

A Brief History of Researching Verbs and Tenses in the English Language

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Abstract: This article describes the formation of verbs and tenses in English linguistics, how they have been studied by scientists over the centuries, and the importance and scope of the researched works. The main focus of the article is on the study of tenses in active voice, and it mainly covers the researches of linguists who conducted research in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Keywords: Tense, verb, aspect, perfect, pluperfect, imperfect, inflection, primary tense, secondary tense, conjugation, auxiliary verb, mood, category, morphology, syntax.



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Introduction

English is unique in its variety of tenses. The tenses in it are significant because they can express any action, state, completeness or incompleteness of action, duration of action with the help of inflection of verbs and auxiliaries. Although English grammar was originally formed on the basis of the traditions of Latin grammar, it continued to be refined and developed independently over the centuries. The tenses of the verbs have also been formed consistently for several centuries under the influence of morphological processes and have acquired their present appearance. During the past periods, verb tenses were systematically studied by a number of linguists, and a number of scientific manuals were created. At this point, it should be noted that the contribution of linguists to the study of verb tenses is significant. With the help of this study, the research of only a few of them on grammar and verb tenses will be highlighted.

Review of literature

Much attention is paid to the study of verb tenses in English linguistics. In all the works written from William Bullokar's late 16th-century scholarly manual, *Pamphlet for Grammar*, to Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum's scientific manual (2002 edition), *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*, great importance is attached to the analysis of the topic of verb tenses. In this research work, the works of a number of linguists such as, William Bullokar, Lindley Murray, William Chauncey Fowler, T.W. Harvey, Judson Perry Welsh, Canon Daniel, J.M.D. Meiklejohn, J.C. Nesfield, W.M. Baskerville, J.W. Sewell, J.D. Rose, Otto Jespersen, R.C. Pooley, Randolph Quirk, Sydney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, Jan Svartvik, Rodney Huddleston, Geoffrey K. Pullum are analyzed and their views on the tenses of the English language are highlighted.

Research methodology.

In the article, using comparative-historical methods, the views of linguists who conducted research in the 19th and 20th centuries on verb tenses were comparatively analyzed.

Analyzes and results.

In modern English grammar books, the tenses of the verb are shown as twelve in active voice. Each of the Past, Present, and Future tenses includes four aspects. The following table shows only the tenses of the active voice that are generally recognized in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

Aspects	Times		
	Low	Present	Future
Simple	Did	Do does	shall do will do
Continuous	was doing were doing	am doing is doing are doing	shall be doing will be doing
Perfectly simple	Already done	have done has done	shall have done will have done
Perfect continuous	had been doing	have been doing has been doing	shall have been doing will have been doing

However, here it is worth noting that the classification of verb tenses was not always the same as above. For several centuries, there have been different views of linguists on the process of modification of verb tenses in the English language.

The study of English grammar is associated with William Bullokar's "Pamphlet for Grammar" written in the late 16th century [1]. In early written works, English grammar was based on Latin rules and structures, and Bullokar's work was based as a model on William Lilly's Latin grammar book "Rudimenta Grammatices" (1534). The first officially published work on English grammar was also attributed to Bullokar under the title "Brief Grammar for English" (1586). Despite Bullokar's research and efforts, most scholars of that century wrote English grammar in Latin. Admittedly, the early written English grammar rules were under severe pressure of Latin grammatical traditions.

By the beginning of the 19th century, Lindley Murray, in his influential work "English grammar adapted to the different classrooms" (1817), emphasized that English grammar was different from Latin and Greek. This work by Murray was of great importance in the study of English grammar in Great Britain and North America in the first half of the 19th century. In his scientific work, the linguist mentions the six tenses of the English language and explains each of them. In particular, he focuses on the following tenses: Present, Imperfect, Perfect, Pluperfect, First future, Second future [2,86 p].

