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DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

The use of tense and aspect in the writing
of 12th grade Austrian learners of English

Verfasserin

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Preface and Acknowledgments

My professional background, insofar as it has led me to pursue the topic of the present thesis, warrants a brief note. I have been working as an English tutor and later as a teacher as well for a long time and therefore it was obvious that the topic of my final paper would be somehow connected to English teaching and its outcome. When Professor Dr. Dalton-Puffer gave me the idea of analyzing English test papers, I happily agreed so that I could combine my professional experience with academic research. Although it sometimes seemed out of reach, I have now finished my paper.

Therefore, there are people who need to be mentioned and thanked.

First, I want to thank my supervisor Dr. Christiane Dalton-Puffer who has supported me with her helpful feedback and patience throughout the years.

Thank you, Bianca, for having always been there. Supporting, motivating or simply listening. Danke.

Helga und Harald, I also thank you, for taking care of both of us, Kimi and me, as well as supporting me from day one.

הדות Julia, Merci Isabelle and Kiitos Gerald: Thank you for believing in me.

I also want to thank my family, especially, my dear sister Ana, who at times when I needed it most found the right words to get me going; and Markus, thank you for proofreading and your support.

Finally, I want to dedicate this thesis to my Grandmother, Anny Komaier, whose heart's desire has now come true and who will be celebrating up there. Danke Omili.

1. Introduction

But the Hebrew word, the word timshel.
—'Thou mayest'— that gives a choice.
It might be the most important word in the world.
That says the way is open.
That throws it right back on a man.
For if 'Thou mayest'—it is also true that 'Thou mayest not'.
(John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*)

Starting with the school year 2014/15 the new A-levels system 'Matura Neu' will be compulsory for all AHS schools in Austria. This new system is also called '4-Skills Matura', due to the four areas that will be examined: Reading Comprehension, Listening Comprehension, Language in Use, and Writing. Owing to the way this system is set up, it will then be possible for students who have numerous grammar mistakes in their test papers and would score lowest in that area to pass their A-levels, provided they successfully manage the other three skills. Although communication skills are essential for language acquisition, this development might lead to a decrease of profound knowledge of grammar and may not serve our students in the future well.

As a teacher of English with many years of experience, I have always been interested in how students learn English and why some mistakes appear more often than others. I have also wondered about the possibilities of how to help the students to avoid certain mistakes and how the students should be exposed to certain tenses, such as the Present Perfect and progressive tenses, which seem to confound Austrian students especially.

Many mistakes that occur with the use of what is commonly taught as 'tenses' in the Austrian EFL classroom are, in fact, not tense but aspect related. Significantly, the notion of aspect is generally not explicitly taught or even mentioned in EFL teaching (Kortmann 1991: 14), as illustrated by numerous school textbooks (e.g. *More!, Headway, You and Me* series of textbooks), and aspectual forms are treated as compound or relative tenses, but tenses nonetheless. By contrast, the teaching of Slavic languages relies heavily on explaining and recognizing aspectual forms. It should noted that the Austrian curriculum for English in the 'Oberstufe' valid until 2003 did mention acquiring "aspect" next to "tense" as a goal of teaching, but this reference has been dropped in the presently valid curriculum

(BMUKK 2002, 2004). This curricular goal, however, was never translated into explicitly teaching 'aspect' as evidenced, for instance, by the textbooks used.

In linguistics, the recognition that "tense and time have in principle nothing to do with each other" (Leuschner 1977: 99) is a cornerstone of the study of tense and aspect. Beyond this very basic consensus that tense and aspect need to be understood each on its own terms, linguistic theory has not produced a common and unequivocal understanding of what tense and aspect are, how they are to be classified and studied. In many ways the foundation of modern tense and aspect research is Reichenbach's 'theory of tense' (1947). It introduced a diagrammatic representation of time and the three parameters of event time E, reference point R and speech time S that have been used, in one way or another, ever since. While influential, Reichenbach's theory has been challenged and modified by numerous authors such as Comrie (1976, 1985), DeClerck (1991), Binnick (1991), Klein (1994) and Radden & Dirven (2007).

The essential difference between tense and aspect can be summarized as follows: tense is a grammatical expression of a situation's location in time as past, present and future (Comrie 1985: 9), whereas aspect characterizes how a speaker views the temporal contour of a situation from inside (1985: 6). Tense can therefore be derived logically from the known facts of a situation, whereas aspect depends on the view of the speaker and may change with emphasis or intention. While various classifications of aspectual distinctions have been suggested, a fundamental distinction is that between complete or incomplete, i.e. in progress.

From a linguistic point of view, aspect is a prominent feature of the English language. Like many other languages, English expresses aspectual distinctions through both grammatical and lexical means. In other words, there are both grammatical forms (which resemble and are often described as 'tenses') as well as verbs that inherently contain an aspectual feature such as 'state' or 'activity'. Regarding lexical aspect, Vendler's (1957) four-way classification has been most influential and must be considered when studying students' difficulties with tense and aspect in English. Moreover, grammatical and lexical aspect are not independent in language use, as they interact by excluding certain forms, e.g. a stative verb cannot, as a rule, be used in a progressive form.

Second language acquisition (SLA) refers to the process by which any language after the first is learned and research findings as well as theoretical models of its

intricacies serve as a theoretical base when investigating learner errors. Arguably the most influential research on SLA was undertaken by Gass and Selinker (1972, 1994), but the work of Krashen (1981) and Ellis (2005) is also taken into consideration. Errors can have varied reasons, frequently they occur due to similarities or differences between the native language (L1) and the target language (TL). An Austrian German native speaker who learns English might produce errors caused by 'false friendship' or, more generally, crosslinguistic interference: In fact, the two languages have little distance showing multiple morphological, semantic and grammatical similarities. Some of these, however, are similar in form but different in meaning, such as *have spoken* and *habe gesprochen*. Therefore, these differences as well as similarities raise specific issues in the process of SLA. Contrasting English and German grammar should be helpful before analyzing the learners' errors and may help to find ways of avoiding them in the future. Error Analysis (EA) can serve as a tool to study the kind and quantity of errors learners commit, Corder's five steps (1974) method offering a reliable standard for doing so.

Since aspect as such is not taught in Austrian schools and hence not known to students even at their A-levels, research into the general acquisition of English aspect might contribute valuable perspectives to the analysis of tense and aspect errors. Relevant research is in its infancy and has been provided by Andersen (1986), Bardovi-Harlig (1992) and Li and Shirai (2000) among others. Research on the acquisition of English by German native speakers in particular was undertaken, for instance, by Hecht and Green (1983), Rohde (1992, 2002), Schmiedtová (2011) and Liszka (2002). Possible deviations from their results caused by the specifics of Austrian German as a variant of standard German spoken in Germany have been studied only marginally, for instance by Knapp (1989), Körberl (1989) and Erling (2004).

Looking at learners' language in detail, numerous researchers have found that the various aspectual forms of the verbal system, such as the simple vs. progressive (e.g. Past Simple versus Present Perfect), are the dominant sources of errors (Parkes 2001). In particular, it has been suggested that the English progressive is a crucial problem for language learners and belongs to the more complex features of the English language (Johansson & Stavestrand 1987). It proves difficult especially for German-speaking learners, who have no comparable aspectual

category (Römer 2006). However, little attention has been paid to the tense and aspect errors produced by Austrian learners of English. Where tense use in German languages is concerned, Austrian German differs significantly from other standard variants of German, such as the variant spoken in Germany or Switzerland (for a discussion of the pluricentric view of German and Austrian German's nominal status as a language, see Clyne 1992 and Zeman 2009).

The empirical study of my thesis will look at test papers of Austrian students of a 12th grade AHS in Vienna to determine, first, what kind of tense- and aspect-related mistakes they produce regarding tense and aspect in free written texts. I will then categorize the mistakes according to the involvement of tense and aspect, providing a detailed quantitative analysis of the frequency of error type and error clusters. The next analytical step will be to relate these mistakes to the previously established comparison between the German and English tense/aspect systems to identify plausible sources for specific error types and error clusters (focusing on the most notable source of crosslinguistic interference). On the basis of these plausible explanations, recommendations for teaching will be suggested.

My thesis attempts to answer the following questions:
- What tense- and aspect-related errors do Austrian German-speaking learners of English commit in written tests shortly before their A-levels?
- Why do they confuse certain verb forms?
- In how far is cross-linguistic interference an issue for Austrian learners of English, specifically with respect to the Austrian standard variant of German?
- Why is the progressive form overused in certain contexts, e.g., instead of the simple present, and underused in others, e.g. perfective meaning?

My paper is organized as follows: As a starting point, Chapter 2 reviews theoretical background knowledge relevant to the analysis by looking at tense and aspect systems, first in general and then in English. Chapter 3 begins by contrasting the German and English tense/aspect systems and subsequently looks at the research field of Second Language Acquisition and the method of Error Analysis. My study as well as the discussion of my findings will be presented in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 5 will provide a conclusion and outlook to my thesis.

2. Theories of Tense and Aspect

This thesis analyzes learners' language, specifically the use of tense and aspect forms in written language. It must thus begin with a review of relevant research and theories on tense and aspect in general and in the English language in particular. Since tense and aspect are grammatical and lexical representations of time in language, I will first take a general look at the notion of time and its meaning before discussing theories and models of relevant grammatical and lexical forms in language.

2.1. Time

> I'm just catching up with yesterday.
> By tomorrow I should be ready for today.
> (Anonymous)

Looking for a definition of 'time', I was surprised to learn that the concept of time has been a controversial issue in various fields, such as philosophy, art and science. The latter is interesting for the topic of this paper since it is concerned with the human concept of how time is experienced. Every person perceives the notion of time individually and therefore differently than any other person does. Albert Einstein is often quoted as he was explaining his theory of relativity, that the experience of sitting next to a beautiful girl for an hour felt like a minute, whereas placing one's hand on a hot stove for a minute felt like an hour. Naturally, these different perceptions of time are reflected in our language. We only have to consider the various semantic meanings for the term 'soon'. If someone says *My father will be back soon*, it can evoke different meanings for different interlocutors. One might think of five minutes, someone else of two hours or even days. Turning back to the definitions of time, two should be mentioned. According to the New Oxford Dictionary of English (1998: 1940-1941), time is "the indefinite continued progress of existence and events in the past, present, and future, regarded as a whole". One definition I find especially useful has been proposed by the online Babylon dictionary stating that "time is a system used to place one event in relation to another" (Babylon). The past is regarded to have already happened and to be unchangeable, whereas the future is considered to be open to many

possibilities. Moreover, time can be measured and divided into temporal units, e.g., seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, etc; yet the individual perception remains immeasurable by means of unitary quantum. The following section deals with diagrammatic representations of time as a common means of visualizing the measurement and/or division of temporal units.
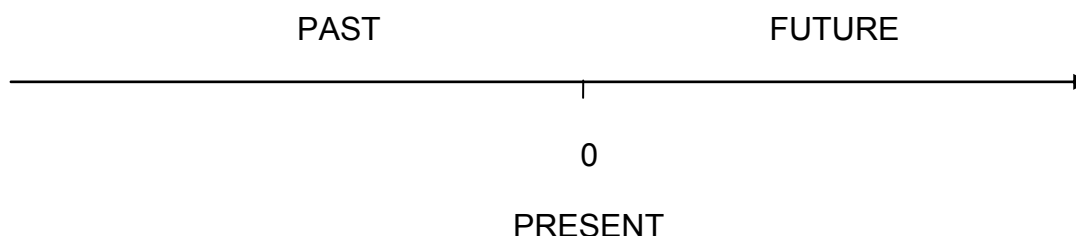
Diagrammatic Representation of Time or Time in Language

Time can be represented in more than one way, especially if philosophical discussions are taken into account. In some cultures it might be argued that they have no concept of time at all or lack any conceptualization of progress. Whorf claims that Hopi (a Uto-Aztecan language of Arizona and New Mexico) has "no words, grammatical forms, constructions or expressions that refer directly to what we call 'time'" (Caroll 1956: 57). Therefore one could argue that the Hopi do not have any concept of time, but Whorf also pointed out the Hopi have a non-linear conception of time and thus see time differently than Western societies do (1956: 57-64). However, Comrie explains that these conceptualizations of time seem to be either inaccurate or irrelevant due to the fact that references to past or future events, such as tales about the past, can be found in all languages. Comrie goes on arguing that all humans must possess some concept of time since they know, for instance, that people grow older and not younger. Then there are societies, such as the Australian Aboriginal cultures that regard time as a recurrent cyclic concept due to the change of day and night or the change of seasons (1985: 3-5). Similarly, the Buddhists, some Indian religions and students of esoteric philosophies, who all believe in reincarnation, consider time as something that is not linear but occurs in cycles. However, Comrie (1985: 5) says that

> [...] in cultures which have [...] a cyclic conceptualisation
> of time, the cycles are invariably of such long duration
> that it makes no difference to the activities of daily life
> that they are taking place in a cycle of time rather than
> on a straight time line.

To put it into other words, even if we take cyclic concepts of time for granted this can only be true for longer and general time periods and is not relevant for our practical conceptualization of time in speech. Therefore, I want to look at the traditional western concept of time and follow Comrie who assumes that time can be presented as a straight line. This time line serves the purpose of locating

events, processes and states which he relates to as 'situations' in temporal relation to each other (1985: 5).

Schematically the line can be seen as in Figure 1:

PAST   FUTURE

——————————————————|————————————————————▶

0

PRESENT

Figure 1: Diagrammatic presentation of time

The past is represented to the left and the future to the right with the present moment dividing these two periods and being represented by a point labeled 0 on this line (1985: 2). Therefore, any event situated on this time line will refer to the present moment, whether preceding, coinciding with or succeeding the present moment. McCawley (1981: 341) explains the notion of 'now' or the 'the present':

> The notions of 'past' and 'future' are put together out of
> these two more basic notions: the past is what is prior
> to now and the future is what now is prior to.

Consequently, the present moment changes permanently and could also be seen as a flow in time. Comrie displays the example of "what is now the present moment is a time point subsequent to what was the present moment five minutes ago" (1985: 3). Frawley (1992: 337-338) uses the term 'central zero-point' for the present moment and adds that

> [i]n the expert model of real time, there is no central
> zero-point because all bodies are in motion. But we
> need a central zero-point, the temporal equivalent of the
> spatial baseline of Earth, when we say such simple
> things as I wrote the letter. The past tense, wrote, is
> understandable only as projection from the baseline of
> the present, 'write before the present,' just as will write
> means 'write after the present.' Ordinary speakers are
> unperplexed by the fact that the present zero-point itself
> is a moving target in real time.

Therefore, the utterance *Kimi ate*, for example, is placed left of the present moment because it happened in the past, thus before the present.

