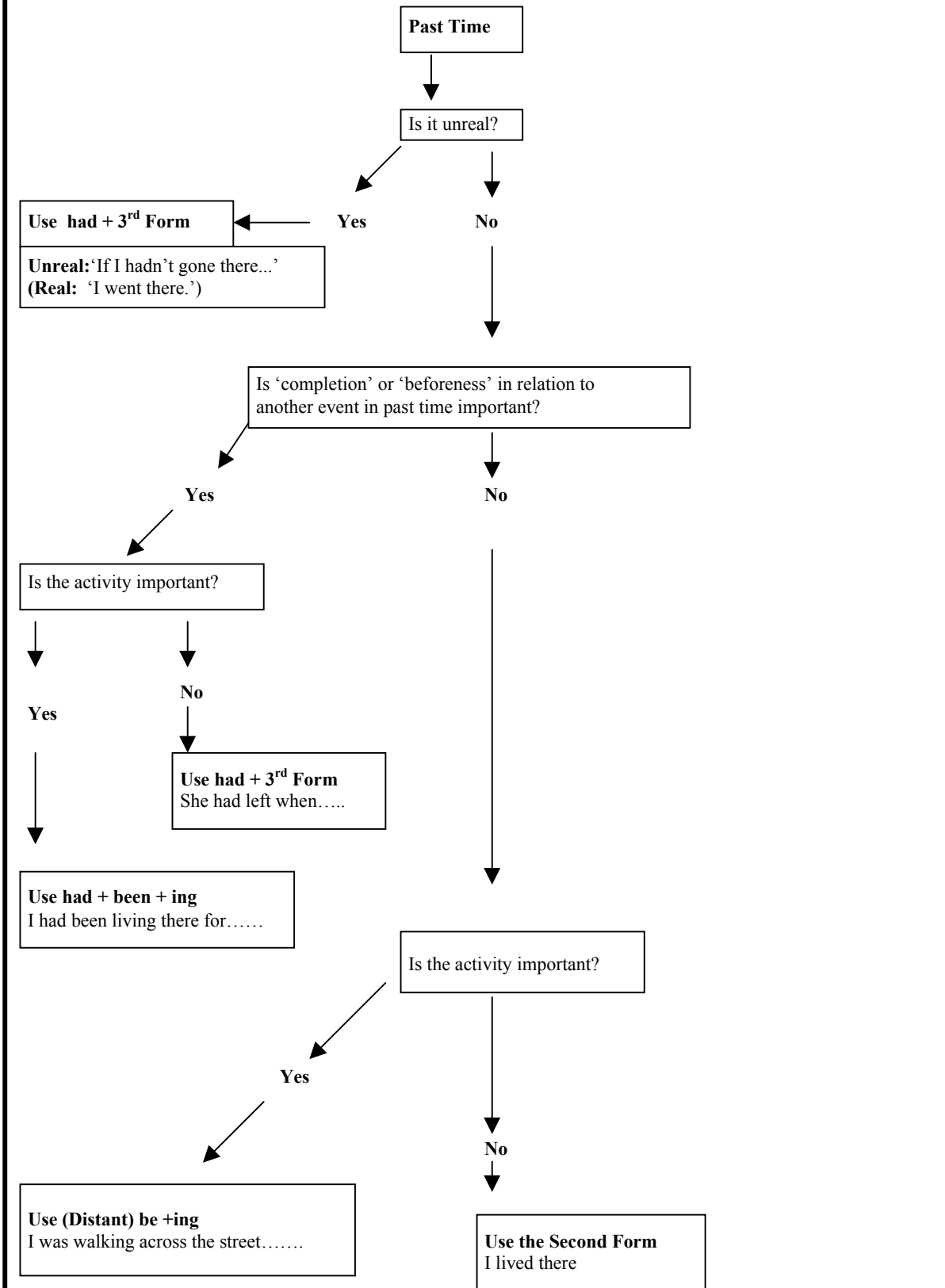


Figure 13 Past Time Decision Tree

This diagram gives us simple guide to the distinctions between the choice of various verb forms in 'Past Time'. It clearly shows that the Second Form is the **default form** for Past Time and is defined negatively – that is, it is used when there is no special reason not to.

