The Role of Grammar in Communication:
The Interpretation of Time, Tense and Aspect in English

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Abstract

A vast majority of known languages have mechanisms which enable the speaker to express time (Comrie, 1985). Among these languages most of them also express time with a verb, and more specifically, with various verbal tenses (Smith, 1991). The verbal tense, a grammatical category which differs significantly from one language to another may also be considered a grammaticalization of time; in other words, chronological time is expressed with,

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and within, the verbal tense. Thus, we cannot understand the latter without focusing our attention on the former, and vice versa. Verbal tense can therefore provide us with a particular kind of insight into our perception of chronological time.

The current study is a contribution to the ongoing interpretation of the relationship between time, tense and aspect.

The present paper also adds its voice to the connection between the three concepts. In general linguistic approaches, aspect and tense are treated as complementary ways of encoding time. However, tense differs from aspect in showing the time reference, while aspect shows how the action or state is envisaged or seen as happening or occurring. Knowledge in the distinction between the three concepts (time, tense, aspect) enables English speakers to communicate better, grammatically.

Key words: Time, Tense, Aspect, Grammaticalization, Verbal tense, Chronological time, Communication.

Introduction

In the western tradition, basic conceptions of chronological time and verbal tense have been inherited from the ancient Greeks. With regard to the verb, Aristotle maintained that a verb is a sound, which not only conveys a particular meaning but has a time reference also (Quoted in Binnick, 1991). This definition of a verb has not changed significantly in current times. Indeed, a verb denotes or marks time since time dimension cannot be entirely ignored in any action or state. A verb is thus a part of speech which is closely linked with time. It is evident from ancient works that in the classical age the verb/time relation was considered a simple

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relation of a spectacular type (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In this theory, verbal tense fully overlaps with chronological time and accurately expresses it by linguistic means. There is a complete equivalence between verbal tense and chronological time. What exists as chronological time in an extra-linguistic reality is a verbal tense in a linguistic reality.

Tenses, moods and aspects (TMA) belong to the things in one's native language that one tends to take for granted and often, they have only attracted the attention of grammarians who have had to explain the use of such categories in one language to speakers of another language in which the system is different. However, since the semantics of TMA categories is connected with concepts that are fundamental to human thinking, such as *time, action, event,* philosophers have often had occasion to reflect upon their use. In recent years, as the scope of general linguistic theory was widened, there has been an upsurge in studies of TMA systems, where the insights of earlier traditions have been exploited. Some languages have had their TMA systems described in hundreds of monographs and articles; yet, it is usually impossible to know to what extent the claims and the conceptual apparatus of these works can be extended to other languages. One constant source of confusion, in the study of tense, mood and aspect categories, is the complex interrelations between grammar and lexicon. The basic observation is that in addition to the fact that some aspectual notions are expressed by morphological means in some languages, it is also true for all languages that verbal lexemes differ in their aspectual potential. It is clear, for instance, that the verbs *die* and *sleep* are quite different as regards the contexts in which they occur naturally. To take a standard illustration of this fact, *sleep* but not *die* can be used together with a durational adverbial like *for two hours*. The obvious semantic correlate of this distributional fact is that *die* is normally used of punctual events, whereas *sleep* is used of

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prolonged states. Verb lexemes differ as to their *Aktionsart or inherent aspectual meaning*; In addition, some languages distinguish different morphological forms of the same lexemes, called *aspect*, according to the context in which the verbs are used.

The focus of the current study is to demonstrate the communicative functions of the three concepts in the English language, namely, time, tense and aspect through series of grammatical interpretations. The writer will explore the theoretical perspectives of the study and this will be followed by a review of previous studies on the three concepts in focus by other researchers in English Grammar. The paper will interpret the three concepts in different subcategories by showing the relationship between them and finally end with a concluding segment.

Theoretical Perspectives of the Study

The great expansion of linguistics as a discipline was associated with advances made in theories of grammar. The work of Noam Chomsky and others generated great excitement within linguistics. Today, there is perhaps a more even balance in the prominence of major areas of linguistic research, but theories of grammar are still regarded by many as the essential basis for any theory of language. When the term *grammar* is used in phrases such as *case grammar* or *systemic grammar* it is in a broad sense, referring to a theory of language. It is also commonly used in a more restricted sense, to refer to syntactic structure or the descriptions of the syntactic structure of a particular language. Sometimes these descriptions use the framework that has been developed as part of a theory of language, so that we may have, for example, a transformational grammar of English (Graddol, et al, 1987). Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows his language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations,

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distractions, shifts of attention and interest and errors in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. Speakers of a language know the principles that govern the organization of words into longer sequences though they may not necessarily be consciously aware of their linguistic knowledge.

