

HOW TO LEARN THE ENGLISH TENSES SYSTEM

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ANNOTATION

Everyone who has studied English as a foreign language, and even more so those who have chosen the profession of teaching English at school, lyceum, gymnasium or university, knows that the greatest difficulty for Russian speakers is the "tenses" of the English verb. Indeed, if anyone who speaks Russian as a native one knows that there are three times, then what bewilderment should be caused by English grammars, which assert that this language does not have three or five times, but twelve. However, the presence of twelve tenses, recorded in grammars as a fact, very rarely raises a bewildered question for anyone: what other tenses are there in the English language, in addition to the present, past and future? Try to answer it! Does not work? You don't have to waste your time. Because, apart from the three named, there are no other times and cannot be. In no language of the world (and there are several thousand of them) the number of verb tenses expressed in special grammatical forms does not exceed the "magic" number "three". Less than three may be. There are languages with only two forms of tenses (for example, "past" "unpassed"), there are languages without verb tenses at all, but there are no languages where these tenses would be more than three.

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The name of any of the twelve English tenses begins with one of three words: Present, Past, Future. There are four kinds of the present, four kinds of the past, and four kinds of the future, which are known as Simple, Progressive, Perfect, and Perfect Progressive. In Russian, there is a similar picture, only there are fewer forms: one present (I am coming), two past ones (I went / came) and two future ones (I will go / I will come). Strictly speaking, if we agree that there are 12 tenses in English, then we should talk about at least five tenses in Russian (in fact, there are even more of them). But for some reason we don't. Why? Yes, because we perfectly understand that both went and came - the forms of the past tense. Just like an English speaker understands that I work, I am working, I have worked, and I have been working are all forms of the present tense.

The difficulties that English language learners face in mastering the grammatical forms of the verb (not only with the grammatical category of tenses, but also with the passive voice) are caused by the fact that there is no clear theoretical understanding of the meanings and functions of verb forms in the educational literature, which would make it possible to explain in a simple way what is their purpose. In other words, you need to understand well why, in general, such categories as time, type, voice are needed in a language in order to clearly and simply explain the principles of functioning of the corresponding forms. This understanding provides a cognitive approach to language as a system of knowledge representation.

In accordance with this approach, any grammatical category serves to express and preserve certain knowledge in the language. Compared to lexicon, grammar is a more abstract system, therefore the knowledge presented in it is universal in the sense that it is important for the normal functioning of society: it does not matter in what language the members of society communicate with each other. This means that grammatical categories, which have different expressions in different languages, differ little in content from each other. That is why translation from one language (for example, Russian) to another (for example, English) is possible.

What are the categories of time and kind for? With the help of the category of time, a person divides the whole world around him into three spheres of experience: 1) experience, which is directly included in the sphere of perceived by the senses and perceived reality, or the present (present from Lat. Praesens - mo, which is before the senses); 2) experience that is preserved as a memory of what has passed by our senses, or the past (past); 3) experience, which is predicted on the basis of existing knowledge, or the future (future). It is very important to learn here that, unlike English, in Russian there is no one-to-one correspondence between these concepts and the so-called forms of the verb. Consider the following situation as an example.

Dad went on a business trip some time ago. Vova is teaching his lessons in his room, his mother is preparing dinner in the kitchen. The doorbell rings. The boy opens the door and, when he sees his father, happily says: "Mom, dad has arrived!"

In any school (and not only school) grammar, it will be indicated that you have arrived (in this case) - the perfect form of the past tense denotes an action that took place in the past and completed by the time of speech. This is the traditional approach to which all Russian speakers are accustomed to (especially since this is knowledge that none of us ever uses in practice: after all, we all mastered our native language, including grammar, in infancy, when we had no idea neither about time, nor about form, nor about other subtleties of grammatical science). But when studying English as a foreign language, this approach no longer suits us, since it does not allow us to correlate what we know about our native language with what we find in a foreign language. The cognitive approach focuses on answering the question: "What exactly

does the boy tell his mother?" In this case, his exclamation is interpreted as follows: "I see dad. Since some moment in the past, I have not seen him, that is, he was not at home, since he went on a business trip. Now dad is here again, which means he has arrived (inference based on the boy's background knowledge)". In other words, the meaning of the boy's exclamation is "Dad is home again (I see him again)." But this is the present time and in English, where the correspondence between temporal concepts and the temporal forms of the verb is much more consistent than in Russian, the present tense form will of course be used. Another question, which of the four possible: Simple, Progressive, Perfect or Perfect Progressive? And here the correct (i.e. cognitive) understanding of the category of the species comes to the rescue.