In Non-Past Time, a similar diagram can be drawn: see **Figure 14**

- The basic questions and choices are the same
- Non-Past Time has the added complication of modal forms.
- Note the status of the **First Form**. This is comparable to the **Second Form** in '**Past Time**' that is, it is the **default** verb form.
- Note the two examples of the First Form. One is placed in time by the **co-text**, for the other the time is not explicitly stated though it is **implicitly** 'Non-Past Time' by virtue of being within this field.
- Note the use of the Second Form to denote **unreality** in 'Non-Past Time' – remember the Second Form is **not** 'past' but distant or remote.
- Look at the modal forms. Note the implicit contrast between will and other modals.
- Note that '**going to**' is considered an '**activity form**', part of '**be + ing**'. The contrast between 'I'm going to do it' and 'I will do it' is essentially one of a non-modal form (going to) and a modal one (will). 'I will do it.' is an assertion. 'I'm going to do it' is presented as an objective fact. Once a decision has been made we can present a future event as a 'factual activity'. In 'It is going to rain' we have objective external evidence (ie the dark clouds, the smell of rain on the wind etc) In 'I'm going to do it', the decision already made is similar such evidence.
- Note that the two fields clearly separate verb forms. **Have + 3rd Forms** do not appear in the '**Past Time**' field. They should not be contrasted with the **Second Form** as a choice because no such choice exists. It is **not** a question of 'Simple Past' or 'Present Perfect' – you choose. The choice is **Past Time** or **Non-Past Time**.
- Connections are possible between the two fields. Consider:
If I hadn't moved to Warsaw...
(Past Time field, unreality. 'I did move to Warsaw' is the reality.)
I wouldn't be here now
(Non-Past Time field, unreality. 'I am here now' is the reality.)
- Jokes and anecdotes. One use of the First Form is to tell jokes or anecdotes in 'the historical present'. The analysis presented here does not see this as an exception or special use but merely the temporary extension of **Non-Past Time** to cover the story or events being retold (see **Figure 2** and **3**). The verb forms retain their **core meaning**.

The diagrams give us a powerful overview of the two time-fields and the verb form uses within the two fields. Such a visualisation of the essentials of the system shows the essential differences between verb forms, proper contrasts and perhaps a decision-making structure that learners could internalise with exposure to extensive real-world examples.

Is it Past Time or Non-Past-Time?