There are many distinct frameworks employed by linguists to analysis syntactic structure. Since the knowledge that people have about their language is very complex, it is difficult to devise a single framework that can satisfactorily account for everything that they know. Different frameworks tend to vary in the relative prominence that they give to the different aspects of our linguistic competence. Some of the frameworks that are most widely used have been developed as part of a theory of language in general, rather than simply as a framework for analyzing syntax. Their approaches to the analysis of syntax, therefore, reflect their overall orientation to the study of language. Transformational generative grammar, for example, which is best known, perhaps through the work of Chomsky, aims not only to describe and to explain language structure but also to investigate the nature of the mind (Quoted in Graddol, et al, 1987). Systemic grammar, on the other hand, focuses more on the social aspect of language, aiming to account for the various linguistic choices that are available to us in different social situations. Within these broad general approaches, different frameworks have been developed that give more prominence to one aspect of syntactic structure than to others.

Within traditional linguistic theory, it was clearly understood that one of the qualities that all languages have in common is their creative aspect. Thus, an essential property of language is that it provides the means for expressing indefinitely many thoughts and for reaching appropriately in an indefinite range of new situations. The grammar of a particular language,

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then, is to be supplemented by a universal grammar that accommodates the creative aspect of language use and expresses the deep-seated regularities which, being universal, are omitted from the grammar itself. Therefore, it is quite proper for a grammar to discuss only exceptions and irregularities in any detail. It is only when supplemented by a universal grammar that the grammar of a language provides a full account of the speaker-hearer's competence (Graddol, et al, 1987).

Reichenbach (1947) theorized about the tense of verbs. According to his theory of tense, there are at most three points in time which are relevant to the choice of tense in any given sentence: The point of speech (S); The point of the event (E); and The point of reference (R). This can be illustrated in the following utterance: *Kwame had gone home.* From this example, *S* is the time when the statement was uttered, *E* is the time when Kwame went home and *R* is some definite time-point between *S* and *R* provided by the context. One of the main points of Reichenbach's theory is that he is able to distinguish the perfect tense from the simple past by assuming that in the former, *E* and *R* are different. Reichenmbach's scheme works best for cases involving single, punctual actions; nonetheless, according to Dahl (1985), Reichenbach's accounts of the progressive in English and the aorist in Turkish are not convincing. That is partly due to the fact that the scheme basically only accounts for temporal reference and is not well suited for describing aspectual notions (ibid). However, there is at least one way in which the scheme can be made more powerful. Consider the following sentence: *When I arrived, Kwame had tried to phone me twice during the preceding week*. *R* here must be the time when I arrived and *E* the time point when Kwame tried to phone me. But it can be observed that there is nothing in Reichenbach's scheme that corresponds to the time referred to by *during the preceding week*.

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The function of that phrase could be said to specify a temporal frame for the *E* point, that is, a time period within which they are located. Let us call the temporal frame *F*. In fact, although there are complex sentences like the above-where *S, E, R* and *F* are all distinct-they are rather infrequent and perhaps a little farfetched. It is quite common that we need to postulate an *F* in order to give an adequate account of the interpretation of a sentence. There are in fact several ways in which a temporal frame can be determined. It may be introduced by an explicit time adverbial in the sentence. It may also have been introduced explicitly or implicitly in the earlier context, as in: *I had a good time in Accra. I visited the central shopping mall twice* (i.e., during the time I was in Accra).

Review of Related Literature

Many studies published in books and journals serve as channels to unveiling many different research findings on time, tense, and aspect in English grammar. Dahl (1985) is the outcome of a research project whose aim was to create a data base containing comparable data on the tense, mood and aspect (TMA) systems of a large number of languages. The study is a contribution to the general theory of tense and aspect and of grammatical categories in general, based on the analysis made of data from more than 60 languages collected within the research project. The primary aim of this analysis was to test the hypothesis that the TMA categories that occur in the languages of the world can be reduced to a small set of cross-linguistic category types. In contradistinction to the original project, in which the study was to cover the total TMA field, the final analysis was restricted to tense and aspect categories that occur in affirmative declarative sentences.

