THE STRUCTURE OF THE TENSE FUNCTIONAL-SEMANTIC FIELD IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This article explores the structure of the functional-semantic field of tense in the English language. Drawing from functional grammar theories, it examines how tense as a semantic category is represented across morphological, syntactic, lexical, and contextual levels. Special attention is paid to how the temporal meanings are conveyed by various linguistic elements and their hierarchical positions within the field — from core morphological categories to peripheral lexical items. The study also considers cross-linguistic observations, the concept of universality of temporal semantics, and distinctions in expression across languages.

Keywords: Functional-semantic field, tense, morphology, syntax, temporal semantics, aspect, English grammar.

Introduction

The functional-semantic approach to linguistic analysis differs significantly from traditional grammar by integrating elements from multiple linguistic levels to express broader meanings. In this framework, tense — understood as the expression of time in language — is considered a universal semantic category realized through various linguistic forms. These range from core morphological tenses to peripheral lexical and syntactic expressions. The aim of this study is to analyze how the English language reflects tense in its functional-semantic structure and to outline the hierarchy of its expressive means.

It is known that the structural-semantic school of linguistics analyzes linguistic and speech phenomena differently from traditional grammatical linguistics. In traditional linguistics, each linguistic unit, category, or lexical group is studied separately, and recommendations are formed regarding its usage in speech. At the next stage of development, linguistic system elements are generalized based on their specific meanings. Their grammatical features, semantic scope, and distinctive characteristics in speech realization are studied. Central meaning carriers, which are the focus of attention, are not limited to a single linguistic level. These units can be found at morphological, lexical, and syntactic levels, and in speech, means from different levels may be used together or separately.

Each linguistic level contains various paradigms that serve as carriers of meaning. For example, the functional-semantic fields of deixis, degree, politeness, and temporality can be considered examples of such extensive functional-semantic paradigms. It is known that a functional-semantic field expresses a major meaning, and the elements that fully cover this core meaning should match it not only by their lexical semantics but also by the function they perform in

speech. These elements can form the morphological category that constitutes the core of the field.

Following the core is the central part, which includes morphological or syntactic means that partially express the core meaning. Lexical and phonetic units, on the other hand, occupy the periphery of the paradigm. Thus, elements selected as the core of a functional-semantic field must demonstrate both functional and semantic dominance. The levels located in the field's periphery are functionally and semantically more distant from the core meaning of the paradigm. In speech, these means appear as adjuncts, helpers, or clarifiers to the primary elements expressing the core meaning.

Research Methodology

The study employs a descriptive-analytical method based on functional grammar theory, primarily A.V. Bondarko's framework. A comparative approach is also used to identify similarities and differences between linguistic systems. English temporal markers and grammatical constructions are analyzed in terms of their functional-semantic load, distribution, and formal expression.

Various means that express the duration and manner of an action or state combine to form the field of temporality. The concept of temporality first emerged in philosophy, where it is defined as the set of interrelations between different parts of time and events. In linguistics, temporality consists of time, action-state, and speech. One of the linguists who contributed significantly to the popularization of the term "functional-semantic paradigm" through detailed analysis of temporality is A. Bondarko. The scholar also argues that the temporal paradigm includes elements from the aspectuality and modality fields of the verb. Based on A. Bondarko's perspective, we can see that the essence of the temporality field has been thoroughly revealed. "The field of temporality consists of meaning and its expressions," he states.

"Essentially, temporality is a semantic category that reflects the correspondence between the time an event occurs and the moment of speech. In terms of expression, temporality is a functional-semantic field that encompasses morphological, syntactic, lexical, lexical-grammatical, and grammatical-contextual elements." Bondarko classifies the elements of the temporality field into three types. According to him, these expressions can indicate qualitative, quantitative, or qualitative-quantitative temporality. Qualitative temporality refers to the narrative of events occurring in a sequence over time. Quantitative temporality includes meanings such as the duration of an event and how many actions took place over a given period. The third type, qualitative-quantitative temporality, serves to express the meanings mentioned above. These elements, which are part of a microfield, are secondary and belong to the periphery of the paradigm.