Non-Past Time

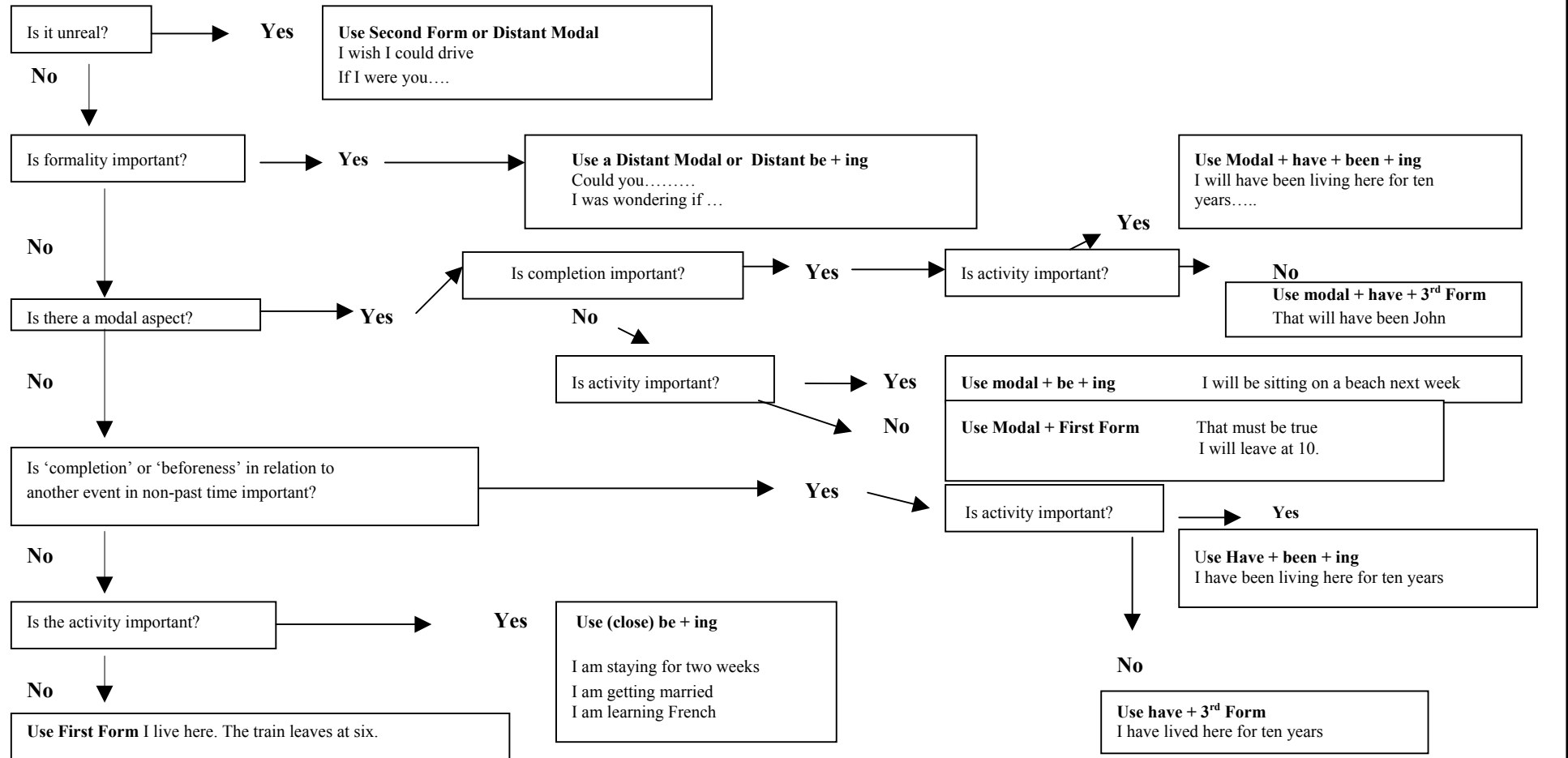


Figure 14 Non-Past Time

The above diagrams in **Figures 13 and 14** are quite complex attempts to show the system of English verb use through some basic distinctions. While they do not pretend to completely model the decisions a speaker makes when choosing which verb forms to use, they do show the regularities in the system **and** the default uses of the First and Second Forms of the verb. The learner needs such a system and needs to perceive such a system in order to relate it to their L1 system.

It may be that a better view would be to turn the diagrams on their heads and to start with simplicity rather than complexity. Thus for **Past Time** we could state that:

When talking about Past Time we always use the Second Form.

Unless the activity is important so then we use **(Distant) be + ing**.

Unless completion or 'beforeness' in relation to another event in past time is important so then we use **had + 3rd Form**.

(Unless activity is **also** important so then we use **Had + been + ing**.)

Unless unreality is important so then we use **Had + 3rd Form**.

Obviously the diagrams are failures to reflect the entire complexity of the English verb because, for example, models are not fully dealt with and passives are ignored. Yet I think it is a good attempt to represent some of the system in relatively simple terms and is an improvement on lists of forms and uses which seem unrelated to each other. In reality there are a few basic distinctions and these are used in combination to create more complex meaning. These two diagrams might provide a basis for learners and teachers to fill in the detail themselves and to refine their understanding of the system and perhaps improve the diagrams themselves.