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Giorgi & Pianesi (1997) consider the domain of the temporal and aspectual interpretation of sentences from a point of view of the interface between syntax and semantics. The empirical domain of investigation covers the Romance and Germanic languages with special reference to Italian and English. The study addresses questions concerning morphology and word order on the one hand, and questions concerning tense, aspect, and sequences of tense phenomena on the other. The researchers adopt the minimalist framework recently developed by Chomsky (1995). In particular, the authors propose a theory of features to account for the cross-linguistic variation existing among Romance and Germanic languages in their temporal and aspectual systems. From a theoretical and technical point of view, Giorgi & Pianesi (1997) present two leading ideas: The first aims at providing an answer to the problem of morphological variation across languages. It was observed that the same tense is realized differently in the various languages. For instance, a particular tense can be realized with or without an auxiliary or the same tense may exhibit different constraints with respect to compatibility with temporal specifications. To explain these phenomena the authors develop the notion of syncretic and hybrid categories which are typically found in some languages.

The second idea concerns the interface with semantic interpretation. The authors propose some interface conditions which might also have import for a sequence of tense theory.

Declerck, et al. (2006) describe the workings of the system of special verb forms used in English to locate situations in time. The goal of the authors is to write a grammar of the English tense system which is at the same time a scientific study and a work which could be used as a reference grammar by linguists and students of English with a basic knowledge of descriptive linguistics and a fairly advanced proficiency in English. Declerck, et al. (2006) is meant to be a

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thorough study of the tense system based on a wealth of old and new observations, and offering a coherent framework revealing the relations between the observations, accounting for them, and ultimately predicting most of them. The framework is a revised version of the descriptive theory presented in Declerck (1991). Although it is presented without unnecessary formalization, it is a rigid framework which could easily   be formalized and used in formal approaches like formal semantics or computational linguistics.

Harper and Charniak (1986) provide an interesting and revealing analysis of English tense and aspect involving relations between events. According to them, there are several kinds of events: the utterance event, which is associated with the time of the utterance; the main event or the event being described by the main verb of the sentence; the perfect event; and the progressive event. The representation of every sentence involves the utterance event and the main event; sentences with progressive or perfect aspect also involve progressive or perfect events. This treatment is quite different from the Reichenbach (1947) conception of *reference time*, which is assumed to be relevant to all sentences. To translate   between the two systems, the reference time may be thought of as being represented by the perfect event in progressive sentences. In the case of perfect progressive, one might consider that there are two reference events, while in simple tenses there is no reference event at all. Alternatively, in a system like webber (1987) in which   reference points for each sentence are used to construct an event structure, the tensed event is the relevant one.

The Concept of Time

Throughout the centuries people have developed various conceptions and theories about time and there are many similarities between them. In some respects, however, they differ or
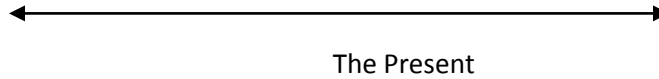
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complement each other. Given the extensiveness and diversity of these conceptions and theories, it is difficult to argue or even imagine that humans would have managed to develop a unified theory of time; however, language offers evidence that may be just the opposite of this assumption. Although in theory our perceptions of time may be very different and determined by geographical positions, era, philosophical schools and even religions, in languages different views come together to a relatively unified structure or image. Though it cannot be argued that the products are a universal notion, it is true, however, that some elements can be found in numerous languages and that they have stayed almost unchanged from ancient times to the present day.

The Greeks knew only the word *chronos* for both verbal tense and chronological time. The Italians today, for example, still speak of time (tempo) even when it comes to complex verbal structures where one could hardly claim they denote chronological time per se. In these cases, it is more about expressing relations between action or state within time relations (Graffi & Scalise, 2002). The Slovenians also speak of time in general even though they distinguish between, for example, the present tense and the present time. The English are more precise and they use time for chronological time and tenses for verbal tense. We often speak of tense even when we mean aspect, aktionsart or mode (Zagar & Grgic, 2011).