I. Galperin divides the field of temporality into two semantic groups. According to his observations, the temporal field consists of elements that are either directed toward the future or oriented toward the past. In his view, temporality is a category inherent to the text (or speech) and includes elements such as continuum, prospection, and retrospection. Based on a broad

range of ideas, the hyperseme of the temporality field also encompasses meanings related to historical, natural, physical, and other types of time.

As can be understood, the definitions above do not emphasize that temporality is specific to a single language or that it has unique semantic features in a particular language. This suggests that temporality is a universal paradigm present across all languages, conveying the same meaning in different systemic languages. By meaning, this field is universal and common to all languages. However, in terms of expression, the structure of the temporal field varies among different language systems. While the core meaning and microsemantics are shared, comparisons of their expression reveal discrepancies.

It is known that a functional-semantic field has a core in terms of meaning, and the hyperseme located at this core breaks down into microsemantics at lower levels. The hypersemes, as the semantic core, also form the nucleus, central, and peripheral parts. The hyperseme at the core of the temporal functional-semantic field is "the time of the occurrence of an action or state in relation to speech," which is universal across all languages. This universal meaning is expressed in different ways by various elements at different linguistic levels and to varying degrees.

Based on the definitions above, the hyperseme of temporality has been identified. However, this large meaning is subdivided into intermediate semes of past, present, and future. Each of these intermediate semes includes smaller microsemantics such as duration, repetition, completeness, and incompleteness. In English, there are primary and secondary elements that express the meanings mentioned. Primary elements occupy the core and central parts of the temporality functional-semantic field. Specifically, the expressive core of the field in English consists of two tense forms at the morphological level. These tenses, formed through suffixes and ablaut, are the present and past tense categories.

Although the future tense meaning is part of the semantic core, in English, its expression does not enter the functional core but remains in the central part. This is because, based on the conclusions of the formal linguistic school, English is said to have only two grammatical tenses. The present simple tense is expressed by the base form of the verb and the third person singular form, and in interrogative and negative sentences, the auxiliary verb *do* is used, with the third person suffix becoming part of this auxiliary.

The formation of the simple past tense is more complex. The verb stem is typically suffixed with *-ed*. Some verbs, however, use ablaut to indicate tense, though this vowel change does not follow a strict systemic pattern. For example, ablaut may involve a vowel change in the word (write – written) or a complete change in the phonetic form (go – went), while some verbs remain unchanged (put – put). The interrogative and negative forms are constructed using the auxiliary verb *do*, in its past form *did*, even when ablaut is used. These two tense forms are morphologically simple and contain minimal elements, indicating that their meanings are clear and concise.

Past indefinite tense	**Present indefinite tense**
Students completed report of their surveys.	Amelia visits grandparents once a while with her children.
Students did not complete report of their surveys.	Amelia doesn't often visit grandparents with her children.
Did students complete report of their research?	Does Amelia visit grandparents once a while with her children?

The future tense, which semantically belongs to the core of the paradigm, is located in the central part of the field in terms of its expression. This is because the future tense is formed using the modal verbs *will* and *shall*, while the main verb that expresses the action or state does not undergo any changes.

Future tense

Employees will go through accreditation during the next two months.

Employees will not go through accreditation during the next two months.

Will employees go through accreditation during the next two months.

It is worth noting that the morphological constructions located in the central part of the field are not limited to the future tense alone. Through the layering of various means, it becomes possible to express continuous and perfect actions or states. Unlike the simple future tense, here we observe changes within the structure of the verb. For example, in the continuous tense, the verb *to be* is used along with the *-ing* suffix added to the main verb.

The perfect tense is formed by using different forms of the auxiliary *to have* and adding either an ablaut change or the *-ed* suffix to the main verb. The meaning of a perfect continuous action or state is expressed by combining various forms of the auxiliary *to have*, the *been* form of the auxiliary *to be*, and the *-ing* suffix added to the main verb. These forms arise through the layering of various constructions. Due to their structural complexity, these tenses differ from the simple, absolute tenses in English. For this reason, they occupy the central part of the functional segment within the functional-semantic field.