Task 14

- What is the system for your language?
- How could you represent it diagrammatically?

Conclusions

I have tried to show that there is a **system** to English verb use and this is only sometimes connected with time. A coherent picture of verb use can only be built up by abandoning the exclusively tense = time grammar confusion of coursebooks and other teaching materials.

There are no 'special tenses' in English – just a few verb forms that act consistently with co-text and context to realise the speaker's meaning. It is entirely regular, clear and economical.

Yet the central problem remains, we use '**past**' forms to express unreality and formality.

It drives me crazy saying or reading or hearing things like 'the form is past but the meaning is not.' The sheer idiocy of the analysis, which has spawned such contorted and illogical descriptions of the English verb system, simply infuriates me and drove me to write this book. I am more intelligent than this and so are my learners.

What is needed then, is the broad brush of concepts like 'close' and 'distant', 'fact' and 'non-fact', 'real' and 'unreal'. The learners have to fill in the details themselves, working from prototypical to less easily explained examples. At an early stage learners should learn to accept a certain amount of ambiguity, perhaps a lot of ambiguity. If they are fed 'rules' that are clearly not true but are merely conveniences for native speaker teachers to avoid complex concepts that would necessitate using L1, then the shock of the real, the plethora of exceptions, will be a profoundly de-motivating experience.

In short, we should teach less - a stripped-down, logical and consistent system - and let learners learn more. Learners have to construct their own mental representation of the English language – grammar and all – and relate it to their own language competencies, including their L1. Let them learn it.

Yet some might argue that the concepts explored in this book are too complex for learners, especially beginners, to understand. But is this true? These (adult) learners have already mastered at least one L1 in all its complexities, as well as other subjects, so their cognitive abilities are not in doubt. Is it then perhaps that the lack is on the teacher's part – being unable to discuss/explore these ideas in terms suitable for beginners eg in their L1?

As I said in the introduction, linear time is an easy concept to communicate – without L1 competence. Just because such a grammar is easy to teach by a minority of teachers (native speakers), that is not sufficient justification for it to be **the** grammar that is taught. It may be easy to teach but is difficult to learn – because English verb usage is not essentially time-based.

There **is** a system to English verbs that is regular and consistent. It is remarkably economical by using the same mechanisms to mark time and reality distance etc.

The learner needs to be able to see the general system rather than be presented with an extended list of discrete 'structures'. If this takes complex metalanguage in the learners L1 then so be it.

Changing the terminology

Do we have to, or can we, change the terminology of verb forms to a more accurate, less confusing one? Or are we stuck with inaccurate, confusing labels like 'simple present'? Unfortunately I think we are. There is too much invested in coursebooks and reference works to make such changes easily and too many powerful vested interests who have described English in the way it has been described. Think for a moment – do coursebook writers sit down from first principles and create a coursebook grammar from scratch? Of course not, everyone perpetuates the same old rules and examples which learners struggle with. It is time for some innovation and research. Meanwhile teachers who think differently will have to fight a guerrilla war for the hearts and minds of their learners.

It is up to teachers to develop ways of negating the idiocies of the traditional EFL verb terminology, rules and descriptions so that their learners are better served. Learners need to be sceptical of grammar books and rules from an elementary level.

Teaching the ideas in this book

This book has been an exploration of the English verb in the hope of stimulating you to do the same. The ideas in the book are just ideas – not complete enough to pretend to be a new orthodoxy. You must decide what to do with the ideas, if anything.

I believe they are powerful ideas, both simple and elegant and learners should be aware of them.

They might be linguistically difficult to explain, especially in L2. As a teacher you would have to know, or learn, some appropriate metalanguage (eg distant, unreal) as expressed in the learners L1 and to be able to draw comparisons or show contrasts with the L1 grammatical system.

With beginners you can start right from the beginning by showing the consistency of the system, by using ideas of distance etc and building up a picture, however hazy, of the system as quickly as possible.