- Present tense: "I rule; I am ruled; I think; I fear."
- Imperfect tense: "I loved her for her modesty and virtue;" "They were travelling post when he met them."
- Perfect tense: "I have finished my letter;" "I have seen the person that was recommended to me."
- Pluperfect tense: "I had finished my letter before he arrived."
- First future tense: "The sun will rise tomorrow;" "I shall see them again."

- Second future tense: “I shall have dined at one o'clock;” “The two houses will have finished their business, when the king comes to prorogue them.”

Murray's interpretations are different from those of modern English grammar. In particular, he describes the Past simple and the Past continuous tenses as Imperfect tense. His thoughts on Perfect tense are detailed and almost completely in line with today's explanations.

The linguist names the Past Perfect tense as the Pluperfect, but we can see that the main detail of this tense is given in a form suitable for today's interpretations.

Also, when Murray refers to future tenses, he shows them as two. The first future tense describes the tense that will happen at a definite or uncertain time in the future, and this tense corresponds to Future simple tense. In his work, he states that the Second future tense denotes an action completed before a future event or action, and in modern English, the tense that corresponds to this definition is called the Future perfect tense.

In the middle of the 19th century William Chauncey Fowler's comprehensive grammar guide to English grammar was published. His work “*English Grammar: The English Language in its Elements and Forms*”(1850) was intended for teachers as well as students of schools, mainly colleges, higher educational institutes and provided an in-depth analysis of the origin and history of the English language, its relationship with other languages, and the grammatical features of the English language. William Fowler, in his work on the concept of tense, explains that it is the form of verbs used to express the relationship to time [3.249 p]. The English term tense is derived from the French temps and the Latin tempus. William Fowler also shows six tenses in English, including compound words and inflections, but unlike Lindley Murray, he divides tenses into two categories, namely Primary tenses and Secondary tenses. Primary Tenses include: 1. The Present; 2. The Past; 3. The Future. Secondary Tenses include the following: 1. The Present perfect; 2. The Past perfect; 3. The Future perfect.

In explaining the Present tense, he focuses on three forms [3.249p]: 1. *I write*. This is the Simple form and represents a typical action that is always true. 2. *I am writing*. This is the Progressive form, and it expresses an action that is happening right now. 3. *I do write*. It is the Emphatic form and used to emphasize in positive sentences.

It is worth noting that the Progressive form, which Fowler indicated as the form of the present tense, corresponds to the Present continuous tense, which is studied separately in modern English. However, the Emphatic form is not a separate tense, as it is considered as a feature of the Present simple tense.

William Fowler gives three forms of past tense (Past tense or Preterite): 1. *I wrote*. It is the simple form and expresses an action that took place at a time that belongs entirely to the past. This tense is also called the Preterite in English. 2. *I was writing*. It is a continuous form and expresses an action that was not completed at a certain time in the past. 3. *I did write*. This is a form that expresses emphasis in the past tense.

According to William Fowler in his guide, the first and second forms of the past tense shown above are treated as independent tenses in contemporary English. They are called Past simple tense and Past continuous tense, and the laws mentioned by the linguist at that time correspond to the current laws of these tenses. The third form of the past tense is studied as a composition of the Past simple tense.

Future tense has two forms: 1. *I shall write*. It is a simple form and represents an action that will take place now. 2. *I shall be writing*. This is a continuous form (Progressive form), which will happen at a certain time in the future. Both forms of the future tense are formed by combining *will* and *shall*.

William Fowler called the Perfect tenses the secondary tenses and explained that although he lists them as three, each of them has two forms, the simple and continuous forms. Each form given in the description of perfect tenses corresponds to six separate perfect tenses in modern English. It can be concluded that although Fowler indicated the tenses as six, twelve main tenses can be seen in his theories.

