

## CONTEXTUAL EXPLICATION OF ABSOLUTE AND RELATIVE FORMS OF TENSE FORMS AND THEIR METHODS FOR TEACHING

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**Annotation:** *The overall scope of this work is to provide an account of tense from the viewpoint of language universals and linguistic typology, that is, to establish the range of variation that is found across languages in tense, and what the limits are to that variation. In chapter I, first some preliminary remarks are given concerning the notion tense and its relation to time, in particular defining tense as the grammaticalisation of location in time; this necessitates some discussion of other expressions of time in language, in particular of the conceptually distinct notion aspect, and of ways other than grammaticalisation in which location in time can be expressed in language.*

**Keywords:** *English tense analysis, tense categories, and methods for teaching.*

## ZAMON SHAKLLARINING MUTLAQ VA NISBIY SHAKLLARINI KONTEKSTUAL TUSHUNTIRISH VA ULARNI O'QITISH USULLARI

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*Ilmiy rahbar:*

**Annotatsiya:** *Ushbu ishning umumiy ko'lamini til universalligi va lingvistik tipologiya nuqtai nazaridan zamon haqida ma'lumot berish, ya'ni zamonda tillar bo'ylab uchraydigan o'zgarishlar doirasini va bu o'zgarish chegaralarini aniqlashdan iborat. . I bobda dastlab zamon tushunchasi va uning zamon bilan munosabati, xususan, zamonning zamonda joylashuvining grammatiklashuvi sifatida belgilanishiga oid ba'zi dastlabki fikrlar berilgan; Bu tilda vaqtning boshqa ifodalarini, xususan, kontseptual jihatdan ajralib turadigan tushuncha jihatini va tilda vaqtning o'rnini ifodalashning grammatiklashuvdan tashqari boshqa usullarini muhokama qilishni talab qiladi.*

**Kalit so'zlar:** *Ingliz zamonlarining analizi, zamon kategoriyalari va uning o'qitishdagi metodlar.*

The verb and the noun are the two word categories with the highest frequency of usage. The verb is without doubt the most complex word category in English. In spite of this, the traditional grammars (and other English handbooks) do not offer a systematic analysis thereof. Any verb is necessarily in a particular mood and tense, is either in the positive or negative, and can furthermore, contain an aspectual distinction. The verb is

thus complex due to the intertwined verbal categories pertaining to it. One of the factors preventing traditional Bantu linguists from offering an exhaustive and coherent description of the relative tenses is that they have not used a scientific model for tense analysis. Even the analysis of the absolute tenses is not done systematically (consider Welmers 1973:344 et seq. and Du Plessis 1986) and it is therefore not surprising that the analyses of the relative tenses are totally inadequate. In spite of the high frequency of usage, some standard Bantu grammars do not include a discussion on the relative tenses at all, while the majority discuss only a few possible forms of the relative tenses, notably the so-called 'recent past continuous' and 'remote past continuous' tenses. It is, again, not surprising that the relative tenses are probably one of the least studied topics of English grammar. Most Bantu grammars offer an account of the morphological structure of the tense forms that they include in their discussion, but none of the existing grammars offers an accurate account of the semantic import of these tense forms. It is evident from the preceding discussion that the analyses of the relative tense forms are generally not nearly exhaustive or systematic enough. Confusion reigns as far as the interpretation and analysis of the so-called relative past tenses are concerned. Different labels are used to refer to these tense forms collectively and individually.

The confusion of categories such as mood, tense and aspect has resulted in incomplete and unsystematic analyses of the relative tenses with -be. Consider for instance the fact that the relative tenses containing the potential -nga- have been included in the analyses of a number of scholars while the forms containing the progressive -sa- have not been included in their discussion. This state of affairs can be ascribed to the fact that the potential has been regarded as constituting a mood while the progressive has not been regarded as a mood. The scholars obviously tried to indicate in which moods the relative tense forms can occur. On the other hand, the fact that relative verbal forms such as *izingane ezidlalayo ...* 'the children who are playing ...' have not been regarded by traditional grammarians as constituting a separate mood, has generally led to the exclusion of these relative tense forms with -be (in the relative (qualificative) mood) from their analyses.

The use of inappropriate names to refer to these tense forms (collectively and individually) has contributed to the misinterpretation of, especially, the semantic significance of these verbal forms. This confusion is aggravated by the fact that many scholars have not demarcated and defined verbal categories such as mood, tense and aspect properly.

The fact that in many instances grammarians have simply followed the analyses of earlier scholars has also perpetuated the confusion. In some instances grammarians have misinterpreted earlier grammarians' analyses. A good example is, for instance, that Louw and Jubase categorize the relative tense forms containing the future tense morpheme in the complementary part as 'contingent' forms, while Doke considers those relative tense forms containing the future tense morpheme in the auxiliary part, as 'contingent' forms.

### An umbrella term for the so-called compound tenses

The names most commonly used to refer to the so-called compound tenses collectively (or particular forms of the compound tenses) are, compound tenses, compound tenses and moods, past tense with -vha (-ba) / -ne past tenses / -be past tenses, past continuous tenses / continuous past tenses, perfect tense, perfect aspect, imperfect aspect, incomplete perfectum, contingent form / contingent mood / contingent tense, deficient verb forms, participial tenses and relative tenses.