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                                                                           time
_____|_____|_____>


              Kimi ate                now
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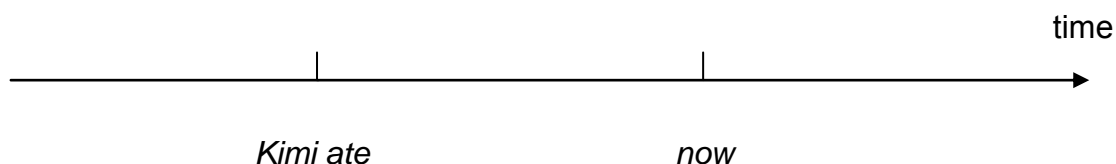
Figure 2: Diagrammatic representation of *Kimi ate*

Whereas, the phrase *Kimi will play*, for example, is placed to the right of the present moment because it has not happened yet but will happen sometime after now.
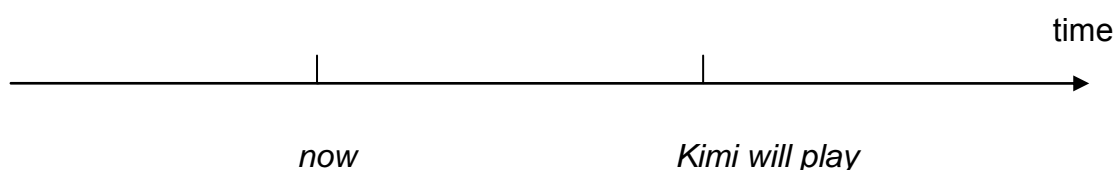
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                                                                           time
_____|_____|_____>


               now                    Kimi will play
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Figure 3: Diagrammatic representation of *Kimi will play*