Time is usually imagined as a straight line. On an arbitrary spot on the line a point X is placed which marks the present time. To the left of the point, the past time is imagined, and to the right, the future time. Almost all texts which address the time-tense problem discuss this straight line used to illustrate a basic conception of time. The timeline is illustrated below:

The past   X
                                              The future

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The Present

Smith (1991) defines time as being a single, unbounded dimension. Such a definition is in accordance with the straight line above. Despite the success that the above illustration has had among numerous researchers and educationists alike, it has been clear from ancient times that it is not sufficient for a graphical description of the complex time-tense problem. One of the principal reasons for this insufficiency is that the illustration lacks a definition of what the present future and past are. One thing is, however, evident from this scheme; the present is a point which is arbitrarily placed on any given spot on a straight line. This point is thus a completely arbitrary notion. It follows then that the present is the first element of separation on the straight line and, until the present has been defined, there is no past or future. The present is the point which separates and demarcates the past from the future, but on the other hand, it also binds and establishes them. The past begins somewhere in infinity and continues to the present, while the future begins with the present and continues to infinity. Naturally, the definition of time arising from the above mentioned arguments raises many questions and dilemmas.

The vast majority of researchers have chosen to turn their attention toward an understanding of the present. Philosophers have not spoken about the linguistic or verbal present, but of extra-linguistic reality. Based on their own philosophical speculations, they have emphasized the present, or the past or the future, as the referential time. When Aristotle put forward the thesis of the n*onexistence* of the moment of the present (Binnick, 1991), this idea appeared for the first time in the history of western thought. The present, as such, does not exist. It does not have, if we resort to philosophical terminology, ontological value. Only through the demarcation of the past and the future is the link created which is referred to as the present. So

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this demarcation, which is the connecting link, is called the present (Zagar & Grgic, 2011). The link is given purpose only through the existence of two time entities the past and the future. The Slovenian verbal system is based on the division into three time entities: the past, future and present. Even though there are systems that differ from Slovenian (and systems similar to Slovenian); for example, those which express time in the binary divisions of past/non-past or future/non-future, at the same time do not exclude the present as a notion. Regardless of how time is divided, therefore, human civilization cannot operate without a notion of the present within a system of time (Zagar & Grgic, 2011).

The grammaticalization of time has been discussed by numerous authors. By definition, it is a process through which time relations appear at a grammatical level and they influence grammatical structures, for example, syntax, morphology, word formation and so on. There are also processes of lexicalization of time. In this case, we are concerned with words which denote time or relations in time on the word formational level, but do not influence syntactic structures. For instance, the use of the word great-grandmother by no means obligates a speaker to use exclusively past tense, to change the word order in a sentence, nor to avoid certain adjectives where their use might seem internally inconsistent, for example, *a young great- grandmother.*

Grammatical Tense

The term tense comes from Old French *tens* and from Latin *tempus* (both mean time). In grammar, tense is a category that locates a situation in time, to indicate when the situation takes place (Fabricius-Hansen, 2006). Tense is the grammaticalization of time reference, often using

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three basic categories of the past, the present and the future. In absolute tense, as in English, tense indicates when the time of assertion, time of completion or time of evaluation occurs relative to the utterance itself (time of utterance). In relative tense, on the other hand, tense is relative to some given event. Relative tense indicates temporal distance from a point of time established in the discourse that is not the present (i.e., reference to a point in the past or future). In languages which have tense, it is usually indicated by a verb or modal verb, often combined with categories such as aspect mood, and voice.

Tense places temporal references along a conceptual timeline. This differs from aspect which encodes how a situation or action occurs in time. Typical tenses are present past and future. Some languages only have grammatical expression of time through aspect; others have neither tense nor aspect. Some East Asian languages such as Chinese express time with temporal adverbs, but these are not required, and the verbs are not inflected for tense. In Slavic languages such as Russian, a verb may be inflected for both tense and aspect together. Aspect is often confused with the closely related concept of tense because they both convey information about time. If this distinction is not well clarified communication may be affected. Aspect can be said to describe the texture of the time in which a situation occurs, such as a single point of time, a continuous range of time, a sequence of discrete points in time, whereas tense indicates its location in time. The most common aspectual distinction in languages of the world is that between perfective (complete, permanent simple) and imperfective (incomplete, temporary, continuous). In many languages, grammatical forms combine tense and aspect and in many traditional approaches to grammar both are labeled *tense.*

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An interesting example of the understanding of relations between chronological time and verbal tense is from Aristotle who wrote that there are three chronological times and thus three verbal tenses: The present, the past and the future (Quoted in Zagar & Grgic, 2011). This statement was already refuted by other linguists during ancient times because Greek had six verbal tenses: The present, the future, the imperfect, the aorist, the perfect and the *plusquamperfekt* (past perfect). The use of these tenses indicated complex relations between an extra-linguistic and a linguistic reality. The number of tenses in a language may be disputed because the term tense is often construed to represent any combination of tense, aspect and even mood. In many texts the term "tense" may erroneously indicate qualities of uncertainty, frequency completion, duration or possibility.