Most of the terms used by Bantu language scholars to refer to so-called compound tenses are inappropriate. The only term that is perfectly apt is the term 'relative tenses'. Firstly, this term is used cross-linguistically and is a well-established one. The term 'relative tense' has been used by a large number of scholars since Reichenbach's 1949 publication. Secondly, this term makes provision for all the possible combinations of auxiliaries and complements within this tense paradigm. This prevents the illogical fragmentation of the analysis into various seemingly unrelated subsections as is the case with Doke's and other scholars' distinction between 'compound tenses' and 'contingent forms'.

It is proposed that the term 'relative tenses with -be' be used to refer to the so-called compound tenses of English. The reason for the addition of the part 'with -be' is essential because there are also other types of relative tenses that do not employ the auxiliary verb -be. (These tenses are not discussed in this mini-dissertation.)

### Terminology used to refer to the individual relative tense forms

The super-ordinate terms used to refer to the relative tenses discussed in 2.10.2 above, have led to inappropriate terms being used for the individual relative tense forms with -be of English (and the other Bantu languages). An account of the names used to refer to the relative tense with the auxiliary part in the near past tense form and the complementary verb in the present tense form will reveal the inconsistency in the naming practice of these tense forms.

The labels used to refer to a relative tense form such as that illustrated in example 2 below are: voortgaande verlede tyd (continuous past tense), past-continuous tense, immediate past continuous tense, voortdurende nabye verlede tyd (continuous near past tense), past present tense, present tense of the past continuous, incomplete perfectum, present continuous tense, imperfect aspect, relative tense with reference time shortly before coding time and event time coinciding with reference time.

Izingane bezidlala (< zibe zidlala) ngenkathi sisebenza ehhovisini.

'The children were (busy) playing at the time we were working in the office'

The only relevant term to name the relative tense form contained in example 2 above is the last one in the list above. The term 'relative tense with reference time shortly before coding time and event time coinciding with reference time' actually denotes a single tense. (Refer to chapter 6 of this study for a more comprehensive discussion) Before a proper analysis of the relative tenses can be made, it is essential to

distinguish between the three closely related categories of tense, time and aspect, which all pertain to the semantic interpretation of the predicate. All these categories pertain to the verb, but they are not all verbal categories, neither do they reflect the same aspects of meaning.

This discussion is necessitated by the wide-scale confusion that still exists among Bantu scholars concerning the true nature of these categories. The relative tenses can only be properly differentiated from absolute tense after a clear distinction has been drawn between the categories of tense, time and aspect.

#### Marking the location of events in time

Languages indicate the location of events in time relative to a particular point (which is generally the deictic centre) primarily by means of two types of strategies, namely by using temporal adverbial descriptions (in the form of lexical items) or by varying the morphological form of the verb. The first mechanism of time reckoning is generally referred to as time reference while the second mechanism is generally referred to as tense. Both these time-establishing mechanisms are operative in languages (and thus in English).

Generally, tense and time reference have the same relational value, as is evident in example 1 below where *kuthangi* has an anterior relational value and the verb form *sithenge* also marks the event as being prior to coding time. In this example, tense as well as time reference therefore have an anterior temporal reference. The distinction between tense and time reference

Tense is a verbal category while time reference is a sentence category. There are a number of mechanisms that contribute to time reference, the most common being the use of temporal adverbials. Comrie (1985:8) distinguishes three types of expressions (or mechanisms) for locating events in time, namely (1) lexically composite expressions (such as *amahora amahianu emva kokusuka kwesitimela* : 'five hours after the departure of the train' (which are virtually infinite); (2) lexical items such as *namhlanje*, *izolo* and *kuthangi* : 'today, yesterday' and 'the day before yesterday' and (3) grammaticalized categories such as present and past (which are generally referred to as tenses). Posthumus (1990:22) identifies the following major mechanisms for time reckoning:

- tense;
- the semantic traits of the verb;
- the interlocutors' knowledge of the world;
- the influence of aspectual morphemes;
- the influence of auxiliary verbs;
- the text and context;
- the interrelation between tense forms and temporal adverbials.

Comrie (1985) describes tense as the grammaticalized expression of location in time. The major distinction between time and tense is thus that tense is marked in the verbal morphology while time is not.

Palmer (1991:7; 21) maintains that the distinction between mood and modality exactly parallels the distinction between tense and time. He (1991:21) furthermore, points out that, like mood, the category of tense is traditionally restricted to the verbal morphology. He states that tense is a morpho-syntactic category of the verb, even though its semantic function relates to the sentence as a whole.

Since time itself does not provide any landmarks in terms of which one can locate situations, events are typically grammaticalized in the verb by locating them in relation to the moment of speech (the deictic centre). Lyons' (1977:677) comment on the lack of sophistication in the traditional descriptions of tense is true for the Bantu languages:

Traditional discussions of the grammatical category of tense do not give sufficient emphasis to the fact that it is a deictic category; and they tend to be misleading in other respects also.

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