At a more advanced level it is too late. They have already been indoctrinated by the highly systematic teaching of a time-based non-system agglomeration of verb forms and uses. They believe that there are tens of verb forms with accompanying exceptions. They go through mental gymnastics to cope with rules like ' the form of the 2nd conditional is past but the meaning is not'. All you can do is remedial work and point out the regularities of the system and try to show them that there is a system. Sometimes they will just shrug and say 'so what?' Often they will say

'Yes I **know** that but I didn't know I did'. Sometimes they will like the ideas and thank you.

The reader is invited, in the spirit of the Graver passage, to explore English with their learners, using the ideas and concepts outlined in this book as a starting point.

Robert Buckmaster Tallinn, Estonia February 16th 20003

Selective Key

Tasks 1, 2 and 3

Task 1 Look at these example sentences and place them in the 'correct' category of time: 'Past' 'Present' or 'Future'.

Past

Have you ever been to Poland?
I lived there for ten years.
I was walking down the street when I saw her..
I had never seen him before in my life.
John tells me that you are thinking of quitting.

Present

First boil the rice, then fry it.
My sister works in a bank.
I hate maths lessons!
I didn't know you were married.
I wish I could drive
If I were you, I'd dump him
..Hill takes the corner wide...
It's time we were going. I was interested in those cuff links in the window.

Future

When you've finished that, how about making the beds?
I'll phone you when I get there.
She's flying to Warsaw tomorrow.
I promise I'll do it.
The concert starts at 6pm.

Problem Sentences

Ice melts in the hot sun.
This man walks into a bar, and he says to the barman.....
I often stay up till midnight.
If no-one gave you presents for your birthday, what would you do?
P.J. Smith writes in a recent article in the Times that....

Task 2 Now put the same example sentences from Task 1 into the two categories of 'PastTime' and 'Non-Past Time'.

Past Time

Have you ever been to Poland?
I was walking down the street when I saw her..
I lived there for ten years.
I had never seen him before in my life.
John tells me that you are thinking of quitting.

Non-Past Time

First boil the rice, then fry it.
My sister works in a bank.
It's time we were going. I was interested in those cuff links in the window.
I hate maths lessons!
I didn't know you were married.
..Hill takes the corner wide...
If I were you, I'd dump him
I wish I could drive
When you've finished that, how about making the beds?
I'll phone you when I get there.
She's flying to Warsaw tomorrow.
I promise I'll do it.
The concert starts at 6pm.
Ice melts in the hot sun.
This man walks into a bar, and he says to the barman.....
I often stay up till midnight.
If no-one gave you presents for your birthday, what would you do?
P.J. Smith writes in a recent article in the Times that....

Task 3

Past Time

10 minutes ago
then
2 days ago
at six o'clock
in 1999
last week
the day before yesterday
last year
in the eighties
yesterday

Non-past Time

today
then
at six o'clock
this year
soon
it's almost 5 o'clock
since 1990
the day after tomorrow now
next week
since I was born
this afternoon
this week
in ten minutes
tomorrow

Verb Form Terms

Preferred term in this book	The traditional term
1. The (Close) First Form	Infinitive Present Simple Imperative
2. The (Distant) Second Form	Past Simple
3. The Third Form	Past Participle
4. (Close) be + ing	Present Progressive Present Continuous
5. (Distant) be + ing	Past Progressive Past Continuous
6. Have + 3 rd Form Have + been + ing	Present Perfect Simple Present Perfect Continuous/ Progressive
7. Had + 3 rd Form Had + been + ing	Past Perfect Simple Past Perfect Continuous /Progressive
8. Passive	Passive
9. Do/Did	Do/Did
10. Modal Verbs	Modal Verbs
11. Auxiliary Verbs	Auxiliary Verbs

NB Both 'preferred' and 'traditional' terms are used in this book as it is very difficult to escape from the straightjacket of traditional terminology.

The preferred terms come or were inspired by from Michael Lewis' landmark book 'The English verb'.

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