However, the means of expressing temporality at the morphological level are not limited solely to tense. Several verbal categories can also serve as expressions of this hyperseme. Nevertheless, the temporality hyperseme may not be their primary functional meaning, but rather a secondary one. For instance, in the voice category, the auxiliary verb *to be* used in the passive voice allows us to understand in which tense the action occurred.

Present:	*Test results are announced every second Monday of a month.*
	Test results are being announced now.
	Test results have been announced this week.
Past:	*The new edition of dictionary was published last year.*
	The new edition of dictionary was being edited during several month.
	The new edition of dictionary had been approved before publication
Future:	*The online platform of delivery service will be launched next month.*
	The online platform of delivery service will have been launched by next month.

Among the morphological units that indirectly express the meaning of temporality, mood can also be included. For instance, the imperative-optative mood indirectly indicates whether an action will or will not take place in the future. The subjunctive mood likewise refers indirectly to the future. As understood, at the morphological level, tense forms express the meaning of temporality directly and fully. Modal verbs, lexical-grammatical constructions expressing desire, the passive voice, and mood convey the meaning of temporality partially and indirectly. When these mentioned means appear within sentence structure, they become tools of the syntactic level. In addition, compound sentence constructions specific to the syntactic level can encompass one or more meanings within the temporality field. For example, simple sentences often express the temporality of a single action or state, while compound sentences convey the sequential or parallel temporality of multiple actions or states. Such sequence or simultaneity is organized through conjunctions like *while*, *when*, *whilst*, and *meanwhile*. The sentences are then presented as a mixed tense structure.

While we were watching new series on TV, fire broke out in the kitchen.
You can note down unfamiliar words, while you are listening English podcasts.

Parents went out for a dinner, meanwhile I cleaned the house and did the washing.
Guests will be here soon, meanwhile prepare to greet and welcome them.

She wrote her essay whilst watching TV.
I have gained great expertise whilst working for this company.

Furthermore, prepositions that attach to verbs and alter their primary meanings also serve to indirectly express the meanings of completion, continuation, or initiation—thus indicating time. For example, the preposition *on* attached to a verb can convey continuity (e.g., *go on*), while *out* can indicate completion (e.g., *speak out*, *sell out*). These aspectual meanings manifest in speech and further reinforce the temporal semantics of an action or state in the sentence.

Due to their ability to change the meaning of the words they combine with, prepositions can be considered partially lexical units. However, since they only convey temporality or aspectuality when used specifically with verbs in speech, they can also be regarded as partially grammatical units.

Results

The core of the English tense system includes the present and past indefinite tenses, which are morphologically expressed and form the nucleus of the functional-semantic field. The future tense, formed by modal verbs *will* and *shall*, is positioned in the central zone due to its lack of morphological markers.

Complex tenses such as progressive, perfect, and perfect progressive involve auxiliary verbs and affixes, indicating aspectual and temporal nuances. These constructions belong to the central functional zone but are structurally more complex.

Passive voice and modal verbs also contribute to expressing time indirectly. For instance, passive constructions involve auxiliary verbs that reflect tense (e.g., *have been approved*, *will be launched*), while modal verbs suggest temporal orientation along with modality (e.g., *could*, *might*, *will have to*).

Lexical-grammatical expressions like *be going to* indicate planned future actions and are also included in the temporal field. Moods such as the imperative and conditional, though not primarily temporal, often imply future actions.

At the syntactic level, compound sentences and connectors such as *while*, *when*, *meanwhile* contribute to expressing sequential or simultaneous temporal relationships.

On the lexical level, adverbs of time (e.g., *now*, *yesterday*, *tomorrow*) and verb semantics (e.g., *begin*, *end*, *continue*) indicate specific temporal phases. Phrasal verbs and prepositional phrases further refine temporal meanings (e.g., *go on*, *sell out*).

Conclusion

Traditional English grammar, influenced by Latin and French models, recognizes only two grammatical tenses — present and past. The future tense, expressed through modal auxiliaries, is often excluded from this core. However, from a functional-semantic perspective, all forms that contribute to expressing time — including modal verbs, voice, aspect, and syntactic structures — are integral to the temporal field. While the core meaning of tense (the timing of an event relative to speech) is universal, its expression varies across languages. English displays a rich, multi-layered system of temporal expression that requires a broad analytical approach beyond traditional grammar.

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