According to Leech and Svartvik (1975) the term tense refers to the correspondence between the form of the verb and our concept of time (past, present or future). The two authors also postulate that English has two simple tenses: the present tense and the past tense. Indeed, in English, tense refers to the absolute location of an event or action in time (either the present or the past) and grammatical tense is marked by an inflection of the verb. For example, *Keren dresses decently* (present tense); *Keren dressed decently* (past tense). It is also worth noting that, in English, reference to other times, for instance, the future can be made in a number of ways, by using the modal auxiliary *will* or the semi-auxiliary *be going to*. For example, *Keren will dress decently to school* and *Keren is going to dress decently to school*. Since, in English, the expression of future time does not involve any inflection of the verb, we do not refer to a *future tense*. Strictly speaking, therefore, there are only two tenses in English: present and past. At this point, one can posit that technically, in English, tense is a change to a verb or the form the verb

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takes to indicate time. In English, there are two situations in which the base form of a verb is changed to indicate time: *write (base); write(s) (present);* and *wrote (past).* We can express future time in English but we do not express future tense since there is no change to the root form of a verb that indicate future.

Grammatical Aspect

The term *aspect* is presumed to have appeared on the international scene for the first time in 1830 when a French Slavic philologist translated a Russian grammar and used the word *aspect* (Zagar & Grgic, 2011). Grammarians of the Greek and Latin languages also showed an interest in aspect, but the idea did not enter into the modern western grammatical tradition until the 19th century via the study of the grammar of the Slavic languages. The earliest use of the term recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary dates from 1853 (Binnick, 1991).

The term *aspect* is a translation of the Greek word *eidos* meaning looking, look, form, figure, image, idea, notion and conception. The English word *aspect* is closer in meaning to quality, type, attribute and manner. *Aspect* meant two things in the 19th century linguistics: It signified the distinction between perfective and imperfective verbs and also the meaning of a verb according to the phase of the action being expressed by the verb (Kortmannn, 1991). Meanwhile, German linguists used the term a*ktionsart* for marking aspect. In contemporary times, there seems to be considerable terminological confusion among (especially English speaking) linguists where some authors use only the term aspect or aspectual while others combine the forms aspect and *aktionsart*. With the term aspect or aspectual it is the distinction between perfective and imperfective verbs that is denoted. The term *aktionsart* denotes the type of verbal action.

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In general, the division between aspect and tense is clearer than the division between aspect and *aktionsart*. Tense is known in most languages in one form or another. That is why the problem of a correct translation of the term tense, which marks a known notion in some languages, and an almost unknown one in others, does not appear as a central issue of discussion among the world's linguists (Zagar & Grgic, 2011). Tense and aspect systems are complementary. They both express time relations and sometimes overlap. While tense denotes the time location of a certain action or state, aspect marks their internal (time) structure, or at least this is true in (classical) theory (Comrie, 1985). When used by speakers, however, the boundary between tense and aspect is more subtle. In some cases time location can be expressed with aspect, in others the internal time structure of the action can be expressed with the tense.

In linguistics, the term grammatical aspect refers to the possibility of using special grammatical forms (more specifically, verb forms) to express various meanings which have to do with how the speaker wants to represent the internal temporal structure of a situation (Declerck et al, 2006). From another perspective, aspect can be viewed as a grammatical category that expresses how an action, event or state, denoted by a verb, relates to the flow of time. Aspect concerns the manner in which a verbal action is experienced or regarded, for example as complete or in progress (Leech & Svartvik, 1975). Semantically, aspects are different ways of viewing the internal constitution of an actualizing situation. These different ways are expressed by different markers on the verb.