As I have mentioned before, Comrie uses the term 'situation' as relating to events, processes and states. He distinguishes between two different kinds of situations: On the one hand, he sees situations which are punctual (or at least conceived as such), which he represents by points on the timeline; on the other hand, he sees situations that occupy (or are perceived as occupying) a specific duration of time, which he represents as stretches on the timeline (Comrie 1985: 5).
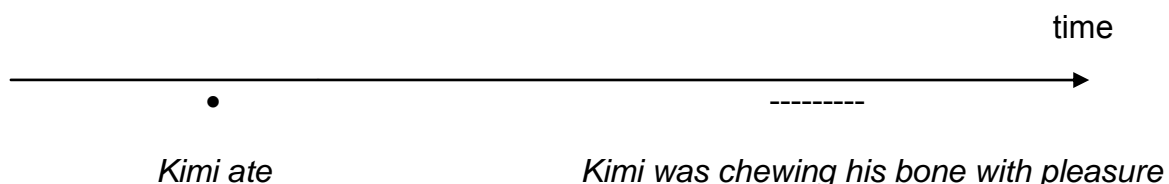
```
                                                                           time
_____>
              •                                    ---------


          Kimi ate                    Kimi was chewing his bone with pleasure
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Figure 4: Diagrammatic representation of situations on the time-line

The example mentioned earlier *Kimi ate* would refer to a punctual situation according to Comrie's theory if we think of a piece of food that he puts into his mouth and swallows. Regarding the situation as one that occupies a stretch of time and stressing the duration of the eating process, we would have to express it differently. Yet, this is a difference of aspect which will be discussed in a later chapter.

In general the time line is considered to be a frontal axis[1] because humans tend to experience the passing of time similarly as movement through space (Haspelmath 1997: 21) and therefore use spatial terms. We say, for example, *Don't look back* because of our association of time going forward or being behind us. Yet, as I have mentioned in the earlier chapter, time is something that is perceived individually and therefore the diagrammatic representations of time can also be individually different for every person.

In this section I have briefly sketched the philosophical basis of time and showed its diagrammatic representation on the time line. Now I will go on to the more specific issue of locating an event in time. In doing so, I will also move to a language-oriented rather than a philosophical discussion.

2.2.   Locating in Time, Deixis and their Connection to Tense

> The fixed base for any location in time is the human observer engaging in communication.
> (Radden & Dirven 2007: 202)

Having discussed in the previous chapter how time is perceived and represented on the time line, I turn to the locating of situations in time. According to Comrie (1985: 7) "the idea of locating in time is a purely conceptual notion [...] [and] all human languages have ways of locating in time". Smith explains the idea of conveying temporal information in more detail and assumes that for the receiver to understand a sentence, he/she must locate an event or state in terms of both space and time. This is due to the fact that time is one of the fundamental coordinates for assessments of truthfulness. Smith argues that all languages provide information which enables the receiver to determine how the situation expressed is located in time (Smith 2008: 227).

Since interlocutors situate situations or events in their minds in certain locations, this perceiving is bound to the individual speaker and the individual context and

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[1] The frontal axis is part of the three-dimensional space system which is represented by three axes: the frontal axis describes the front – back relations, the vertical axis shows up – down relations and the lateral axis describes right – left relations (Haspelmath 1997: 21).

can therefore be called deictic. A general definition of deixis is given in Lyons (1977: 637):

> By deixis* is meant the location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities being talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatiotemporal context created and sustained by the act of utterance and the participation in it, typically, of a single speaker and at least one addressee.

This means that the understanding of the phrase *Come here and talk to him then*, depends on extralinguistic context, namely the person who is addressed and the location where and the time when the utterance is made. Deixis distinguishes five standard categories[2] that provide contextually-dependant reference (Levinson 1983: 61-63):

- *person deixis* (reference to the speaker, the addressee or a third person)
- *place deixis* (reference to spatial context)
- *time deixis* (temporal reference point)
- *discourse deixis* (reference to portions of the unfolding discourse)
- *social deixis* (reference to social status)

For locating in time, only time (or temporal) deixis is relevant. Levison (1983: 62) states that

> [t]ime deixis concerns the encoding of temporal points and spans relative to the time at which an utterance was spoken (or a written message inscribed) [...].

Levinson adds that time deixis is generally grammaticalized in the form of deictic adverbs of time, but above all in tense. Examples of the former class of adverbs are English *now* and *then*, *yesterday* and *this year* (Levinson 1983: 62).

The concept of tense is therefore significantly connected to locating in time. According to Comrie (1985: 9) "tense is grammaticalised expression of location in

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[2] The traditional categories of deixis are *person, place* and *time*, later *discourse deixis* and *social deixis* were added. In literature about deixis, further types of deixis are identified, e.g. *emphatical deixis* and *perceptual deixis,* among others (Marmaridou 2000: 69).

time" and hence tenses are closely connected to deixis. Binnick (1991: 128) illustrates that

> [a]lthough the tradition treats the tenses as referring to (expressing) times, tense in fact has to do with pairs of times and the relation between them, specifically between the times of events and the moment "now", defined as the time (or "moment") of speech or utterance [...].

Consequently, Binnick argues, speakers must describe the same event by using different tenses at different times since *now* may refer to different times, just as *she* and *he* may refer to different individuals (Binnick 1991: 128).

In the discussion of expressing location in time Comrie distinguishes three different classes:

- *lexically composite expressions*
- *simple lexical items*
- *grammatical categories*

The largest class of these in the English use of language comprises lexically composite expressions such as *five minutes after John left* or *a long time ago.* These adverbials are potentially infinite since there is a vast amount of linguistic means for measuring time intervals. The second class is the set of lexical items such as e.g. *now, today* or *yesterday*. These two groups are categorized differently in individual languages. Comrie shows the example of the term '*last year*' which is a lexically composite expression in the English language, in contrast to Czech where the equivalent *loni* is seen as a single lexical item. The third and last class consists of grammatical categories which include all existing tenses in a particular language. Comrie lists for the case of English, five tenses which are present, past, pluperfect, future and future perfect. However, Comrie (1985: 8) also adds that other linguists have called into question the view that the future and the Future Perfect are tenses. In contrast to English, many other languages have a wider range of tenses, especially those which differentiate degrees of remoteness in past and future (Comrie 1985: 9), but nevertheless the number of lexical items in these languages would always be more significant in comparison to the number of existing tenses.

It should also be noted that there are also languages that do not have tenses and in these languages inference and aspectual information allow temporal interpretation (Smith 2008: 228). Shaer explicates that Inuit languages, such as Greenlandic, Inuktitut, and Yup'ik, are generally described as "tenseless" in the sense that they have no temporal marking that would make them directly comparable to the tenses of Germanic and Romance languages and thus allow sentences without any explicit temporal marking (Shaer 2003: 139).

Since the focus of this paper lies on the tensed languages English and German, I will not discuss tenseless languages in greater detail. I now turn to tenses and how they are organized into systems in more detail.

2.3. Tense Systems

> The things that were, the things to come and the things past.
> (Homer in Iliad)

In the description of numerous languages, the term 'tense' is used as part of the grammar to define the time referred to. A more complex definition of tense is provided by the International Encyclopedia of Linguistics:

> Tense refers to the grammatical expression of the time of the situation described in the proposition, relative to some other time. This other time may be the moment of speech: e.g., the past and future designate time before and after the moment of speech, respectively [...] tense is expressed by inflections, by participles, or by auxiliaries in connection with the verb. (1992: 144)

Klein (1994: 18) looks at the common use of the term 'tense' from a critical point of view and points out that it can be terminologically problematic as it is often used in three different meanings:

- as referring *to a particular form* (e.g. Greek is seen as having six tenses, in the sense of 'tense forms')
- as referring *to the meaning of a particular form* (in the sense that *was* expresses past tense)
- as referring *to the verb category itself* (in the sense that the grammatical categories of tense, mood and voice apply to the verb in Indo-European languages)

I will follow Klein in this particular distinction and use the term 'tense' for the entire phenomena and add '-form', '-meaning' and '-category' whenever there is need to distinguish between them.

As discussed in the previous chapter tenses are deictic since they determine temporal relations with reference to the time of the speech act. Two times are thus distinguished:

a) Speech Time S

b) Event/Situation Time E

Speech Time refers to the speaker's moment of speaking and is 'now'; Event Time is the time the situation occurs (Radden & Dirven 2007: 202). Given these two points S and E, two possible temporal relations between S and E can be found: E precedes S or vice versa and is therefore sequential; or E and S are simultaneous meaning that they happen at the same time or that S is included in E.

In order to analyze the English tense system the German logician Reichenbach[3] (1947: 287-298) presented a theoretical model that adds a third element to E and S:

c) Reference Point R

R is the temporal standpoint or perspective from where a situation is presented. R thus helps to explain why in many utterances, it does not matter how long ago something happened (in objective terms), but rather how it relates to another event (from the speaker's subjective perspective).

Additionally to these three times that are linguistically involved in locating a situation in time, there are two relations: Speech Time is related to the Reference Time, and Reference Time is in relation to Event Time, by the relations of simultaneity and sequence (1947: 287-288). The three time points can be illustrated in the following example:

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[3] Reichenbach's theoretical model with E, R and S has been widely accepted and used for linguistic research until today.

(1)   *(S) I was eating dinner (R) when Bianca called and asked me about the spelling. (E)*
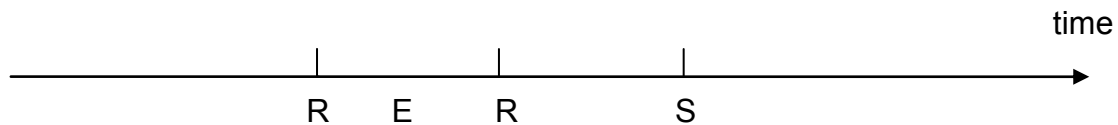
time

R   E   R   S

Figure 5: Reichenbach's model

This tensed utterance introduces references to the three 'time points':

- Speech Time: S: time of narrating

- Event Time: E: phone call

- Reference Time: R: related to the phone call

The stretch of reference in this example begins before and extends beyond the event of the phone call.

Michaelis (2006: 221) supplies a more illustrative example to explain Reichenbach's model:

(2)   *I took a cab back to the hotel.*

(3)   *The cab driver was Latvian.*

She argues that if a speaker makes those two claims successively, it is clear for the hearer that the cab driver's Latvian identity hasn't desisted following the cab ride. Rather the speaker's motivation for using the past tense form in either sentence has to do with the fact that tenses

> [...] do not express the relationship between the temporal zero-point and the time of the state of affairs described. Rather, tenses express the relationship between speech time and another interval of interest [.] In [a], for example, R is a specific past time that both the speaker and hearer can identify, while in [b] R is the time established by [a]: the time of the cabride. What [b] shows us is that when a speaker makes a past-tense stative assertion, she or he may vouch only for that portion of the state's tenure that coincides with the mutually relevant interval. (2006: 221)

Drawing on Reichenbach's model, Michaelis is thus able to explain why tense choices are always deictic and must be seen within their context.

Criticizing Reichenbach's approach, Comrie (Declerck 1991: 232-233) revised the tense model based on the observation that there is no R in the absolute tenses (present, preterit and future). Consequently, Comrie's model also does not use R in the cases where it would coincide with S or E. The three tenses in which it would coincide according to Reichenbach's unmodified model are thus seen as only having the two time elements E and S, combined in the three relations simultaneity, anteriority and posteriority. According to Comrie's theory, tense thus relates the two points of time as follows (Declerck 1991: 233):

present	E simul S
past	E before S
future	E after S

Although Comrie's model was designed to improve Reichenbach's approach, it has itself been repeatedly criticized as insufficient. Criticism has, for instance, been raised against Comrie's inability to fully account for the role of adverbs and adverbials in the tense system. While Comrie does acknowledge that tense is not only a "tense of verbs", but also of adverbs (1985: 8), Klein has argued that "even when limited to simples cases, [Comrie's theory] cannot be correct" (Klein 1994: 21).

Klein (1994: 23) goes on to discuss the inadequacy of Comrie's "standard theory of tense" with reference to the following example:

(4) *Then these figures were multiplied. The result was ninety-four.*

Here, the same phenomenon as in the cab ride example mentioned earlier can be recognized. Klein points out that the result of ninety-four is not only true some time before the time of the utterance and that the statement's accuracy is, in fact, not confined to any time. However, the speaker decides to make a statement about the time at which the result was calculated by multiplying the figures, and the use of aspect is consequently determined by the fact that this time precedes the time of utterance (Klein 1994: 23).

Similarly, a speaker might use the past tense in sentences such as *What was your name*, which are still true, but refer to the time the information was received (1994: 23). Hence the past tense in this example is not chosen to refer to an event that

takes place before the time of speech, which would suggest that Comrie's standard theory of tense cannot fully account for the complexity of the tense system. Klein discusses more examples that raise doubts about Comrie's theory and suggests that a third point, namely the 'topic time', needs to be included, which he sees as the time for which the assertion of the utterance is made (1994: 22-24). Topic Time or TT, in Klein's suggestions, is different from Reichenbach's R insofar as it depends on the relevance of the assertion or the time span, to which the assertion refers, rather than to the reference point (or stretch) of E or Event Time.

For the purposes of the present thesis, I will adopt Reichenbach's basic model, which is still the standard point of reference, but keep in mind the criticism that has been raised against it both by Comrie and his successors. Modifications and objections such as those suggested by Comrie and Klein may indeed prove relevant in the analysis of my data sample in so far as they may relate to mistakes arising from differences between German and English. The following section will clarify how Reichenbach's model applies to the English tense and aspect system, while also incorporating elaborations suggested by other researchers, most notably Declerck, Klein and Comrie.

Tenses can be divided into absolute or simple tenses and relative or compound tenses. In the next chapter the difference between these two systems will be explained.

2.3.1. Simple or Absolute Tense

As was mentioned above, tenses are deictic because they locate the time of a situation relative to the situation of the utterance. This can be either the present moment or some other point in time. The tense forms present, past and future relate the time of the situation specified to the moment of discourse, i.e. the present moment. With the present moment as their deictic center, they are referred to as absolute tenses or simple tenses (Comrie 1985: 36). Haspelmath explains the latter term with the observation that "[v]iewed as semantically and/or morpho-syntactically simple, they are [also] termed simple tenses" (Haspelmath 2001: 559). Particularly regarding the English language, this characterization has to be qualified: The present, past and future tense in English can be called 'simple'

tenses in terms of form and 'absolute' tenses in terms of their semantics, as opposed to 'compound' and 'relative' tenses, respectively.

The example *Helga again bought a new handbag* clearly shows an absolute tense, since the reference point is the moment of speaking and E is prior and would therefore be 'left' of S on a diagrammatic timeline. When using the future tense *will buy* (instead of *bought*) in the same sentence, E is subsequent to S and would thus be right of S on the timeline. Putting the sentence into the present tense by saying *buys* (instead of *bought* or *will buy*), E and R and S coincide and are located on the same point. The following diagrams illustrate the time of the situation in reference to the speech time and show that all three tenses relate the situation to the moment of assertion (which is always the present).
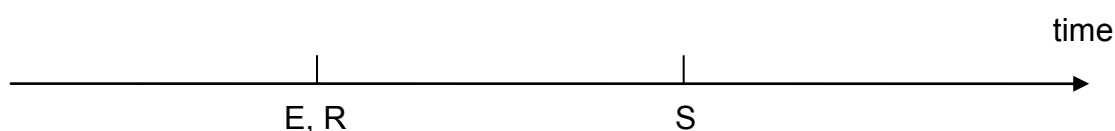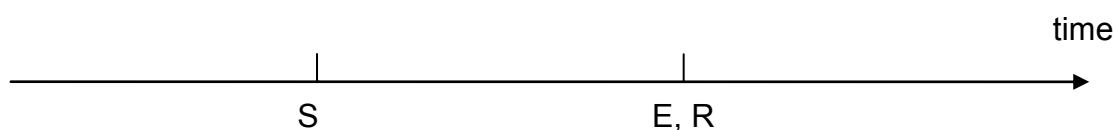
time

                    | |
_____→
                  E, R   S

Figure 6: Past Tense

time

                    | |
_____→
                   S   E, R

Figure 7: Future Tense

time

                    |
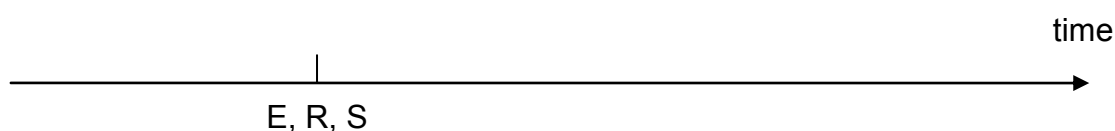_____→
                 E, R, S

Figure 8: Present Tense

Looking at simple tenses in more detail, we see that they generally consist of one word that is morphologically marked, e.g. *go* and *went*, referring to the present and the past, respectively. The future tense, however, is composed of two words, e.g. *will go*, but nevertheless considered a simple tense by most linguists.[4]

According to Comrie (1985: 37) special focus has to be put on the present tense, because

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[7] See, among others, Comrie (1985: 43-48), Dahl (1985: 103-108), Declerck (1991: 10)

> it is relatively rare for a situation to coincide exactly with the present moment, i.e. to occupy, literally or in terms of our conception of the situation, a single point in time which is exactly commensurate with the present moment.

Comrie (1985: 37) mentions only two examples where E, R and S can actually coincide: performative sentences and simulation reports.

(1) In performative sentences indicating "that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action – it is not normally thought of as just saying something" (Austin 1975: 6-7), as is the case in sentences such as *I name this girl Carmen* or *I promise to write my paper.* In both examples the acts of naming and promising are being carried out at the same time the assertions are stated. Other examples for performative verbs are *sentence, order, resign, I do* (wedding vow) etc.

(2) Simulations reports, such as on-the-spot sport reports or audio comments for the blind, are uttered momentaneous to the described action, as is the case in the following sentence: *The mixed-breed Barbara crosses the finishing line.* There is thus a literal coincidence between the event and the moment of speaking, i.e. the present moment.

It might be argued that these situations are not strictly 'momentaneous' – in the sense that Comrie uses the term –, but they can be conceptualized as momentaneous, since both the uttering of the sentence and the acting out of the event require some time (Comrie 1985: 37).

Apart from performative sentences and simulation reports, however, the more general use of the present tense is for states and processes where the present moment is included within of a longer period of time. This includes, for instance, sentences such as *Mum loves surfing Finnish news pages.* The present tense will be further discussed in Chapter 2.5.1.

2.3.2. Compound or Relative Tense

Unlike the definition of simple or absolute tense, that of relative tense is somewhat controversial. Tenses are called relative if their deictic center is not necessarily the present moment, but relative to some other situation or, as Lyons (1977: 689) puts

it, "[if] the situation time is related only indirectly to speech act time, but immediately to a contextually-given reference time". Applying to E, R and S, in case of a compound tense, E refers to R, unlike simple tenses where E directly refers to S as the deictic centre. Being morpho-syntactically and/or semantically complex, the former are also known as compound tenses in contrast to the simple tenses (McCawley 1971: 111).

Characteristically in English, "finite verb forms have absolute tense and non-finite verb forms have relative tense" (Comrie 1976: 2). Therefore, the main instances of relative tense in English are participle constructions using non-finite verb forms, such as the following phrases:

> (5) *When meeting our neighbor, Kimi often jumps out of joy.*

> (6) *When meeting our neighbor, Kimi often jumped out of joy.*

The present participle *meeting* in both cases refers to the situation located simultaneous with the time of the main verb, but is independent of the tense of the main verb. Thus, the situation described by *meeting* in sentence (5) refers to the present using present tense *jumps*, whereas in sentence (6) the past is referred to by the past tense *jumped*. "The relevant factor in the choice of the present participle", as Comrie (1976:2) puts it, "is thus relative time reference, not absolute time reference". Similarly, perfect participles in non-finite participial constructions also correspond to relative tense (Comrie 1976: 2).

> (7) *Having fed Kimi earlier, Agnes doesn't need to feed him again today.*

> (8) *Having fed Kimi earlier, Agnes didn't need to feed him again that day.*

Time adverbials can be also differentiated according to absolute or relative time reference. For instance, *today, yesterday* and *tomorrow*, which refer to the days including, preceding and following the present moment, respectively, are all adverbials that describe absolute time reference. However, the time adverbials *on the same day, on the day before, on the next day* indicate relative time reference due to fact that exact information on the day is missing (Comrie 1985: 56-57).

Comrie (1985: 65) further distinguishes between 'pure relative tense' and 'absolute-relative tense'. According to this distinction, absolute and relative tense

forms coincide with the distinction between finite and nonfinite verb forms, respectively (Comrie 1985: 57). Concerning finite tenses, Comrie further differentiates between absolute tenses or, as Declerck calls them, 'pure absolute tenses', and 'absolute-relative tenses'. While the former relate the time of the event (E) directly to the moment of speech (S), the latter relate E to S via one or more intermediate point of reference in time. Thus, the past tense is an *absolute tense* (in the sense being 'pure'), whereas the Past Perfect tense is an *absolute-relative tense*. The special status of 'absolute-relative tenses' (such as the past perfect) is due to the fact that their semantic structure combines the relations 'E before R' and 'R before S', R functioning as the intermediate reference point (Declerck 1995: 2).

> (9) *Ana had finished baking by the 7th of December.*

> (10) *When Markus had finished the interview, he wrote a summary.*

Example sentence (9) shows an absolute-relative tense by using *the 7th of December* as a specific reference point in time that acts as an intermediate step (R) between the time of the baking (E) and the time of speech (S). Similarly, in example (10) the writing of the summary figures (expressed as a separate clause) functions as a reference point that acts as an intermediary in the timeline.

Comrie's choice of terms has invited comments and criticism from Klein and Declerck, among others. Klein (1994: 131) maintains that relative tenses are "a combination of tense and aspect":

> The notion of relative tense is not necessary to account for the pluperfect nor for the future perfect. We could surely use the label 'relative tense' instead of 'aspect' here. But then, we would also be forced to call the contrast between imperfective and perfective a difference in relative tense, and this does not seem to be a particularly fortunate choice of terms.

Declerck similarly rejects Comrie's conclusion that tenses such as the Past Perfect are 'absolute-relative tenses' and considers nonfinite verb forms tenseless. In turn, he applies the term 'relative tense' to forms which, such as the past perfect, relate a time of situation (S) to a 'time of orientation' or (R) in a temporal domain that is established by a verb in another tense form (Declerck, 1995: 7). This last

qualification is crucial, as it implies that only tenses with two verb forms are considered relative tenses.

It must be noted that using the terms 'simple' and 'compound' or 'absolute' and 'relative' imply different perspectives, hence the two pairs of terms cannot be used interchangeably. However, they overlap to some extent insofar as they describe the same linguistic phenomena. The past perfect tense, for instance, can be described as an absolute-relative tense as well as a compound tense, with each perspective emphasizing certain aspects. Seen as a compound tense, it as form consisting of two verbs in distinct forms and thus morpho-syntactically complex in comparison to a simple tense. In contrast, seen as absolute-relative tense, the Past Perfect expresses a semantic structure combining the relations 'E before R' and 'R before S', R functioning as the intermediate reference point. In short, the term 'compound' (vis-à-vis 'simple') emphasizes the form of the construction, whereas the term 'absolute' (as well as 'absolute-relative' and 'relative') emphasize the semantic dimension.

A straightforward comparison of what each of the tenses listed below (here in the canonical distinction between simple and compound tenses) is in terms Comrie's categories is infeasible, as his distinction hinges on interpretation of context rather than meaning (Comrie 1985: 57).

Simple Tenses	Compound Tenses
present	present progressive
past	present perfect
future	past progressive
	past perfect
	past perfect progressive
	future progressive
	future perfect
	future perfect progressive

Table 1: English Tenses

In summary, several scholars have argued against using the terms 'absolute' and 'relative' (including Comrie's further differentiation) and advocate using 'aspect' in combination with 'tense' to describe and differentiate the same phenomena. Compound or relative tenses in this view are tense-aspect combinations as opposed to simple or absolute tenses that do not include aspect.

The distinction between absolute (or pure absolute), absolute-relative and relative tense – all the more because it is controversial – is not relevant to the analytical purpose of this thesis. The clear distinction between simple and compound forms, in combination with aspect, offers a workable approach to analyzing the mistakes made by learners of English. The model used in the study presented in Chapter 4 is thus based on the model first suggested by Reichenbach – with its crucial distinction of E, R, S – and as further developed and elaborated by other linguists such as McCawley (1971), Comrie (1976) and Lyons (1977). Hence, the term "compound" is used rather than Comrie's "relative" in the sense that, as Klein (1994) and Declerck (1995) argue, such forms are really combinations of tense and aspect rather than a special kind of tense.

A crucial addition to this perspective, which was focused mainly on grammatical aspect, are the analyses and categorization of Aktionsarten or aspectual classes in the domain of lexical aspect (Vendler 1957, elaborated by Andersen 1990, Smith 1991 and Li & Shirai 2000) to be discussed in the following sections.

2.4. Aspect

> Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.
> (Carl Jung)

Looking at temporality in language, i.e. the way in which time is represented through words, three different categories can be distinguished: First, the time of an event, action or process can be related to another point in time. This is also called 'temporal reference' and is realized primarily through the **tenses**. Second, the development of an event, action or process in time, i.e. its temporal course, may be represented in specific ways. This is done primarily through the grammatical feature of **aspect**. Third, certain **lexical items**, most notably verbs, contain

temporal meanings as part of their inherent semantics and can be classified accordingly (Klein 1994: 15).

Whereas tenses are well known to most speakers of English and German as categories of teaching grammars, the categories of aspect and Aktionsart are less familiar. In the attempt to explain aspect, various explications can be found, each looking at it from a different angle than the others and emphasizing specific scopes of application. I will now discuss aspect as a linguistic feature in more detail, focusing on aspect in English only in the next chapter.

Aspect vs. Tense

The term 'tense' is often misleadingly used to cover both aspect and tense. Therefore, it is essential to draw a clear-cut distinction between these two categories as features of grammar. Necessary as it may be, a clear definition of the latter remains controversial. In his discussion of aspect, Comrie (1976: 3) suggests the following general definition of aspect[5]: "aspects are different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation".

Considering the example

(11)   *Kimi was chewing his bone when Oma called.*

we see that the verb *chewing* presents the background situation to the verb *called*, which introduces the event. The call happens during the time of the chewing, which is therefore considered (and expressed as) a situation lasting longer than the call, i.e. it precedes and follows the call, extending before and after it. The verb form *chewing* thus expresses the situation with respect to time in order to explain when the call took place.

Klein (1994: 140) explains that tenses "locate the topic time with respect to the time of utterance, and aspect relates the time of the situation to the topic time." In his explanation of aspect, Klein uses the term 'topic time' (or TT) as a way of referring to the time of the speaker's claim, which is restricted entirely to the time of the assertion.

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[5] Comrie's suggested definition is itself based on Holt (1943: 6).

Therefore, it is valid to say that both aspect and tense are concerned with time, but in different ways. While "tense relates time of the situation referred to some other time, usually the moment of speaking" (Comrie 1976: 1-2), aspect is different insofar as

> [it] is not concerned with relating the time of the situation to any other time-point, but rather with the internal temporal constituency of the one situation; one could state the difference as one between situation-internal time (aspect) and situation-external time (tense). (Comrie 1976: 5)

Since it has been suggested that aspect looks at a situation from inside, we can say that the internal makeup of a situation is seen as either complete or incomplete/in progress at a given point in time.

The features of deixis allow for a further differentiation between tense and aspect: tenses are deictic due to their relation to a reference point, whereas aspect is non-deictic, because the analysis of the internal temporal makeup of a situation does not depend on its relation to any other point in time (Comrie 1976: 14).

> (12) *Gerald played my favorite song on his new keyboard.*

> (13) *While playing, Gerald also managed to feed Kimi.*

Example (12) shows the deictic reference of the past tense, whereas sentence (13) shows the internal relation of aspect (here between the progressive *playing* and the event of feeding Kimi). The above examples also demonstrate that referring to the same situation using one a perfective form and then an imperfective form is not contradictory (Comrie 1976: 4). To summarize the generally accepted characteristics of aspect: it expresses situation-internal time and is non-deictic.

However, the term 'aspect' has not received a universally accepted definition, due to a number of issues. Various linguists have suggested different definitions of aspect, mainly because such a definition depends on the language being described as well. The term 'aspect' appeared for the first time in a French translation of a grammar of Russian in 1830 and was introduced to refer to special language features in the Slavic languages (Kortmann 1991: 11-12). Zandvoort (1962: 19) argues that

> [t]he attempt to transfer the category of 'aspect' from Slavonic to Germanic, and from there to Modern English grammar, strikes one as an instance of misdirected ingenuity.

Spitzbardt (1954: 56) even comes to the conclusion that "[p]resumably nowhere in modern linguistics there is such a muddle as in the area of research on Aktionsarten and aspect", calling his article "'Aspekte and Aktionsarten' – ein Tummelplatz der Terminologie". Apparently, the situation has not improved much since the middle of the 20th century (Kortmann 1991: 2).

The term „Aktionsart" was coined by Karl Brugmann in 1885 to explain the „Art und Weise, wie eine Handlung vor sich geht" (Brugmann 1913: 538), i.e. the manner in which an action progresses. Brugmann's theory postulated that any language possesses multiple ways to express the manner in which actions occur, such as tenses, verbal roots and prepositional affixes (Porter 1997: 116). More recently, it has been used, for instance, by Kortmann to denote phenomena otherwise subsumed under lexical aspect. Kortmann (1991: 19) does not consider this an aspectual category, defining aspect as such as grammatical.

Even massive research efforts have not led to a consistent, clear and generally accepted theory of tense and aspect (Binnick 1991: 3). However, Klein (1994: 2) admits that "on a somewhat global level, most linguists share a certain picture of what these categories are and how they function". This 'certain picture' must needs be vague in the sense that certain points are shared while others have to be flexible, because they have to be adapted to different languages.

In light of such terminological turmoil, it should be pointed out that, although aspect is not as prominent in English as it is in other languages, it has to be considered when analyzing mistakes made by learners of English. In fact, that is one of the crucial reasons why it must be considered, because the learners may experience interference between languages. For one, aspect in English is not as fully developed as for example in Finnish or Slavic languages, where it is therefore also explicitly taught during language learning. For another, the notion of 'aspect' does not feature in second language acquisition, i.e. it is not taught as something separate from tense to students in Austrian schools. Yet, aspect factors into the formulation of tensed sentences in English and may lead to mistakes that require

to be distinguished from mistakes that concern only tense, even if – or especially when – they occur in combination with the latter.

For the time being, aspect will be discussed as a non-specific feature of language, rather than of English or German. As such, Comrie represents aspect systematically as differentiated into the following categories:
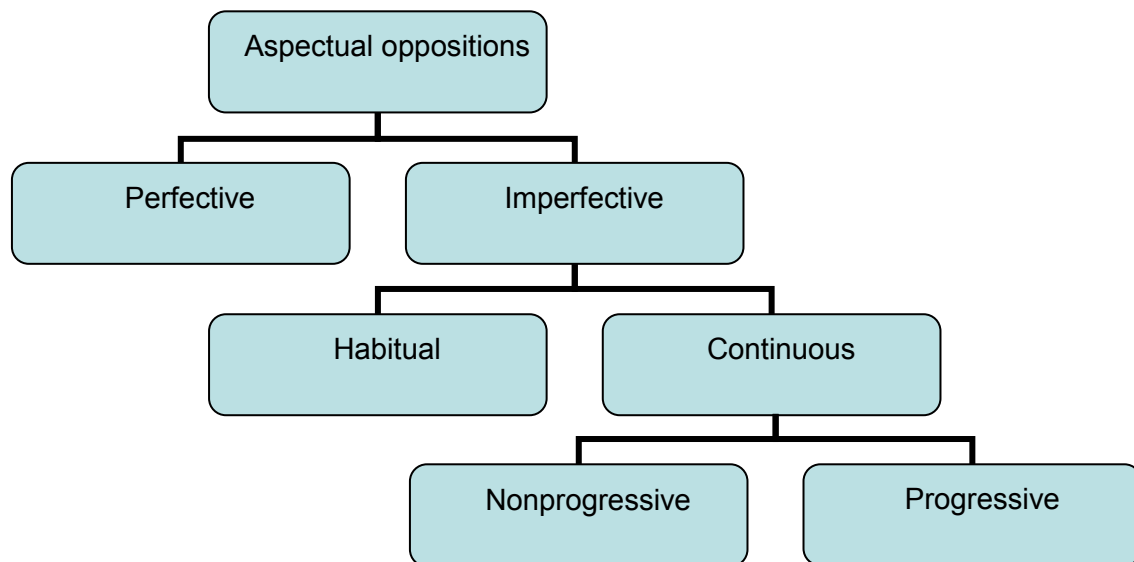

Figure 9: Semantic aspectual distinctions according to Comrie (1976: 25)

Comrie points out that these distinctions are purely semantic and do not necessarily correspond to grammatical categories. In actual languages, aspect is often combined with other categories such as tense, further complicating the matter (1976: 9). As Li and Shirai point out, Comrie neglects to precisely define the two categories of continuous and nonprogressive aspect, giving only a negative definition of what either is not (Li & Shirai 2000: 3). Definitions by negative are often problematic, especially in the application of categories in analysis.

The semantic category of **perfectivity** as opposed to the imperfective is defined as not expressing the internal structure of a situation, regardless of its complexity. Perfectivity therefore reduces a situation to a whole or totality (Comrie 1976: 17-18). While this is often referred to as a 'point in time', Comrie (1976: 18) compares the perfective view of a situation to a "blob" rather than a point, arguing that in some languages, e.g. Russian, perfective forms are not punctual:

> A blob is a three-dimensional object, and can therefore have internal complexity, although it is nonetheless a single object with clearly circumscribed limits. (1976: 18)

A further terminological issue that Comrie clarifies is that perfectivity is often described as a "completed action", putting too much emphasis on the "termination of the situation" (1976: 18). While perfective forms do in many cases indicate the completion of a situation, others refer to the situation as "complete" in the sense of a whole with beginning, middle and end (1976: 18-19). Indeed, some perfective forms, especially of stative verbs, can refer to the beginning of a situation in which case they take on an ingressive meaning, e.g. English *sit* (1976: 20).

A final terminological distinction that, according to Comrie, is significant in talking about aspectual distinctions is the common choice of words describing actions as "resultative" to indicate a successful completion of a situation. Again, he concedes that this is often accurate, but – as in the case of "completed" – it unduly stresses the end of the situation rather than its whole (Comrie 1976: 21).

In contrast to the above, **imperfectivity** looks at situations from within, describing them "as internally complex, such as those that last for a considerable amount of time or include a number of distinct internal phases" (Comrie 1976: 21). In some languages perfectivity and imperfectivity are not incompatible (Comrie 1976: 24). The aspectual category of imperfectivity can be subdivided into further distinctions that are present in concrete languages (Comrie 1976: 24-25). The first such distinction is that between habituality and continousness or durativity.

Habitual Aspect is used to describe

> a situation which is characteristic of an extended period
> of time, so extended in fact that the situation referred to
> is viewed not as an incidental property of the moment
> but, precisely, as a characteristic feature of a whole
> period. (Comrie 1976: 27-28)

Iterativity, i.e. the repetition of an action, is not the crucial characteristic of habituality. By contrast, unbroken actions such as the 'standing' or 'existing' of a monument, are not iterative because there is no intermission to their being, but qualify as durative or habitual aspect. On the other hand, the simple repetition of an action does not make it habitual: someone calling a friend twice (or several times) before having dinner does not constitute a habit, but does when it has become a routine linked to having dinner (Comrie 1976: 27). Thus, habituality is a conceptual rather than linguistic category, describing a situation that is characteristic of an extended period of time, not as an incidental property of the

moment (Comrie 1976: 28). It is furthermore difficult to quantify by the number of repetitions irrespective of the context.

While habitual aspect is opposed to continuous aspect, in some languages such as English it can be freely combined with both subcategories of continuous aspect: progressive and non-progressive aspect (Comrie 1976: 30). In such combinations, however, the second aspect is realized in a separate clause, as in the example:

> (14) *When Uncle Walter came by, I used to be writing the paper.*

Regarding progressiveness, two types of language can be distinguished: in the first type, the use of progressive and non-progressive forms is obligatory for indicating progressiveness and non-progressiveness (e.g. English), whereas in the second type, the use of specifically progressive forms is optional (e.g. Spanish, Italian, French) (Comrie 1976: 33). Comrie places special emphasis on the often neglected fact that progressiveness differs from imperfectivity per se, since the latter includes the special case of habituality (ibidem).

The need to further differentiate continuousness into two forms, i.e. progressive and non-progressive forms, arises from the fact that some verbs can occur in progressive form and others cannot. These verbs are accordingly divided into stative (e.g. *know*, *understand*) and non-stative verbs (e.g. *rain*, *play*, *work*), of which only the latter can appear in the progressive form (Comrie 1976: 35). Progressiveness is thus the combination of continuousness with non-stativity. In the terms of Li and Shirai, progressiveness denotes a "dynamic, continuously changing action in progress, and is generally incompatible with stative predicates" (2000: 12).

Having discussed the systemic distinction between perfective and imperfective including the latter's sub-categories, we now turn to a very general feature of aspect: the fact that it has a grammatical and lexical dimension, i.e. it is manifest in both grammatical features and lexical features. I shall therefore use the terms 'grammatical aspect' and 'lexical aspect' to refer to these two dimensions, even though Comrie (1976), for instance, does not use the exact same terms. The underlying reference to grammaticalised aspect and lexical classes of verbs with internal aspectual meaning are, however, the same. The system of aspectual distinctions discussed above refers largely to grammatical aspect.

2.4.1. Grammatical Aspect

The term 'grammatical aspect' is used to refer to aspectual distinctions "marked explicitly by linguistics devices" (Li & Shirai 2000: 3). These markers include inflectional and derivational morphology, auxiliaries and periphrasis as well as language-specific formal devices (Comrie 1976: 9).

While differences between languages can be found with respect to the use of grammatical aspect, these uses are not entirely idiosyncratic or language-specific (Li & Shirai 2000: 11). In fact, typological studies have shown recurring patterns that allow the assumption that grammatical aspect can be differentiated according to pattern and degree of grammaticalisation (Li & Shirai 2000: 23). The most frequently grammaticalised difference is that between perfective and imperfective aspect, i.e. the distinction between a situation as an unanalyzed whole (taking an external view) and a situation as seen from within (taking an internal view).