With the help of the category of the species, a person differentiates knowledge by its source: we know about something because we saw (heard, felt, etc.) it ourselves, and we know about something because this knowledge was transmitted to us in readymade form (someone said, read about it, learned it at school, etc. - the possibilities are very diverse here). This distinction is very important, and in our daily activities we always take it into account on a subconscious level. We all know the proverb "Better to see once than hear a hundred times". Its meaning is that what you see with your own eyes, as a rule, is not questioned, while knowledge obtained from someone else's hands is not always necessarily reliable. In this regard, see what happens if, in the above situation, the boy uses the imperfect verb instead of the perfect form: "Mom, dad came!". Although formally this statement is grammatically correct, in our situation it cannot be used, because they do not say that. And they do not say that, because the arrival does not contain an indication that at the time of the statement the boy sees his dad, while the form arrived contains such an indication.

The difference between the Russian language and English is that in Russian this kind of semantic differences are very often conveyed not by special forms of the verb, but by the context. Compare the following examples: Ivan smokes despite warnings from doctors; Look, Ivan smokes again, despite the warnings of the doctors. In the first case, we are talking about what we know about Ivan, while it is not at all necessary that Ivan is before our eyes; he may even be in another city, even in another country. In the second case, we are talking about what we directly observe: this is directly indicated by the verb look. In English, everything is much simpler, because there these semantic differences are conveyed by special (specific) forms of the verb: Simple and Progressive, respectively. Note that the term kind comes from the verb to see (which is etymologically related to the Latin *videre* - to see and the Greek *eidos* - that which is visible).

But so far we have talked about two types of knowledge, which correspond to two types: one knowledge has a certain source of information (for example, the boy in the given example), and the other is an indefinite source (for example, saying Ivan smokes,

I do not make it clear how I know about this). And there are four forms of the English verb. Why so much?

Because the situations when we talk about what we directly observe can differ significantly, depending on what exactly we see (hear, etc.). When I say: Look, Ivan smokes again, I have the opportunity to observe the smoking process itself (he holds a cigarette in his hand, brings it to his mouth, draws in the smoke and then lets it out - an action, generally speaking, meaningless and harmful). But if mom, meeting Ivan, feels the smell of tobacco smoke emanating from his clothes and asks: Have you smoked again? present time. But she does not observe the very action of smoking, only certain signs are available to her perception, indicating that Ivan smoked. To express this cognitive meaning in English, there is a special form of the verb - Perfect. This form is used when we compare what we see with what was before (for example, in the morning Ivan did not smell, but now it smells of tobacco, which means he was smoking). Finally, there are cases when we talk about a directly observable action and at the same time compare what we see with what we saw at some point (or at some moments) before. For example, I see that Ivan is smoking now, but I also saw him smoking before that, all day long. In this case, the combination of two forms expressing different cognitive meanings occurs, and we get the Perfect Progressive form, which is very disliked by many students, although in fact it is not simple, but very simple.

The given (naturally, in a very brief form) explanations of the cognitive content of English verb forms can be summarized in the form of a very simple algorithm that allows you to almost accurately select the correct form of the verb.

Algorithm for choosing a species-tense verb form:

Decide for yourself what time what you are going to say belongs to (Present, Past, Future).

Decide for yourself what you are going to say: what you see (saw, see), or what you know (knew, you will know).

If about what you see, ask yourself: "What exactly do I see?"

I see the action itself → Use the Progressive form

I see signs (traces) of action → Use the Perfect form

I see the action itself and compare what I see now with what I saw before -> Use the Perfect Progressive form

If about what you know (no matter where) → use the Simple form

This algorithm as an integral part of the methodology for teaching the grammatical forms of the English verb is described in the textbook "The English verb. New grammar for everyone" (Kravchenko A. V. (ed.), Irkutsk, 1999).

Moreover, a cognitive approach to English tenses allows us to clearly see that there are no so-called exceptions in relation to the use of verbs of different groups in certain grammatical forms. So, any verb (for example, see, know, remember, like, etc.)

can be used in the Progressive form, you just need to know when it can and should be done, and when not. A simple principle becomes clear that determines the choice of passive or active voice in speech; especially since this principle is exactly the same as in the Russian language.

In short, it turns out that there is nothing complicated and incomprehensible in the system of grammatical forms of the English verb. As practice shows, a thinking person (it does not matter, a schoolboy, student or adult) learns the meaning and functions of English tenses in a short time. The rest is a matter of technology, training students in the use of the forms themselves and automating the selection algorithm.

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