T.W. Harvey also mentions six tenses in his book "Harvey's English Grammar" [4,77p]. He divides the concept of time into three parts (Past, Present, Future), in every part he shows that there are two tenses and calls these tenses Absolute and Relative. Absolute tenses include the Present, the Past, and the Future tenses and explain that they represent indefinite or incomplete action. The Relative includes tenses such as the Present Perfect, the Past Perfect, and the Future Perfect, indicating that they represent a completed action. We can see that Harvey did not pay special attention to continuous (or progressive) tenses while showing the tenses.

Judson Perry Welsh also lists six tenses in his book on English grammar "A Practical English Grammar" [5,180p]. We can see that the names of the tenses he cited are the same as the names in modern English:

1. *The fish swims.* 2. *The fish swam towards me.* 3. *The fish will swim away.* 4. *The fish has swum away.* 5. *The fish had swum away before I spoke.* 6. *The fish will have swum away before you can be ready to catch it.*

In the sentences given above, he explains the six tenses by conjugating the word *swim*, which are Present, Past, Future, Present perfect, Past perfect and Future perfect. Judson Perry Welsh, like T.W. Harvey, does not refer to Continuous or Progressive tenses.

Canon Daniel, in his book on English grammar "The Grammar, History and Derivation of the English Language", divides the tenses into three main divisions, Past, Present and Future, and shows that each action in these divisions can be divided into Perfect and Imperfect, and he also puts forward six tense theory. Although this linguist did not use modern terms such as Simple or Continuous (Progressive) to name tenses in his theories, we can see these tenses in the table below [6,75p].

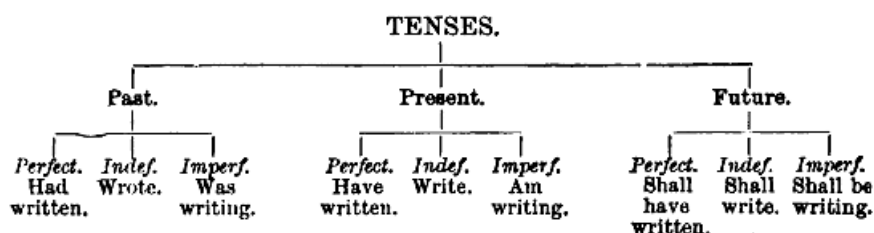
		Active	Passive
Present	Imperfect	I love	I am loving
	Perfect	I have loved	I have been loving
Past	Imperfect	I loved	I was loving
	Perfect	I had loved	I had been loving
Future	Imperfect	I shall love	I shall be loving
	Perfect	I shall have loved	I shall have been loving

Actually, looking at the table, we can see examples of twelve tenses in active voice of modern English, and six tenses in passive voice. However, Canon Daniel, in his research, does not focus on Simple or Continuous (Progressive) tenses.

J.M.D. Meiklejohn in his book "The English Language; its Grammar, History and Literature" divides tenses into three main tenses: Past, Present and Future. When explaining the concept of tense, he focuses on reflecting not only the time of the action and event, but also the state, and calls the action and the state of the verb tense as Perfect, Imperfect and Indefinite. We can see that

the Imperfect, which he pointed out, is sometimes called Continuous or Progressive in modern English, and the Indefinite is sometimes called by this name, and sometimes Simple.

Below we can see how J.M.D. Meiklejohn expressed his theory on the three main tenses Perfect, Imperfect and Indefinite [7.42b]:



In the diagram above, the linguist has shown nine tenses based on the verb “write”. He also claims that there are tenses such as Past Perfect (Pluperfect) Continuous, Perfect Continuous and Future Perfect Continuous.

So, by the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, linguists studying English grammar began to recognize twelve active tenses.

J.C. Nesfield also dwells on the theory of twelve tenses in his book “*A Manual of English Grammar and Composition*”. This scientific manual was first published in 1898, but was reprinted annually until 1908.

J.C. Nesfield, when describing tenses, according to the time of occurrence, divides into three forms, Present, Past and Future, and according to the level of completion of the event at the time of occurrence, four forms such as Indefinite, Continuous, Perfect and Perfect Continuous [8,48p]. It appears that J.C. Nesfield refers to the three tenses and four aspects of modern English, and only uses the term Indefinite instead of the Simple.