The expression of grammatical aspect may be carried out by different means in a specific language. For one, it can influence the inflectional morphology of a language, e.g. French *il lut* and *il lisait* or Spanish *leyó* and *leía*. Alternatively, it can be expressed by means of periphrasis, e.g. English *he was reading* as opposed to the simple verb form *he read* (Comrie 1976: 9). Significantly, the fact that one language, e.g. English, expresses a particular aspectual feature or distinction in grammatical forms does not mean that another language, e.g. German, does so using the same forms or even grammatical forms at all. How grammatical aspect works in English and how it compares to German will be discussed in Chapters 2.5 and 3.1, respectively.

The interpretation of the aspectual properties of any sentence cannot be understood unless the contributions or combination of grammatical and lexical aspect are considered (Li & Shirai 2000: 18). Since this division is different between languages, e.g. German and English, this is an area where L2 learners are likely to make mistakes. For instance, a German-native speaker is used to a lexical choice when expressing an aspectual distinction between *kämpfen* and *erkämpfen*, the first being an activity and the latter an accomplishment (see Chapter 2.4.2), and may therefore be confused by the grammaticalised aspectual distinctions offered by English.

2.4.2. Lexical Aspect

Lexical aspect is also known as situation aspect, inherent aspect or Aktionsart. It refers to aspectual meaning as contained by lexical items themselves (Li 2000: 304). In his seminal work on aspect, Vendler (1957) proposed a four-way classification that has been the starting point for subsequent research on lexical aspect:

- *Achievement*
- *Accomplishment*
- *Activity*
- *State*

As with grammatical aspect, "languages differ in how categories of lexical aspect are realized" (Li & Shirai 2000: 4). Unlike grammatical aspect, which differs strongly across languages, however, lexical aspect is relatively similar across languages. It can nevertheless create problems for L2 learners where differences between languages occur in the encoding of temporal properties.

According to Vendler, state verbs encode situations as homogeneous, having no successive phases or endpoints, such as e.g. *know*. Activity verbs also do not have an endpoint but are dynamic and open-ended processes, such as *run*. Different to activity and state verbs are accomplishment and achievement verbs, both having an endpoint. Whereas the former characterize situations as having successive phases and are therefore gradual or incremental, e.g. *make a chair*, the latter encode events as punctual, occurring instantaneously and therefore over as soon as they have begun, such as *reach.* Moreover, by adding an attribute to a verb that is of one class, the class of that verb can be changed to another. For example, *The roommate was running* necessarily means that she ran, whereas saying *She was running a kilometer* does not necessarily mean that the girl finished running a kilometer, she might, for instance, have stopped along the way (Li & Shirai 2000: 15). Langacker (1990: 86) similarly qualifies Vendler's classification by explaining that

> [it] does not […] amount to a rigid partitioning of the verbal lexicon. Some verbs function comfortably in either class; and verbs that normally belong to one are often shifted to the other by a complement or adverb.

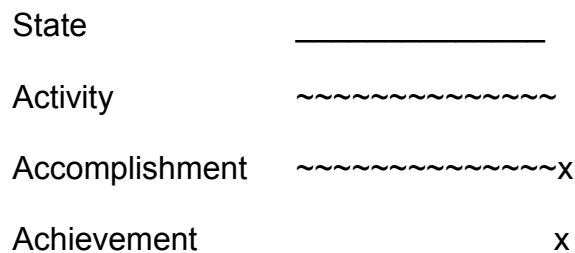The schematic representation by Andersen (1990) offers an illustrative overview of this classification:

State	_____
Activity	~~~~~~~~~~~~~
Accomplishment	~~~~~~~~~~~~~x
Achievement	x

Figure 10: Classification of lexical aspect

In differentiating between these lexical classes, Vendler also explains the use of the progressive aspect with verbs from specific classes. For example, activities and accomplishments are able to appear in the progressive *(She is walking, she is drawing a picture)*, whereas states and achievements are not *(She is knowing Finnish, I am recognizing my dog)* (Gabriele 2008: 6).

Smith (1991: 30) introduces a fifth component to Vendler's system of four classes, namely the semelfactive verbs, such as *knock, tap and cough*. These verbs are akin to achievement verbs in being punctual, but include no endpoint. With progressive marking, they are interpreted as repeated events or multi-event activity, rather than goal-oriented continuous actions.

Analyzing lexical aspect from a different angle, Comrie (1976: 41-51) and others use dual classifications: stative vs. dynamic, punctual vs. durative and telic vs. atelic. Stative verbs such as *sit* express static situations, whereas dynamic verbs such as *eat* express events or processes. In case of stative verbs, all phases of the situation are the same, e.g. in *Pauline knows what I need* whichever moment in Pauline's knowing we consider, it is always the same situation. In case of dynamic verbs, by contrast, we find different phases within one situation expressed by the verb. For instance, in *Petra is making a phone call* she picks up the receiver, dials the number, speaks etc.

Comrie's distinction between punctual and durative verbs refers to verbs that express actions that last in time and those that do not. For example, the word *cough* is seen as a punctual verb, since the action of coughing is rather short. The verb *stand*, in contrast, is regarded as a durative verb due to the longer period in time associated with the action. *Cough* is also a semelfactive verb due to its lack of repetition, and is thus distinguished from iterative verbs which refer to a

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repeated situation. However, Comrie concedes that "it is the situation, rather than the verb, that is punctual" Comrie (1976: 41-42), as there are uses of the word *cough* which would call into question the categorization discussed above, such as "He has been coughing for two weeks now", which refers to continuing symptoms rather than a single act of coughing.

Another contrasted pair of verb classes is telic versus atelic verbs. Telicity is considered to be the property of a verb or a verb phrase which is completed. A verb is seen as atelic if the action or the event is incomplete. Comrie offers as an example the verb phrase *John is making a chair*, which is telic insofar as John's making of the chair will at some point come to an end in the sense that the chair will be ready. The phrase *John is singing*, however, is atelic. Like the former sentence, the verb refers to a durative situation, yet the singing does not have a necessary point of completion. Even if the singing stops in the middle of the song, the statement *John sang* will be true. Regarding the concept of telicity, the difference between telic/atelic verbs and telic/atelic situations is crucial; the verb *sing* as such cannot be categorized as telic or atelic, since the analysis must take into account the situation being described by the full phrase. The phrase *John is singing* is atelic, whereas the sentence *John is singing a song* is telic, "since the situation has a well-defined terminal point" in the sense that John's singing comes to an end when the song in question is done (Comrie 1976: 45).

Krifka (1998: 207) points out the same distinction and further uses the term 'atelic' for a phrasal component that changes the aspectual class of verb from one class to another:

> [I]t is misleading to think that a particular event can be called "telic"• or "atelic". For examples, one and the same event of running can be described by running (i.e. by an atelic predicate, or by running a mile (i.e. a telic, or delimited, predicate). Hence the distinction between telicity and atelicity should not be one in the nature of the object described, but in the description applied to the object.

Thus, similar to the conditions in Vendler's classification mentioned above, the addition of an attribute can lead to a change of the aspectual class of a verb. Both perspectives can show and describe this phenomenon clearly.

An overall comparison of the two analytical distinctions (Comrie vs. Vendler, as extended by Smith 1991) shows an overlap of the categories used. For instance, while the classes accomplishment, state, and activity have the property of duration, the classes of achievement and semelfactive do not. Telic situation aspect can be found in achievements, accomplishments and semelfactives, while states and activities are atelic, as they do not involve changes of state. The full interrelation of the categories can be seen below:

	states	activities	accomplishments	semelfactives	achievements
dynamic	-	+	+	+	+
punctual	-	-	-	+	+
telic	-	-	+	-	+

Table 2: Verb categories (Smith 1991: 30, as quoted in Li & Shirai 2000: 16)

While for the purposes of analysis, the differentiation between grammatical and lexical aspect is essential, in naturally occurring language the two often appear in combination. As a consequence, the analyst must consider not just the verb by itself, but the verb and its arguments, which Smith (1991: 30) refers to as the "verb constellation". In each case of a statement (or sentence), the speaker (or writer) is seen as using a particular combination of lexical items (including lexical aspect meanings) with a certain grammatical form (including meanings encoded in grammatical aspect) (Li & Shirai 2000: 19). Comrie (1976: 50-51) describes restrictions on combinations between aspect morphemes and certain verb types as the "naturalness of combination".

Regarding the combination of grammatical and lexical aspect, a general point needs to be made: Not all lexical aspect categories can be freely combined with all grammatical aspect categories. As a case in point, not all lexical aspect categories can be combined with imperfective grammatical aspect: achievements and semelfactives cannot, but activities, accomplishments and states can. Stative verbs are usually not combined with imperfective aspect, except for uses of stative verbs in the "stative progressive", such as *Kimi is being difficult today*, which occurs only rarely (Li & Shirai 2000: 20-21).

Some languages, including English, accept imperfective/progressive with achievement verbs to focus on preliminary stages of an event, meaning that the point of achievement is very close. For example, *Kimi is winning the race* where Kimi is ahead of all other dogs in the race. As semelfactives imply that there is no duration, the internal imperfective view can be achieved by repetition, as in *She is coughing.* Looking at verbal classes that have duration, i.e. activities and accomplishments, the imperfective view shows the dynamic action of the situation. State verbs, which are also durative, are incompatible with progressive aspect because progressiveness presents a situation as ongoing, requiring it to have successive phases. In contrast, verbs that express processes of cognition, perception, relation and existence have undifferentiated situations. However there are cases where statives can be used with progressive aspect, expressing the "state continuing" (Li & Shirai 2000: 21), such as in French *La mere etait calme* 'the sea was calm' (Smith 1997: 197).

Perfective Aspect

As explained before, **perfective aspect** looks at situations from outside and views them as a single whole. Hence Vendler's **achievement** and **accomplishment** verbs combine naturally with this grammatical aspect**.** Achievement verbs for instance "provide ideal instantiation of such a viewpoint in that they depict punctual situations as single points without internal structure" (Li & Shirai 2000: 21). Accomplishment verbs match with the exterior viewpoint as well, since they indicate that a process has successive phases and include an endpoint.

Activity verbs do not have an inherent endpoint and are therefore incompatible with perfective aspect. The same is true for **semelfactives**: the combination of perfective aspect with semelfactives would express an end without including an endpoint and therefore cannot include completion. **Stative verbs** have neither a starting point nor an endpoint and are therefore also not compatible with perfective aspect (Li & Shirai 2000: 22).[6]

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[6] In English there are instances which allow the use of the progressive with stative verbs. They will be discussed in Chapter 2.5.2.

To summarize the constraints on combinations between grammatical and lexical aspect, it can be clearly seen that there are combinatorial compatibilities and incompatibilities between specific lexical aspects and specific grammatical aspects. On the one hand, there is the nature of the verb itself (and its lexical meaning which carries aspectual meaning) and on the other hand, there is a grammatical construction (which also carries aspectual meaning). Significantly, it is the verb that determines the grammatical aspect that can be applied. Having looked at tense and aspect on a general linguistic level, the next chapter focuses on a particular description of the English tense and aspect system.

2.5. Tense and Aspect in English

Every accomplishment starts with the decision to try.
(Anonymous)

The previous sections on tense and aspect, although they treat both as general linguistic phenomena, have already conveyed a complex picture of the issue. This chapter serves the purpose of explaining the specifics of tense and aspect in English.

Tense

The English tenses are formed grammatically (Comrie 1985: 10), using verb morphology and auxiliary verbs. Their forms are distinct and cannot be used interchangeably. However, some English forms can be used to express different temporal situations, as for example the present tense that can have present, past and future meaning under certain conditions or in specific contexts.

The tenses of the English language are not unequivocally defined, as the scientific community has not agreed on a unified and universal definition of the English tenses. According to some linguists and grammarians[7] there are only two true tenses in English[8], the past and the present (the latter often being referred to as

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[7] See, among others, Seely (2007: 77) and Crystal (2003: 196).
[8] For an in-depth discussion of this question, see Declerck (2006: 100-102).

non-past), since only these two tense forms are exclusively marked in the main verb. The other tenses are marked by additional verbs called auxiliaries. The future tense forms are often seen as not being tenses at all but rather as "grammatical realities of the English verb" (Crystal 2003: 196). The future tense form of *will write* is the simple form of the verb *write* (the unmarked infinitive) and the modal auxiliary verb *will* (Crystal 2003: 196). Seely argues along similar lines:

> Some grammarians define a tense as an inflection of the verb--a change of meaning you achieve by altering the form of the verb. So the past tense of win is won. In this sense, English has only two tenses, present and past. (2007: 77)

However, in EFL teaching 12 tenses are generally taught, plus the special present progressive form of *going to*, which is taught as a future tense (e.g. the *Headway*, *You and Me* and *Meaning in Use* series of textbooks). The strict definition of tense is thus extended or, one might say, abandoned and replaced with "a broader use of the [term tense]: a form of the verb phrase which gives information about aspect and time" (Seely 2007: 77). Hence the textbook view of English tenses is systemic to the point of being simple: each of the six basic 'tenses' has each a simple and a continuous form.

	Present	Past	Future
Simple	*I write*	*I wrote*	*I will write*
Continuous	*I am writing*	*I was writing*	*I will be writing*
Perfect	*I have written*	*I had written*	*I will have written*
Perfect continuous	*I have been writing*	*I had been writing*	*I will have been waiting*

Table 3: Textbook view of English tenses, adapted from Seely (2007: 77)

This simplification of the tense-aspect complex by way of inflating the tense system should be convenient for language learners and is adopted "solely with the goal of immediate intelligibility in mind" (Leech 1971: vii, as quoted in Kortmann 1991: 15). From a linguistic point of view, however, the situation looks strikingly different and such an "all-encompassing conception of tense is not tolerable" (Kortmann 1991: 15). Indeed, Kortmann traces the continuing linguistic discussion

on tense, aspect and Aktionsart to such seemingly simple, but as yet unresolved questions as "How many tenses are there in English?" (1991: 10).

Aspect

From a linguistic point of view, aspect is a prominent feature of the English language. However, it is generally not explicitly taught or even mentioned in EFL teaching (Kortmann 1991: 14), as for example in the school textbooks (*More!, Headway, You and Me*). In contrast, the teaching of Russian or Croatian relies heavily on explaining and recognizing aspectual forms. In EFL teaching, however, the different forms of grammatical aspect are treated as tenses, as in the case of the present progressive form.

Like many other languages, English has grammaticalized and lexicalized aspectual distinctions. Apart from the fact that aspect, as in every other language with aspectual distinctions, relates to time (i.e. the location in time) and thus also relates to the grammatical category of tense by definition, the situation in English is as follows: grammatical aspect contributes to the majority of the English aspect distinctions and therefore significantly overlaps with the grammatical forms of tenses. Therefore this often leads to confusion and error in the grammatical use of the verb forms.

The most basic distinction of **grammatical aspect** in English is that of perfective and imperfective and realizes the fundamental contrast between a completed and incomplete action (see Figure 9).

According to Comrie (1976: 33 "the English Progressive has [...] an unusually wide range" of progressive forms and the distinction between progressive and non-progressive forms is obligatory and not "in general interchangeable, nor can any one of these in general be replaced by the other".

It seems that the use of the progressive tense in English has changed and has become a stronger influence on the English language. Comrie (1976: 38) explains that

> [i]n English the meaning of the Progressive has extended well beyond the original definition of progressivity as the combination of continuous meaning and nonstativity.

For example in the sentence, *He is always coming late*, the progressiveness adds greater emotive effect on the phrase than the simple form come would do by saying *He always comes late*.

Lexical Aspect

The above-mentioned verbal classes exist in English and are referred to as Aktionsarten or lexical aspect.

> Aktionsart, […] has nothing to do with grammar but
> relates solely to the semantics of verbs and predicates,
> more exactly to those semantic properties having to do
> with time. (Kortmann 1991: 13)

In English, **lexical aspect** interacts with grammatical aspect, manifesting in incompatibilities of certain verb classes and grammatical forms. For instance, English stative verbs are generally not compatible with progressive morphology. The sentence *Bianca is knowing how to read Russian* is considered ungrammatical on the interpretation that Bianca is able to read Russian (Gabriele & Martohardjono 2005: 1).

Comrie states that English verbs tend to divide into two disjoint (non-overlapping) classes with respect to possible combinations with grammatical aspectual forms: "those that can appear in the progressive forms, and those that cannot" and that "this distinction corresponds to that between stative and nonstative verbs" (1976: 35).

However, aspectual verb classes in English are not entirely stable. The same verbs are treated sometimes as stative and sometimes as non-stative, depending on the specific context in which they are used (Comrie 1976: 36).

2.5.1. Simple Tenses and Aspect

Present Simple

In language teaching the form of the Present Simple is usually the first tense that is taught to non-native speakers of English. It is formed with the first form of the verb and adds an -s in the 3rd person. In general, it refers to the present time and the present moment and therefore E, R and S are located exactly at the same

point on the timeline as explained in Chapter 2.1. As has already been mentioned in Chapter 2.3.1, only in performative sentences and simulation reports (Comrie 1985: 37) are the situation, the uttering of the phrase and the present moment commensurate. In most cases, however, the present tense refers to situations that are longer than or extend beyond the present moment.

A second glance at the use of the present tense in English reveals that more references to other times exist, as shown in the following examples[9]:

(15) *I am tired.*

(16) *Helsinki lies on the shore of the Gulf of Finland.*

(17) *My dog Kimi chases cars.*

(18) *In the morning Natalia takes a shower, has tea, has her treatment and then walks to the institute.*

(19) *I enclose my cheque for € 250 for the adjustment of my vehicle.*

(20) *Kimi will go wherever there is a treat.*

(21) *Bibi's second snack bar opens next month.*

(22) *I hear Karin has been promoted.*

(23) *I cannot tell him very well. I give him my hand, which he holds in his.* (Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*)

(24) *Komaier argues that there might be even more examples of the use of the present tense.*

Example (15) refers to a rather short period which includes the present moment and can be referred to/seen as an event. In (16) the reference is to an interval of time which is indefinitely long and encloses the present, the past and the future or, in other words, which describes a universal state or fact. Applying the concept of aspectual classes, example (16) can furthermore be considered a case a stative aspect whereas example (17) refers to a habitual action including a repeated

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[9] The examples given in this subchapter draw on the discussion of cases in which the tense forms are used in English in Declerck (1991: 2-3) and Swan (1995: 159-466).