Grammatical aspect is a formal property of a language, distinguished through over inflection, derivational affixes, or independent words that serve grammatically required markers of those aspects. Grammatical aspect is distinguished from lexical aspect or *aktionsart,* which is

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an inherent feature of verbs or verb phrases and is determined by the nature of the situation that the verb describes. The most fundamental aspectual distinction, represented in many languages, is between perfective aspect and imperfective aspect. This is the basic aspectual distinction in the Slavic languages. It semantically corresponds to the distinction between the morphological forms known respectively as the aorist and imperfect in Greek, the *preterite* and imperfect in Spanish, the simple past and imperfect in French, and the perfect and imperfect in Latin (from the Latin *perfectus*", meaning "*completed*"). Essentially, the perfective aspect looks at an event as a complete action, while the imperfective aspect views an event as the process of unfolding or a repeated or habitual event. English marks the continuous aspect with the verb *to be* coupled with present participle and the perfect with the verb *to have* coupled with past participle. For events of short durations in the past, the distinction often coincides with the distinction in the English language between the simple past *I plucked oranges this morning* as compared to the progressive *I was plucking oranges this morning*. In describing longer time periods, English needs context to maintain the distinction between the habitual *I played traditional music often in the past* and perfective *I fixed my bicycle*, although the construct *used to* marks both habitual aspect and past tense and can be used if the aspectual distinction otherwise is not clear.

Although English largely separates tense and aspect formally, its aspects do not correspond very closely to the distinction of perfective and imperfective that is found in most languages with aspect. Furthermore, the separation of tense and aspect in English is not maintained rigidly. Like tense, aspect is a way that verbs represent time. However, rather than locating an event or state in time, the way tense does, aspect describes the internal temporal constituency of a situation, or in other words, aspect is a way of conceiving the flow of the

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process itself (Comrie, 1976). English aspectual distinctions in the past include: *I sang, I used to sing, I was singing, I had sung, I had been singing*; in the present tense *I sing, I am singing, I have sung, I have been singing, I am going to sing*; and with the future modal *I will sing, I will be singing, I will have sung, I am going to sing*. What distinguishes these aspects within each tense is not (necessarily) when the event occurs, but how the time in which it occurs is viewed: as complete, ongoing, consequentially planned and so forth. Certain aspectual distinctions express a relation in time between the event and the time of reference. This is the case with the perfect aspect, which indicates that an event occurred prior to (but has continuing relevance at) the time of reference: *I have danced, I had danced, I will have danced*. English expresses some other aspectual distinctions with other constructions. *Used to + verb* is a past habitual, as in *I used to plant flowers* and *going to + verb i*s a prospective, a future situation highlighting current intentions or expectation as in: *I am going to go to the eye clinic tomorrow.*

While many elementary discussions of English grammar classify the present perfect as a past tense, it relates the action to the present time. This information about aspect is essential for effective communication in English. One cannot say of someone now deceased that he *has talked* or *has been talking*. The present auxiliary implies that he is in some way present (alive), even if the action denoted is completed (perfect) or partially completed (progressive perfect). Aspects can also be marked on non-finite forms of the verb: *(to) be crying* (infinitive with progressive aspect), *(to) have cried* (infinitive with perfect aspect), *having cried* (present participle or gerund with perfect aspect), and so on. The perfect infinitive can further be governed by modal verbs to express various meanings, mostly combining modality with past reference. *I should have cried*

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and so forth. In particular, the modals *wil*l and *shall* and their subjunctive forms *would* and *should,* are used to combine future or hypothetical reference with aspectual meaning.

Conclusion

It is certainly true that the ways in which people perceive time are grounded in a physical sensation of chronological time. The way time is expressed is a result of the conceptualization of time relations. Although time is regarded as an extralinguistic category, and that it exists independently of language, it is an integral part of tense and aspect since the latter concepts convey information about time. In English the concept of time is viewed in relation to tense and aspect. Tense is a linguistic concept: It denotes the form taken by the verb to locate the situation referred to in time. Aspect refers to how an event or action is to be viewed with respect to time, rather than to its actual location in time. Aspect expresses a feature of the action related to time, such as completion or duration. Language injects timeness into processes which do not in and of themselves posses it. Time is therefore (merely) the way in which people speak of the world. Time is a notion which helps humans to organize their understanding of how things happen in the world and helps us to conceive such happenings. Grammar plays an important role in the language used in communication. The information provided in this paper on the functions of time, tense and aspect in English will go a long way to contribute to effective communication.

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