Linguists such as W.M. Baskerville, J.W. Sewell, in their book “*An English Grammar for the Use of High School, Academy and College Classes*”, stated that English was originally considered to have two tenses, that is, Present tense for the Present and Future tense and Past tense, but by the time they conducted research, English not only had three natural tenses, Past, Present and Future, but also had tenses with high inflections like in Latin and Greek [9,147p]. They emphasized that verbs of different phrasal forms can express any meaning in different tenses, indicating the active tenses as follows:

<i>Present.</i>	He chooses.
<i>Present definite.</i>	He is choosing.
<i>Low.</i>	He chose.
<i>Low definition.</i>	He was choosing.
<i>Future.</i>	He will choose.
<i>Future definite.</i>	He will be choosing.
<i>Present perfect.</i>	He has chosen.
<i>Present perfect definite.</i>	He has been choosing.
<i>Past perfect.</i>	He had chosen.
<i>Past perfect definite.</i>	He had been choosing.
<i>Future perfect.</i>	He will have chosen.
<i>Future perfect definite.</i>	He will have been choosing.

It can be seen from the table provided above that W.M. Baskerville, J.W. Sewell mentioned twelve tenses in Modern English, and they only called the tenses like Continuous or Progressive as Definite.

G.W. Henderson, in “*English Grammar by Parallelism and Comparison*”, shows six tenses [10,71p]: (1) Present. (2) Present Perfect. (3) Low. (4) Past Perfect. (5) Future. (6) Future Perfect.

1) The Present Tense: — *I write. I am writing. I do write. He is old.*

2) The Present Perfect Tense:—*I have written. I have been writing. She has studied her lesson.*

3) The Past Tense: —*I wrote. I was writing. I did write.*

4) The Past Perfect Tense: —*I had written. He had been writing. I had seen him.*

5) The Future Tense:—*I shall write. They will arrive next Tuesday.*

6) The Future Perfect Tense: —*I shall have finished my letter by six o'clock. The vessel will have been sailing for four days by the time it reaches Old Point Comfort.*

We can see that G.W. Henderson summarized the Progressive tense and the Emphatic tense with the main six tenses, which some scholars include in a separate category of tenses.

J.D. Rose focuses on verb conjugation and tenses. In explaining the concept of tense, he states that tense is the changing of forms in verbs to express the time of action and state [11,84p]. He emphasizes the function of auxiliary verbs, be, do, have, may, shall, and will, in expressing tense, voice, and mood.

This linguist calls Present, Past and Future Tense as Simple tenses, because according to his interpretation, while other tenses express concepts such as time, duration, completion, Simple tenses only show the time of action in verbs from the point of view of *now*. Thus, he was one of the first linguists to use the term Simple.

J.D. Rose interprets Perfect tenses as tenses expressing completion, and Continuous tenses as tenses expressing continuity. Also, he refers to the Future in the past tenses and clarifies that such tenses are used in “Indirect Speech” after verbs in the past tense. Thus, this linguist, unlike the linguists mentioned earlier, shows sixteen tenses in active voice, including the Future in the past tenses. We can see all these tenses in modern English grammar books. It is also worth mentioning that, due to the fact that the Future in the past tenses are not used very actively, even now these tenses are not given much attention. In the table below J.D.Rose shows sixteen tenses in active voice dividing them into Momentary and Continuous forms [11,87p]:

TABLE OF MOODS AND TENSES (ACTIVE VOICE).				
NAMES OF INDICATIVE TENSES.	INDICATIVE MOOD.		SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD	PARTICIPLES.
	Momentary Form.	Continuous Form.		
Pres.	I write	I am writing	I write	Writing Having written
Past	I wrote	I was writing (Imperf.)	I wrote	
Pres. Perf.	I have written	I have been writing	I have written	GERUNDS.
Past Perf.	I had written	I had been writing	I had written	
			IMPERATIVE.	Writing Having written
Fut.	I shall write	I shall be writing	Write (thou)	
Fut. Perf.	I shall have written	I shall have been writing	[Have (thou) written]	
			INFINITIVE.	
Fut. in the Past	I should write	I should be writing	To write	
Fut. Perf. in the Past	I should have written	I should have been writing	To have written	

Otto Jespersen, a Danish scholar, one of the greatest linguists of the 19th and 20th centuries, released his scientific works on English grammar “*A modern English grammar on historical principles*” in seven volumes from 1909 to 1949. They were published in different years. The first volume is devoted to sound and spelling, the sixth volume to morphology, and the rest to syntax. Otto Jespersen explains his views on time and tense in the third volume and begins the first chapter of the book with explaining distinction between the concepts of time and tense. He explains that the concept of time is the same for all mankind, does not belong to a particular language, but the concept of tense differs in different languages [12,1p].

R.C. Pooley, in “*Teaching English grammar*”, focuses on six tenses in English [13,82p]: Present, Present Perfect, Past, Past perfect, Future, Future Perfect. An important part of this guide is that it focuses on the formation and inflection of verb tenses in Old English and Modern English, and compares them.

The Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language, written by authors such as Randolph Quirk, Sydney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, and Jean Swartwick, was published by Longman in 1985, and in 1991, it was recognized as the greatest grammar reference of its time. The third chapter of the book is devoted to verbs and tenses. It explains that only the Present Simple and Past Simple tenses are tenses consisting of one verb, and the rest of the tenses are formed by compound verbs through a complex tense system that has been formed for a long time.

Finally, in this book, We witness that twelve times are presented with current modern terms and theories [14,159p]:

	<i>Simple</i>	<i>Continuous</i>	<i>Perfect</i>	<i>Perfect Continuous</i>	<i>Verbs: (2) Tense</i>
PRESENT	I speak you speak he speaks we speak they speak	I am speaking you are speaking he is speaking we are speaking they are speaking	I have spoken you have spoken he has spoken we have spoken they have spoken	I have been speaking you have been speaking he has been speaking we have been speaking they have been speaking	
PAST	I spoke you spoke he spoke we spoke they spoke	I was speaking you were speaking he was speaking we were speaking they were speaking	I had spoken you had spoken he had spoken we had spoken they had spoken	I had been speaking you had been speaking he had been speaking we had been speaking they had been speaking	
FUTURE	I shall speak you will speak he will speak we shall speak they will speak	I shall be speaking you will be speaking he will be speaking we shall be speaking they will be speaking	I shall have spoken you will have spoken he will have spoken we shall have spoken they will have spoken	I shall have been speaking you will have been speaking he will have been speaking we shall have been speaking they will have been speaking	

Nowadays, almost all resources for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students explain the verb tenses in the order shown in the table above.

In 1988, Rodney Huddleston published a very critical review of the book “*The Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*”, and he claimed that a number of fairly simple categories and concepts had not been considered with sufficient care. A year later, he began work on an alternative English grammar guide based on a grant project from the University of Queensland. As a result, in 2002 “*The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*” was published by

Cambridge University Press. Although the main authors are Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum, a number of linguists contribute to the creation of this book. The book, containing 20 chapters and 1860 pages, provides an in-depth analysis of all aspects of English grammar.

The last mentioned two books, "*The Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*" and "*The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*", are considered to be today's most profound reference books having the deepest and most complete grammatical analyses. They serve as the basis for many modern grammar books.

Summary.

In conclusion, it should be said that verb tenses in English have evolved over several centuries. Many linguists have made significant contributions to the study of tenses over the centuries. Only the scientific research of some of them has been covered by this research work. As an object of research, attention was mainly paid to the researches of 19th-20th century linguists.

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