number of incidents. The habit includes the present moment, the past and probably also the future and it is not essential that any of the events occur at the moment of speech. Example (18) describes a series of events. In example (19) the Present Simple is used for formal register. In example (20) in the subordinated clause the Present Simple is used to refer to the future. Example (21) refers to an event in the future that is most likely to happen because it is set or part of a time schedule. In (22) *hear* refers to an incident that happened in the past and is still pertinent now; however, it is very similar to the Present Perfect *have heard*. Furthermore, (23) is a typical example of the historical present, which refers to events in the past and is used to make the story livelier and to include the audience. Finally, the simple present tense is used, e.g. in academic writing, to refer to speech acts in writing that is accepted as part of the present and relevant frame of the discussion, as can be seen in (24).

To summarize, the English Present Simple refers most often to habits, repeated actions, series of events, general facts or truths, present feelings and thoughts as well as fixed events that are planned in the near future. In subordinated clauses, the simple present tense can also be used to refer to the future. Another context- or pragmatics-dependent use of the Present Simple is for instructions or for stylistic effects in narrated past events.

Many theories and interpretations have been proposed about the present tense's reference to present time and the arguable existence of special uses or exceptions in English that do not include the present moment, such as the above examples 18-24. Declerck indicates that some linguists claim

> [...] that the present tense does not refer to time at all, but simply functions as the unmarked tense in the English tense system, and is therefore compatible with any time reference. (1991: 3)

A special form of the present tense simple, i.e. the emphatic present, requires further discussion. By adding the auxiliary verb *do* to the uninflected main verb, more emphasis can be put on the action. For example, *I do plan to finish the paper by the end of the year* stresses the verb and therefore the will of the speaker. This particular form of the present tense, especially its negation in *do not*, is important when comparing German and English and analyzing the errors students make

(see Chapter 3), as there is a lexical similarity between English *do* and German *tun*.

Past Simple

The Past Simple is usually the third tense taught in Austrian schools.[10] It is formed regularly or irregularly. Regular verbs are built by adding the suffix *-ed* to the infinitive form, irregular forms change their forms. Generally, it references the past time and the past moment and therefore S is located after E on the timeline as explained in Chapter 2.3.1. Similar to the present tense, the past tense simple can be used in various ways:

> (25) *Last night I called Bianca.*
>
> (26) *Granny called me several times a day.*
>
> (27) *He stopped for a moment for recollection, and then, with another sigh, went on. (*Jane Austen*, Sense and Sensibility)*
>
> (28) *I wanted to ask you something.*
>
> (29) *I wish I had a better memory.*
>
> (30) *I would be happy if we travelled to the States this summer.*

In (25) the reference is to a single event which is in the past and distant from the present moment. Sentence (26) refers to a repeated event in the past, whereas (27) is part of a literary work and distant from the present reality. (28) is a reference to an attitudinal preterit which indicates social or psychological distance due to modesty or tact. The tense form is past, although the tense meaning is present. Sentence (29) with the phrase *I wish* has present or future meaning. Example (30) refers to an event that might happen in the future and is therefore not certain. Sentences (23) and (24), however, are modal uses of the past tense form. With respect to this last use,

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[10] In adult education the Past Simple is generally taught before the Present Progressive (Soars & Soars 2010). In children's schoolbooks, the opposite is the case: the Past Simple is normally taught after the Present Progressive (Gerngroß, Puchta & Holzmann, 1996).

> [...] most linguists hold that the basic meaning of the preterit is reference to past time, and that the modal uses are special ones. Other, however, point out that what all the sentences […] [above] have in common is the idea of 'remoteness' or 'distance'.(Declerck 1991: 4)

Hence the basic meaning of the simple past is to locate a situation before the moment of speaking.

Using the Past Tense generally implies that the action is not connected to the now. Therefore situations in the past tense are usually seen as completed and perfective. However, in the sentence *Yesterday I met a guy, his name was John* the past tense form *was* does not indicate that the person's name has changed since the day before. Instead, *was* is used here to show the closeness between the meeting and the mentioning of the man's name (Declerck 1991: 3-4). Here, the use of the past tense is preferred (over the factually equally correct present tense) for reasons of understandability: in this sense, tense choices, as Comrie has pointed out, are always deictic.

A similar use of the past tense can be found in reported speech: Sentences that originally were in the present tense in direct speech are changed to the past tense in indirect speech. With respect to standard Englishes, it should be noted that in American English the adverbs *already, just* and *yet* can be used with the past tense. In British English, however, these words, which imply that an action has occurred in the recent past and has an effect on the present moment, always have to be used with the Present Perfect.

Future Simple

The future tense refers to the future time and the future moment and therefore E is located after S on the timeline as explained in Chapter 2.3.1. The English Future Simple is built with the auxiliary verb *will* or *shall* and the infinitive. For this reason, some linguists do not regard the simple future as a tense at all. *Will* and *shall* are also used as modal forms, but only as the secondary use. The term *shall* is very rarely used for future meaning these days and restricted to British English. For the purpose of my thesis I will disregard the differences between *will* and *shall* and concentrate on *will*. Here are some examples of the future tense that can also include the present moment:

(31) *I am leaving. Ok, Tytti and Hanna will join you.*

(32) *I think Italy will win the EM 2012 in the Ukraine.*

(33) *The summer of 2012 will be mild and warm.*

(34) *I will marry you.*

(35) *The next president will be inaugurated in January 2013.*

(36) *Irmi will call me if I don't call her.*

Example (31) refers to a spontaneous decision on an action that will happen in the future. (32) is a reference to an uncertain action in the future and uses the verb *think* to express uncertainty. (33) is also a prediction. (34) refers to a promise in a form that can also be used for threats with regard to a prediction. Example (35) would be used to make a formal announcement of a planned, scheduled event. (36) refers to conditional ideas that will probably happen in the future.

In English there are several forms, sometimes also considered or at least taught as tenses that express future meaning, such as the going-to future. This form is used for an action and an event that is seen as probably happening on account of present evidence indicating it will. Alternatively, it has already been decided and the form emphasizes the idea of intention (Swan 1995: 210). The going-to form will be discussed in the next chapter.

2.5.2. Compound Tenses and Aspect

Present Perfect

The Present Perfect refers to an event before the present moment, therefore E is located before S on the timeline and R coincides with S, as explained in Chapter 2.3.2. It is formed by combining the auxiliary *have* and the past participle of the verb. The English Present Perfect Tense is considered to be an aspect, but it is also different from the other aspects. Comrie (1976: 52) argues that

> [a]spect [...] has been concerned with different ways of representing the internal temporal constitution of a situation. The perfect is rather different from these aspects, since it tells us nothing directly about the situation in itself, but rather relates some state to a preceding situation.

In his general discussion of perfect as aspect, Comrie distinguishes four forms of the perfect. However, he makes the crucial point that "[n]ot all languages that have forms of perfect meaning have the full range" (Comrie 1976: 56):

1. Perfect of result as in *Natalia has arrived*.

2. Experiential perfect as in *Christiane has been to Finland several times*.

3. Perfect of persistent situation as in *I have worked here for nine years.*

4. Perfect of recent past as in *The series "Dallas" has just started.*

While English has all four types, German does not, i.e. German uses the Präsens to express the meaning of persistent situations and allows the use of both Perfekt and Präsens in the case of recent past (see Chapter 3.1 for a detailed discussion of these differences).

The English Present Perfect is a compound tense that is constructed by combining the auxiliary *have/has* and the third person form of the verb. It is used to reference past actions that are connected to the present in some way. These actions either started or happened in the past and still influence or affect the present. Consider the following examples:

(37) *I have known Natalia since February.*

(38) *Jo has taken care of Kimi regularly for quite a few years now.*

(39) *Somebody has broken the oven window.*

(40) *Has Gerald drunk all the Pina Coladas?*

(41) *This is the first time I have stood firm.*

(42) *Mr. Roscher has said that Russia will beat the Czech Republic.*

Example (37) is in reference to a situation that still holds true. (38) refers to repeated actions that started in the past and have continued to occur until the present. (39) is in reference to an action that is already finished, but has an effect on the now. The construction implies that the oven window is still broken, whereas the non-perfect form *Somebody broke the oven window* would allow for the possibility that there is no relevance to the present. Example (40) references a

completed or an achieved action. In (41) the phrasal construction *this is the first time* requires the Present Perfect. (41) is in reference to new information of a recent event, but does not specify when it happened.

It is particularly important to note the difference between actions when time is not mentioned. For example:

(43) *Have you seen the musical 'Sister Act'?*

Here the perfect indicates that it is not clear if the musical has been watched so far by the person asked.

(44) *Did you see the musical 'Sister Act'?*

Here the past tense shows that a specific performance is in question, e.g. last night.

As these examples indicate, the Present Perfect Tense cannot be used if we think of a particular finished time. McCoard discusses the grammatical restriction that English perfect forms cannot be combined with references to a specific point in time in terms of the indefinite past which expresses a past event which is unspecific as to time (1978: 17).

As mentioned before, the Present Perfect Tense is not considered a pure aspect, because it shows a relation between two time-points and looks at the consequences that a prior situation has generated for the present. For this reason, as Comrie explains, the "difference between the perfect and the other aspects has led many linguists to doubt whether the perfect should be considered an aspect at all" (1976: 52). Kortmann (1991: 18) takes this controversy a step further, positing that "[t]he English Present Perfect Tense interacts with tense and aspect, but is conceptually different from both".

Declerck, Reed and Cappelle (2006: 109) see things differently and state that the Present Perfect is, in fact, a tense. They base their conclusion on the argument that

> [...] the preterite, the present perfect tense and the present tense locate the time of the situation referred to in three different 'time zones', [..] the 'past', the 'pre-present' [the time leading to the present moment] and the 'present' [...] [and because of this] the three forms represent three different tense.

In terms of classification, there have been various opinions about whether the present perfect form is a joining of either the present tense or the past tense with an aspectual meaning component of current relevance (Declerck, Reed & Cappelle 2006: 108-109). Binnick (1991: 5) and Palmer (1988: 35), for instance, argue that the Present Perfect should be seen as a combination of the present tense with perfect aspect, using the terms "extended now" (in relation to Aristotle's "derivative present") and "perfect phase", respectively. In contrast, Comrie states that the Present Perfect is closely connected to the past tense, since "in terms of location in time [...] the perfect is not different from the past" (1985: 78).

For the purpose of my thesis, I adopt the position, exemplified by Palmer (1988) and Binnick (1991), that the Present Perfect Tense is a tense-aspect combination which carries aspectual meaning in combination with the present tense and should therefore be subsumed under the present tense. It differs from other aspects in terms of its aspectual meaning. It cannot be considered a simple tense, since it is formed by two verbs and not exclusively marked on the main verb.

Present Progressive

The Present Progressive usually is the second tense taught in Austrian schools and it is formed by the copula auxiliary *to be* and the verb plus the suffix *-ing*. It is also called "present continuous" or "-ing form" in school text books. In general, E is located before, while and after S, which coincides with R (and is the present moment) on the timeline as explained in Chapter 2.3.1.

The Present Progressive is usually used to express incompletion and describes actions that happen at the moment or around now. But the progressive can have other meanings as well. Let's look at the following examples:

(45) *I am writing my paper.*

(46) *I am reading "The Secret" at the moment.*

(47) *The EU is expanding.*

(48) *Where is Tuula driving tonight?*

(49) *I am using only one room at the moment.*

(50) *In the Anne Geddes picture three babies are lying in nutshells.*

(51) *As I write, highly civilized human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me.* (*George* Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*)

Example (45) refers to an action that is happening at the very moment of speaking. It started before the present moment and continues after it. (46) refers to an extended now in the sense of "around now", e.g. every night before I go to sleep. (47) is in reference to developing and changing situations that are happening at the moment. (48) has future meaning. (49) refers to a temporary current situation characterized as an action as opposed to a permanent situation. (50) is in reference to the picture that is being described at the moment. In (51) the progressive forms *flying* and *trying* are used to express the emotional attitude of the writer due to the threatening situation, whereas the simple form *write* shows the factual writing style of the reporter (Hoffmann & Hoffmann 2001: 190).

In general, the Present Progressive is used for duration and action in progress (Binnick 1991: 288), which can also indicate that the action is only temporary. If a non-durative event is expressed in the progressive form, this indicates slow motion. Compare, for instance, the progressive *I am raising my leg* to *I raise my leg.* Leech (1971: 19) explains that *raise my arm* suggests sudden movement, whereas *raising my arm* indicates a more gradual one. Hence, the progressive form presents the event not as instant, but prolonged.

Another characteristic of English is that some verbs that are lexically stative can also be used in progressive forms, thus giving a non-stative meaning, depending on the semantic context. Comrie points out that in English

> [...] the general rule seems to be that lexically stative verbs can be used nonstatively and appear in the Progressive, while lexically nonstative verbs do not lose their ability to be in the Progressive by being used statively. (1976: 36)

If a state is seen as an event as, for example, *Mr G is being stupid,* this implies that he is only acting stupidly at the moment, whereas *He is stupid* would give generally valid information about his intelligence.

The English progressive can also refer to a habitual situation that exists only for a relatively limited period, i.e. cases in which normal habitual aspect would not be used, as for example in *I am seeing a lot of Swedish crime series these days.*

Another use of the progressive form is for plans in the near future, where it is used to "emphasise the idea of 'fixed arrangement'" (Swan 1995: 211). The future built with *going to* is similar in this respect. However, there are further uses of the progressive in English, indeed there are "a number of other specific uses that do not seem to fit under the general definition of progressiveness" (Comrie 1976: 37). Comrie explains that

> [i]n English the meaning of the Progressive has extended well beyond the original definition of progressivity as the combination of continuous meaning and non-stativity. (1976: 38)

It should be noted that the use of the Present Progressive has changed significantly over the years. English is developing diachronically to expand the meaning of the progressive form. Comrie makes this point in saying that

> English is developing from a restricted use of the Progressive, always with progressive meaning, to [...] [a] more extended meaning range. [It] [..] has extended well beyond the original definition of progressivity as the combination of continuous meaning and nonstativity. (1976: 38-39)

Mair and Hundt (1995: 111) similarly observe that "progressives have become more frequent over the past thirty years". Schopf (1974: 26) suggests that the emotive and affective use of the progressive in English, which has only developed since the end of the 17th century, indicates the beginning breakdown of the current system. Schopf describes these changes as processes with an inner logic, but does not discuss the reasons behind this most recent development.

Adverbs such as *always, continually, forever* are generally used with the Present Simple form. However, if these adverbs are used with the progressive, as for example in *My new colleague Markus O. is always working slowly*, they emphasize the speaker's attitude that something happens very often and indeed more often than expected (Swan 1995: 466). Furthermore, the progressive is nowadays compatible with the passive, e.g*. The screen is being fixed*, and so are previously unusual lexical items such as verbs of state and achievement, e.g. *Silvia's handbag is lying on the chair* and *My plant is dying*.

To summarize, the main functions of the Present Progressive are 1) the focus on the momentary progress of an action or actions, 2) to indicate that an action takes

considerable time or is not finished, 3) to show that it has only limited duration or 4) to show the emotional emphasis of the person using the Present Progressive.

Past Progressive

The Past Progressive tense is formed by the past form of the auxiliary *to be* and the verb plus the suffix *-ing.* It is also called "past continuous" or "past -ing form" in school text books. Generally, this tense is used when E is before S and R is somewhere in E, which is a period and not a point on the timeline as explained in Chapter 2.3.1.

The Past Continuous is used to talk about situations that were ongoing at a specific time in the past and therefore has similarities with the present progressive form. Let's consider the following examples:

(52) *Silvia was eating apple chips at 9 pm.*

(53) *We were fighting the whole month of June.*

(54) *While Karin was typing, I was organizing the papers.*

(55) *I was teaching when I received an sms.*

(56) *I was talking to Bianca in the afternoon and she mentioned her treatment.*

(57) *Tomo was always spending too much money for drinking.*

(58) *I was wondering if you could change my working hours.*

In (52) an action is depicted as happening at a particular time in the past. Example (53) is used to "stress that an activity was in progress at every moment during a period of time" (Swan 1995: 417). (54) refers to two situations that are progress at the same time in the past. (55) refers to a prolonged action that was going on when it was interrupted by a shorter action that is in the Past Simple. Example (56) is used to stress that the talking was only background information and less important than the mentioning of the treatment. In (57) the repeated spending of too much money is emphasized by using the progressive. In (58) the past and the progressive show a high level of distancing, since the past tense itself is used to

> [...] make requests (and also questions, suggestions
> and statements) even less direct (and so more polite)
> by using verb forms that suggest 'distance' from the

> immediate present reality. [...] Progressive forms can be used in the same way. They sound more casual and less definite than simple forms, because they suggest something temporary and incomplete. (Swan 1995: 159)

The Past Progressive is atelic and always emphasizes durativity, but the time of the duration can be unknown or unimportant, since neither the beginning nor the end of the situation is explicitly mentioned. The Past Progressive is often used in combination with the Past Simple, when the former refers to a longer background action or situation and the latter refers to a shorter event or action that interrupted the longer action or happened in the middle of it (Swan 1995:417). Therefore, when used in narratives, the Past Simple characteristically provides the main information, while the Past Continuous conveys the background information.

Present Perfect Progressive

The Present Perfect Continuous or Progressive is built by the auxiliary *have* or *has* and the past participle of *be* and the verb with the suffix *-ing*. On the timeline, E is generally located before S and R coincides with S, as explained in Chapter 2.3.1.

Let's consider the following examples:

(59) *Me and Daniela have been running for 30 minutes now.*

(60) *Scientists believe that the ozone hole has been enlarging*
      steadily for many years.

In (59) the progressive form is used to show the focus on something happening 'up to now'. Example (60) refers to "continuous change or development, even if this is permanent" (Swan 1995: 426).

The Present Perfect Progressive is similar to the Present Perfect Simple insofar as it refers to situations that started in the past and continue until now. The difference to the simple tense is that

> [...] the present perfect progressive focus is on the action/situation itself, looking at it as a continuous, extended activity [which] is not necessarily finished [and] [t]he simple present perfect, on the other hand, looks more at the idea of completion and present result. (Swan 1995: 425)

Hence, the Present Perfect Progressive puts emphasis on the durative and progressive characteristics of a situation and is therefore contrary to the Present Perfect of result.

The perfect of persistent situation can be used with both simple and progressive forms. Indeed, sometimes both forms can be used interchangeably without difference in meaning, as for example in *I have been living in Vienna for 13 years* and *I have lived in Vienna for 13 years.* However, if the prepositional phrase of duration is omitted, the progressive and the simple no longer have the same meaning, as in *Istvan has been working for our company* and *Edda has worked for our company.* While the perfect progressive form here indicates that Istvan is still working for us, the simple perfect form means that Edda has worked for us at some time or times in the past (Cowan 2000: 372).

Generally, the Present Perfect Continuous is used with activity verbs, but can be also used with verbs of accomplishment and achievement. In the latter cases, however, the focus is put on the situation itself and not the on-going process. In the phrase *Edda has been telephoning several companies* the continuous form shows repeated rather than continuous action.

Moreover, it can be said that if we ask how many times something has happened, the simple Present Perfect has to be used, because we ask for completed actions, as for example in *How often have you been to the States?*. If we ask how long, the Present Perfect Continuous has to be used, because the action is still going on, as e.g. in *How long have you been studying English?* (Murphy 1994: 20).

Past Perfect

The Past Perfect refers to an event before another moment in the past, therefore E is located before S on the timeline and R is between E and S, as explained in Chapter 2.3.1. It is formed by combining the past form of the auxiliary *have* and the past participle of the verb. Here are some examples of the Past Perfect tense:

> (61) *I saw that Isabelle had called me.*

> (62) *She said that she had had health problems for 2 months.*

> (63) *I had hoped Julia and Tom would stay longer.*

> (64) *If I had not gone to see Bianca at work, I would have stayed at home.*

> (65) *I wish he had talked to me before.*

In (61) an action had happened before a particular time in the past. Example (62) is used for reported speech, where the speech event functions as the moment in the past before that which is spoken about has happened. (63) refers to an unrealized hope or wish. (64) refers to a past event that did not happen and is used for the third conditional. (65) is similar to (64) and describes past events that did not occur. It can also be used with *would rather* (Swan 1995: 427-428).

It should be noted that the Past Perfect is always used together with the past tense, which then functions as the reference point from which another action is seen in retrospect. Similar to the Present Perfect Tense, the action continues until a certain point in time (which is not now as in the Present Perfect, but sometime in the past). The Past Perfect tense is also used in reported speech, where it refers to information in the past that was originally communicated in the Present Perfect or in the Past Simple.

Past Perfect Progressive

The Past Perfect Continuous or Progressive is built by the past form of the auxiliary *have* or *has* and the past participle of *be* and the verb with the suffix *-ing*. Similar to the Past Perfect Simple, S is located after E and R is between E and S on the timeline. E has a durative quality and is atelic as explained in Chapter 2.3.1. However, the Past Perfect places the focus on the durativity of the atelic verb. Let's consider the following examples:

> (66) *It had been raining for 3 hours when we arrived in Myllykoski.*

> (67) *I had been working as a freelancer before I signed the contract.*

In (66) the continuous form is used to show a persistent situation up to the moment we arrived. (67) refers to a continuous situation that does not have to last exactly until the signing of the contract but has to be steady the time before (Swan 1995: 426).

Similar to the Past Perfect Simple, the Past Perfect Continuous has to be used for reported speech when talking about situations that were originally stated in the Past Continuous or in the Present Perfect Continuous, shifting them as it were further into the past. Similar to the Present Perfect Progressive, the Progressive emphasizes the durativity and progressivity of the situation described.

Going-to Future

As the so-called going-to future refers to a future time and a future moment, E is located after S on the timeline as explained in Chapter 2.3.1. The English going-to tense is built with the auxiliary verb *be* and *going to* and the infinitive of the clause's main verb. Here are some examples of the going-to future tense:

(68) *Catina and I are going to meet at the Medusa Club tomorrow.*

(69) *Look at the sky. It is going to snow in Rovaniemi.*

(70) *Rosa and Joonas are going to have a baby in January.*

(71) *Things are going to get better soon.*

(72) *You are going to finish this paper and you are not going to give up.*

(73) *My new home is going to be in the area of Baden.*

As in (68), the *going to* form is used to show a plan or to talk about personal fixed plans and personal arrangements, especially if the decision about time and place has already been made. Example (69) refers to something in the near future with present evidence. (70) predicts the future on the basis of present evidence, even if the future event is distant. (71) refers to predictions about events that are outside people's control. As in (72), the going-to future is also used for commands or orders to tell someone what he or she has to do. Finally, (73) shows how the going-to forms can used to refer to permanent states in the future (Swan 1995: 210-212).

In some instances, the going-to future is used for actions that are seen as more certain to happen than events that are described in the Future Simple. For example:

(74) *The weather forecast says that tomorrow it will be sunny in Retz.*

Here the Future Simple indicates that it is not sure if it will rain.

(75) *Look at the clouds. It is going to rain in Sooss.*

In contrast, the going-to form here indicates that the clouds are already visible in the sky and that rain is very likely to start. Thus, the lack of certainty with respect to a future action when predicting something can be expressed with the Future Simple, whereas the going-to future expresses certainty and intentions.

3. Contrasting German and English Tense and Aspect

Comparison is the best way to judge our progress.
But not with others.
Compare your yesterday with your today.
(Anonymous)

Having discussed the English language system with respect to tense and aspect, this chapter will now take a closer look specifically at the differences between German[11] and English in this respect. Although German is one of the best-studied languages in the world and has intensive long-standing research tradition of more than 200 years, there is still no clear and generally accepted view on the function of the German tense and aspect system (Klein 1994: 129). The number of tenses in German, like those in English, remains controversial. The traditional Grammars, such as the Duden, count six tense forms with a clear differentiation of function: Präsens, Präteritum and Futur Eins are used to show the course of an action, whereas Perfekt, Plusquamperfekt and Futur Zwei indicate completion (Thieroff 1992: 46-47). This distinction is, however, a theoretical and normative approach; it does not adequately describe the conversational use of tenses, particular in Austrian German.

Regarding aspect, Klein states that the Plusquamperfekt and Futur Zwei are not tenses, because they carry aspectual meaning. However, Klein concedes that German does not have grammatical forms to mark aspect, but uses adverbs to emphasize aspectual meaning and express differences in aspect, thus leaving this contradiction unresolved.

> There is more or less agreement that German has no grammaticalised aspect marking; if aspect is expressed at all, then it is by (optional) complex periphrastic constructions. (Klein 1994: 126)

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[11] For the purposes of my thesis, I will refer to 'German' where there is no difference between Austrian German and other standard variants of German and use the term 'Austrian German' where it is necessary to indicate the particularities of the Austrian German standard variant (Muhr 1995: 227-228 and Back, Benedikt, Hornung & Pacolt 1985).

Regarding the number of tenses, English is said to have thirteen tenses, mainly because of a different approach taken by linguists and language teachers. As mentioned in Chapter 2, aspect-marked forms such as the so-called Present Progressive are taught as tenses in English language teaching.

Although English and German originate from the same language stem and share many features even today, the use of tenses differs quite obviously. When comparing the individual tenses, the English present, past and future tense are built similarly to the German Präsens, Präteritum and Zukunft, respectively: *er kommt, er kam* and *er wird kommen* correspond approximately to the English tense forms *he comes, he came* and *he will come.* The first and the second verb form and the auxiliary verb *will* with the infinitive of the main verb are used in these constructions, respectively. The meaning and use of these German tense forms is, however, different in various respects (Klein 1994: 124-125).

Concerning the English aspect forms, the Present Perfect and the Past Perfect are built differently from their apparent counterparts in German: German differentiates between the two auxiliary verbs *haben* and *sein*, depending on the main verb, whereas English uses only *have* as the auxiliary verb.

In German there are two future tense forms, in English five future tenses are commonly listed. In both languages, however, other tense forms can be used to express future meaning. I will now take a closer look at the individual tenses and compare their uses.

3.1. Contrastive Grammar (German – English)

> After all, when you come right down to it,
> how many people speak the same language
> even when they speak the same language?
> Russell Hoban

Present Tense vs. Präsens

In contrast to English, German has fewer possibilities to refer to the present time. For example, in order to translate the German *Ich schreibe* into English, various aspect and tense forms would have to be considered and chosen from, such as *I write, I am writing, I have been writing* and *I do write,* the appropriate choice depending on the context and the use of additional adverbs or phrases.

(76) *I write every day. Ich schreibe jeden Tag.*

(77) *I am writing now. Ich schreibe jetzt gerade.*

(78) *I have been writing for many years. Ich schreibe seit vielen Jahren.*

(79) *I do write, trust me. Ich schreibe wirklich.*

In (76) the translation given is the most common option. In examples (77) and (78) the progressive aspect is used in English because both describe an ongoing process. In (79) the verb *do* carries emphatic meaning and is used, for instance, in contexts where the statement might be unexpected or in contradiction to an earlier statement, question or assumption. German, on the other hand, uses adverbs to express both progressiveness and emphasis in an utterance.

As far as future reference is concerned, the German Präsens can be used similar to the English Present Simple to talk about events that are likely to happen, as for example *Ich gebe die Arbeit Ende 2012 ab*, which stresses probability of the event described. However, the form *Ich werde die Arbeit Ende 2012 abgeben* is also possible and shows that the speaker/writer is absolutely sure. Therefore, this use is occasionally also called *prophetisches Futur* (Dreyer & Schmitt 2008: 122), i.e. 'prophetic future'. There are examples, however, where the Futur Eins for future events woud sound strange, as for example in *Harald wird bald seinen Fünfziger haben.* Here, the use of the Präsens form *Harald hat bald seinen Fünfziger* is more common, describing the future event as the trait of a person. In English, however, the use of the Present Simple for future events is much more restricted, such as to fixed time schedules and plans, e.g. *The train arrives in Graz at 7:32 pm*.

Looking at the position of the variables E, R and S in German, the Präsens carries E on the timeline, and R and S take a different position. In case of the German Präsens, S is conceived of as a specific moment in time, while R and E are located in different places on the timeline in relation to it. The German Präsens furthermore entails that R is not limited in its possible positioning to S (Ballweg 1988: 98).

Future tenses and Zukunft

German only has two future forms, the Futur Eins and the Futur Zwei, whereas English has the following five: Future Simple, Future Progressive, Future Perfect, Future Perfect Progressive and the so-called "Going-to future". As mentioned before, the present tense in both languages can also be used to express future meaning. In the case of German there is only one possibility (*Ich treffe Katrin in Kürze am Grazer Bahnhof*); in the case of English there are two, since both the Present Simple and Present Progressive may carry future meaning. Therefore, English offers a total of seven tense forms to talk about the future. In both English and German the future forms place S before E.

However, there are differences in the usage of the forms in either language. If it is not certain that an action will happen in the future, in German *werden* plus the infinitive are used, as, for example, in *Meine Kusine Petra aus St. Veit an der Glan wird zu meiner Sponsionsfeier nach Wien kommen.* In this usage, *werden* is not a future form but, according to Dreyer and Schmitt (2008: 122), shows the subjective attitude to the situation. It thus carries modal meaning, meaning that an event is seen as happening with some likelihood, but is not certain. By adding particles like *wohl, vielleicht, wahrscheinlich* etc., this uncertainty can be further amplified (Klein 1994: 126).

Past Simple and Present Perfect vs. Präteritum and Perfekt

In German the Präteritum and Perfekt can be used for actions that happened in the past.

> (80) *Ich besuchte diese Woche Kärnten, Retz, Baden und Graz.*

> (81) *Ich habe diese Woche Kärnten, Retz, Baden und Graz besucht.*

The main difference between these two sentences is that in Austrian German the Präteritum form *besuchte* is mainly used for "literary narration ('epic preterite')" (Klein 1994:128) and the Perfekt form *habe besucht* is mainly used in speech and informal writing. Yet, the meaning of the two sentences above is the same.

If adverbials such as *noch* 'still' or *schon* 'already' are added, the meaning of the Perfekt and the Präterium might change, as shown in the following examples:

(82) *Boban aß schon die Mozarella-Sticks.*

(83) *Papa hat schon alle Lakritzstangen gegessen.*

In example (82) Boban was in the middle of eating, whereas in example (83) Papa already ate all the candies. Therefore, the time referred to is not the same for Perfekt and Präteritum and using the two forms synonymously would be incorrect. Klein (1994: 128) points out that the "Perfekt CAN have the function of the English present perfect" and with regard to aspect emphasizes that the Perfekt "can also have aspectual functions".

In English the difference between Present Perfect and Past Simple is strikingly different. The two forms express different times and, in case of the Present Perfect, the existence of a connection to the present moment, and of no connection to the present in case of the past tense. Therefore, the Present Perfect cannot be used if a date is given, as in *Ela and I have visited the Swedish Christmas Market in Vienna last year*. This is different to German, where this situation would be expressed using the Perfekt: *Ich und Ela haben letztes Jahr den Schwedischen Weihnachtsbazar in Wien besucht.* The date does not have to be mentioned, if it is clear from the context, as in *Why didn't Otto buy the bigger Volvo (in summer)?*, where the brackets indicate an unspoken thought.

Another difference to German is that in English the Present Perfect is excluded when deceased people or no longer existing institutions are referred to. By contrast, in German the Perfekt is common in such cases, as in *Mein Opa hat mich als Kleinkind oft in seine Kanzlei mitgenommen* (Hoffmann & Hoffmann 2001: 204).

Comrie furthermore distinguishes differences to German with respect to the specific meanings and usage of the four types of perfect. In case of the perfect of result, German uses the Perfekt to express the same meaning, i.e. that the present situation is seen as the result of a past action. However, in the case of verbs denoting movement, German uses the auxiliary *sein* and the Zweite Partizip to create forms like *ist angekommen*. In all other cases, the perfect of result in German uses the auxiliary *haben* and the Zweite Partizip, creating forms like *hat*

gekocht. The Present Perfect and the Perfekt "resemble [each other] […] in form" (Klein 1994:128), using the auxiliary and the 3[rd] form of the main verb. For German speaking learners of English, a likely challenge in using these forms is the morphological similarity, i.e. a two-part verb construction.

The experiential perfect is used in both English and German to express that a given situation has happened at least once in the past, leading up to the present. As in the case of the perfect of result, morphological similarities exist between the two languages, except in cases when the auxiliary *sein* has to be used in German. In Austrian German, especially spoken Austrian German, it is more common to use *war* instead of *ist gewesen* in such cases, as in *Christiane war schon öfter in Finnland.*

In the perfect of persistent situation, which is characteristic of English (Comrie 1976: 60), German calls for the Präsens as in *Ich arbeite bei DB seit neun Jahren.* While the English use here follows the logic of combining two times, the present and the past, this is in fact not necessary and most languages, like German, do not use the perfect form (Comrie 1976: 60). This discrepancy is a crucial and frequent source of errors for German learners of English.

The perfect of recent past, which expresses temporal closeness between the past and present situation, is only used in British English. However, it is this form which is mainly taught in Austrian schools (as evidenced by the commonly used course books, e.g. *Headway, You and Me* and *Meaning in Use* series). In German, either the Perfekt or the Präsens can be used to express this meaning, creating either *Dallas hat gerade begonnen* or *Dallas beginnt gerade.* Similar to English, temporal adverbs are often used in combination with both tenses in German.

Past Perfect vs. Plusquamperfekt

These two tenses are used almost identically in German and English, locating a past event (E) before a reference point (R) situated in the past before speech time (S). There are two notable differences: The first is that in Austrian German the Plusquamperfekt is often substituted by the Perfekt in spoken but sometimes also in written language. While this would be considered incorrect by normative Grammars, it is widely accepted in practice (Muhr 1995: 227-228 and Back, Benedikt, Hornung & Pacolt 1985). The second difference is that in English after *I*

wish, I'd rather, if only and *as if* the Past Perfect receives the character of the conjunctive, as in *I wish I had taken another topic* (Hoffmann & Hoffmann 2001: 214).

Aspect in German (or the lack thereof)

For the purpose of my study, three points have to be considered. First, Austrian students frequently either ignore or incorrectly apply aspect due to the fact that German does not have grammatical marking for aspect. The issue at stake here is not simply that English is different from German in this respect, but that German-speaking students likely do not even know what aspect is or that such a thing even exists, much less how it is marked grammatically. In particular the concept of 'aspect', as discussed at length in this thesis, is seen as not necessary to teaching English, as learners of English can reach a high communicative competence without understanding the grammatical category.

Second, there exist many similarities between German and English on the lexico-grammatical and morphological level – compare *Ich habe gesehen* to *I have seen*. Both use auxiliary verbs; both also use similar verbs for this function with respect to their meaning, spelling and pronunciation (as well as a shared etymology). Such similarity will often lead to an over-confident use of forms that seem familiar (from German), but are, in fact, misunderstood by or unknown to the student. This, in combination with the first point above, may compound the difficulty of acquiring English aspect for German speaking learners.

Third, a newly acquired form or rule, such as the English gerund, is often overused by language learners (Mitchell 1996: 133). The progressive as the form *-ing* would thus qualify for such misdirected overuse in the case of German-speaking learners of English.

3.2. Second Language Acquisition

> The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.
> (Ludwig Wittgenstein)

My last chapter identified and discussed the differences and similarities between the German and English tense and aspect system. This chapter will now give a

short overview about language learning in order to offer a theoretical framework for the following study.

Second language acquisition (henceforth SLA) "refers to the learning of another language after the native language has been learned" (Gass & Selinker 1994: 4). The term 'second language' can also refer to the third, fourth or any further/subsequent language learned, but it is its defining characteristic that it refers to a language acquired after the native language has been learned (Gass & Selinker 1994: 4).

SLA has been studied and explained from within multi-disciplinary fields, including linguistics, sociology, sociolinguistics, psychology, psycholinguistics and education. The insights and methods achieved have been widely accepted and afford a lucid/comprehensive account of this complex issue (Ellis 2005: 3). The process and mechanisms by which second languages (henceforth L2) are acquired has been a field of research and interest for the past few decades.[12] For instance, Krashen's monitor model with its five hypotheses[13] was on the one hand influential in the field of second language acquisition, but on the other hand also left some important questions unanswered. However, by focusing on these unexplored areas, Krashen's hypotheses significantly contributed to subsequent research (Gass & Selinker 1994: 151).

The study of SLA, according to Gass and Selinker, is about the way a second language is learned, what is learned and what is not learned, and how a new language system is created with having only limited exposure to a second language. Furthermore, such research is concerned with the conscious or unconscious nature of hypotheses that learners deal with regarding the rules of the second language and tries to analyze whether learners compare these rules with their native language or not (1994: 1).

The most important feature of second language learners is that they have learned a language before, which is beneficial when learning a second language, because

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[12] See, for instance, Corder (1967) and Selinker (1972).

[13] The hypotheses are the acquisition-learning hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, monitor hypothesis, input hypothesis and affective filter hypothesis.

the learners already understand how language works. However, they might also produce errors due to inaccurate suppositions about the way how second languages function, based on their first language (Lightbown and Spada 2006:30).

The published surveys of SLA accept two aspects of learning that are common to all language learners:

1. the universals of the L2 acquisition
2. the individual differences of each learner, such as the contextual and personal factors which explain the immense variation in speed and final level of achievement of different L2 learners (Ellis 2005: 3-4)

However, less attention has been given to the individual differences of learners, even though both aspects should be considered equally (Ellis 2005: 4).

Numerous researchers of second language acquisition consider the aim of SLA to describe and explain the competence of L2 learners and its development in the course of time (Ellis 2005: 5). Competence is mainly defined as "a static concept having to do with structure, state or form" (Taylor 1988: 166) and refers to "a language user's underlying knowledge of language, which is drawn on in actual performance" (Ellis 1994: 697). However, despite the extent of research in recent years, there is no standard definition of competence.

Linguistic knowledge is divided into implicit and explicit knowledge. According to Ellis (2005: 5) implicit knowledge appears unconsciously and intuitively so that it can be used automatically in the spontaneous production of language. Formulaic chunks, as for example *I don't know*, are part of our implicit knowledge of language. The native speaker can thus identify what is grammatically or phonetically right or wrong, but might not be able to say why in terms of rules. For example, an English native speaker (henceforth L1 speaker, as L1 designates the first language acquired) is able to recognise and produce the utterance *God bless you*, but would not know that it is an example of the very rare use of the subjunctive in English.

Explicit knowledge, on the contrary, is conscious and metalingual. This means that the learners are aware of the rules that exist so that they can explain what they know (Ellis 2005: 5-6). Having knowledge about the metalanguage, according to Ellis (2005: 6) and Krashen (1981: 98), is identical to learning.

A further distinction, made by Ryle (1949), is that between the knowledge of a proposition ('knowing that') and possession of a skill ('knowing how'). Following Ellis' conclusion that learning is similar to explicit knowledge, language acquisition can be seen as similar to implicit knowledge (Ellis 2005: 5-6).

Role of the Native Language

The role of the native language for learning a new language is known as language transfer. Lado argues that there is a tendency for people to transfer their knowledge of their first language and of their culture, therefore transferring the forms and meanings of the first language to the language newly learned. This concerns the production, hence the speaking and writing, as well as the reception or the understanding of the new language (Lado 1957: 2). The concept and study of transfer is thus concerned with the influence of L1 on L2 in the process of acquisition, including both reception and production. A crucial distinction has to be made between positive and negative transfer. The former is known as facilitation and means that the transfer of the old knowledge results in something correct, whereas the latter is known as interference, referring to the errors that are caused when the knowledge of the native language is erroneously transferred to the new language (Gass & Selinker 1994: 54-55). For the purpose of my study, which investigates errors made by L2 learners of English, I will focus on negative transfer only. Further concepts, such as the term 'cross-linguistic influence' introduced by Sharwood Smith and Kellerman (1986), are neutral to the above-described phenomena of 'transfer' or 'interference'.

According to Gass and Selinker (1994: 89) cross-linguistic transfer includes more than only L1 transfer, but also interlingual effects such as avoidance, language loss of the native language and rate of learning. Avoidance refers to the language learners' choice of using or not using a specific form or structure, due to differences or similarities with respect to their L1. If a form is too complex, it might not be used even if it is known. Moreover, if there are many similar structures in the two language concerned, they might also be avoided because the student may not trust the similarities being real (Gass & Selinker 1994: 90). If the acquisition of a second language has harmful effects on the native language, linguists refer to this as language loss. Such loss is mainly caused by reduced exposure to L1 (Cook 2003: 12). Learning rate concerns the distance between L1 and L2. If

numerous cognates exist between the two languages, the learner will have more capacity to focus on other aspects of language (Gass & Selinker 1994: 91).

In the study of transfer, especially interference, a crucial analytical tool is contrastive analysis. Contrastive analysis compares the first and second language in order to look for similarities and differences so that potential errors can be determined for the "ultimate purpose of isolating what needs to be learned and what does not need to be learned in a second learning situation" (Gass & Selinker 1994: 59). This search for similarities and difficulties focuses on phonetics, morphology, syntax and the cultural system of the languages compared, pursuing the aim of predicting which areas are either simple or difficult for language learners (Gass & Selinker 1994: 60). Lado (1957: 59) claims that

> [t]hose structures that are similar [between the two languages compared] will be easy to learn because they will be transferred and may function satisfactorily in the foreign language. Those structures that are different will be difficult because when transferred they will not function satisfactorily in the foreign language and will therefore have to be changed.

However, what is easy and what is difficult is a subjective issue for each individual learner and therefore a likely difficulty indentified on the basis of contrastive analysis does not automatically mean that it will be a source of error for a specific learner. Studies have also shown that if two languages are compared, as in the case of English natives learning French and French natives learning English, it was not the same type of errors that were made. Critics of contrastive analysis argue that not all predicted mistakes occurred and not all occurring errors were predicted beforehand (Gass & Selinker 1994: 65). The influence of the native language is obvious but "far more complex than the simple 1:1 correspondence" (Gass & Selinker 1994: 64) and there are other factors that affect second language acquisition. These other factors may include innate principles of language, attitude, motivation, aptitude, age and other languages formerly acquired (Gass 1996: 561).

Wardhaugh (1970: 123) proposed a distinction between a strong and a weak version of the contrastive analysis, with the former predicting the errors in advance and the latter dealing with errors and using the contrastive analysis only after errors occurred and in order to explain them post factum. This approach of

identifying the source of errors as they occur without predicting them was, in fact, the beginning of the method called error analysis, which will be dealt with in the following section (see Chapter 3.3).

In order to acknowledge and grasp the more complex situation of SLA, the concept of 'interlanguage' was introduced by Selinker (1972). It refers to the mental grammar that is constructed by the learner at a certain stage in the learning process (Ellis 2005: 54). This language system consists of various elements that may come from the L1, L2 or have a different origin altogether. A learner's interlanguage consists mainly of implicit linguistic knowledge, which is the kind of knowledge we have of our native language.

The concept of fossilization, which refers to the cessation of a learning process, is closely connected to interlanguage. If a part of a language, such as a linguistic form, rule or a feature, fossilizes, it stays in a form that differs from the correct norm of the target language and "continues to appear in performance regardless of further exposure to the target language" (Random House Dictionary of the English Language 1987: 755)

These processes have also been interpreted from the perspective of behaviourism. This school of thought sees language learning as a process of forming and performing of habits. An automatic reply of the learner is thus seen as caused by a certain stimulus:

> Already learned habits interfere with the learning of new habits as a result of proactive inhibition. Thus, the challenge facing the L2 learner (and the language teacher) is to overcome the interference of L1 habits.
> (Ellis 2005: 54)

Since the behaviourist perspective offers a framework of explaining the mechanisms behind interference in SLA, it does not enter the analytical part of my study.

Aspect in Second Language Learning

Where second language acquisition is concerned, Li and Shirai (2000:52) point out that tense is more important than aspect for SLA. Housen (1993) believes that interlanguage is more tense-prominent than aspect prominent because learner's past tense forms where associated with past time and less with the perfective aspect and that the association between tense forms and inherent aspect was not

very strong. Tense, Li and Shirai (2000: 52) point out, is also acquired before aspect. While much research supports this view, it is not universally shared and disagreements between research findings are frequent.

The study of the acquisition of aspect in second language acquisition started in the mid-1980s and has strongly intensified since then (Andersen 1986, Andersen & Shirai, 1994; Bardovi-Harlig, 1992; Klein, 1994; Li & Shirai, 2000). As mentioned in Chapter 3.2 aspect is expressed crosslinguistically in different ways and, therefore, the acquisition of aspect is often complicated by language specific characteristics. Johansson and Stravesand (1984: 144) correctly claim that the acquisition of the progressive is a challenge for language learners of all levels, especially if their L1 does not have a grammatical feature similar to the progressive. Notwithstanding the fact that this field has been researched extensively, there is still no theoretical explanation "of why L2 learners have apparent difficulty acquiring aspectual notions in a second language" (Gabriele & Martohardjono 2005: 94).

With respect to numerous languages, the order in which aspectual distinctions appear in the process of SLA were studies. For instance, Bailey (1987) found that learners master the Present Progressive before the Past Progressive. From a similar perspective, Andersen (1986) found that learners of Spanish acquired past perfective (preterite) earlier than past imperfective (imperfect). Andersen's work also exemplifies another trend in the study of the acquisition of aspect in L2 learning: a focus on how verbs belonging to different aspectual classes are acquired chronologically. The assumption of most approaches is that such an order is virtually identical or at least similar across languages, at least those that share a common ancestry (Li & Shirai 2000: 47-48).

It has been demonstrated, for instance, that in the case of both Spanish and Italian, there is a certain order in which verb classes appear with past perfective:

1. achievement
2. accomplishment
3. activity
4. state

Notably, the order in which verb classes appear with the past imperfective was the opposite:

1. state

2. activity

3. accomplishment

4. achievement

Other research, such Housen (1994), found that specific tense forms (present tense) are more connected with specific verb classes (stative and durative verbs), whereas other tense forms (past tense) correlate more closely with other verb classes (dynamic and punctual verbs). Both findings – i.e. the typical sequence of acquisition and correlation between tense forms and verb classes – may be relevant for connecting errors made by L2 learners to L1 transfer.

On the basis of much research including the work reported above, linguists formulated, modified and later criticized the Aspect Hypothesis to explain on a general, if not universal level how aspect is acquired in language learning. Andersen and Shirai (1994: 133) explain that

> first and second language learners will initially be influenced by the inherent semantic aspect of verbs or predicates in the acquisition of tense and aspect markers associated with or affixed to these verbs.

Hence, learners are led by the lexical classes when producing inflectional morphology. For instance, language learners use past tense marking *-ed* with verbs that semantically include natural endpoints, such as *die* and *draw a picture.* On the other hand, the progressive marker *-ing* is added to durative and dynamic verbs, such as *play* and *swim* (Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds 1995: 124).

In more detail, the hypothesis model consists of four connections between lexical verb classes and grammatical marking:

- L2 learners first use perfective or past marking with verbs of achievement or accomplishment and only later extend their use to activity and stative verbs.

- If a language has a progressive form, the acquisition of the progressive morphology is first limited to activity verbs and then extended to accomplishment and achievement verbs.

- L2 learners do not extend the morphology of progressive aspect, i.e. *-ing* in English, to stative verbs incorrectly.

- Learners of languages that mark the distinction between perfective and imperfective, the marking of imperfective past appear later in the acquisition process than perfective past marking. Furthermore, learners first apply imperfective past marking to stative verbs and only later apply imperfective

marking to verbs of the aspectual classes of activity, accomplishment and achievement (Gabriele, Martohardjono & McClure 2005: 809).

A crucial point is that the Aspect Hypothesis is independent of the learner's L1 because it assumes that there is no influence of the L1 transfer on the key points of the hypothesis itself.

Several points of criticism and limitations have been raised against the Aspect Hypothesis and it is not consistently supported in L2 studies (Klein et al. 2011: 3). One study suggested that the aspect hypothesis concerns primarily lexical aspect and does not concern grammatical aspect (Andersen 1989, as quoted in Li and Shirai 2000: 52). In relation to this, Li and Shirai (2000: 53) argue that, for the acquisition of past tense morphology in English as L2, lexical aspect is, in fact, more important than grammatical aspect – which offsets Anderson's criticism at least with respect to past tense morphology.

However, one of the most important findings in the research area of aspect acquisition in L2 has been made by Bardovi-Harlig (1992). She pointed out that form is acquired before meaning by language learners and that they may therefore be able to use grammatical forms even before the whole range of the semantics associated with the form is acquired (Bardovi-Harlig 1992: 253-278). Thus, it has to be investigated how specific learners understand these forms, which among other things encode aspect, and how this relates to errors based on language transfer. A form acquired before its semantics, i.e. a particular aspectual distinction, which looks similar to a known form in L1 may easily become the source of an error.

Acquisition of English Tense and Aspect by German-speaking Learners

Research on the acquisition of the English tense and aspect system by German speaking learners has been mainly restricted to the variant of German spoken in Germany (see Clyne 1992 and Zeman 2009 for an overview on the pluricentric view of the German language). Research on Austrian German learners of English, on the other hand, seems to be in its infancy. As the data analyzed in the present thesis consist of tests written by Austrian German-speaking students, I will focus my discussion on such limited research on Austrian German speakers' acquisition of English aspect and tense as much as possible and draw on general research into German-speaking L2 users to provide an overall account. The focus on

Austrian German is necessary insofar as the former differs from Germany's standard in several aspects relevant to tense and aspect: Plusquamperfekt is used considerably less frequently in Austria than it is Germany, while Perfekt is the most frequently used tense form in spoken Austrian German (Muhr 1995: 227-228 and Back, Benedikt, Hornung & Pacolt 1985).

A study into lexical aspect carried out by Schmiedtová (2011) with English learners whose L1 was German indicated that difficulties with the acquisition of aspect in English may not simply be an issue of grammatical correctness or lack of knowledge of rules, but stem from a much more fundamental cognitive pattern related to their L1 (167). Using memory, language production and eye-movement tracking, Schmiedtová studied how verbs with one aspectual meaning in the learners' L1 and another aspectual meaning in English as L2 coped (or did not cope) with this difference. Her results showed "that conceptual restructuring of complex structures is rather limited and seems not to be attainable for highly proficient learners in the L2" (ibidem). Thus, even highly proficient L2 learners (such as translators) who are German L1 speakers retain L1 patterns cognitively (ibidem). This cognitive-linguistic perspective may provide valuable insights into why, even at a proficient level, German-speaking learners of English find aspect such a difficult issue.

To predict the successes and difficulties during the acquisition of English as L2, it should be possible to apply the Aspect Hypothesis (see above, chapter 3.2). As with other L1s, the effect of German as L1 on acquisition has been tested and lead to criticism of the general Aspect Hypothesis. In his study, Rhode (1999: 360) analyzed the speech of two German children learning English was with respect to their use of aspectual verb classes. His results did not support the aspect hypothesis in several key respects, indicating specific problems of German L1 speakers. While, in accordance with the hypothesis, mainly achievement verbs were modified for past forms and multiple activity verbs were inflected for the progressive forms, the use of the progressive created difficulties across verb categories. To accommodate these conflicting results, Rhode (1999: 362) assumes a L2-tense hypothesis assuming that the L2 learner interprets grammatical aspect forms "as temporal distinctions, [...] such as the progressive form [...] [being] used with present, past and future meaning without necessarily encoding progressive aspect". He furthermore assumes that the learner acquires

temporal characteristics which he/she can distinguish before the grammatical aspectual distinctions (ibidem). Notably the learner's L1 seems to be irrelevant for this development, even if aspectual forms exist in the learner's L1, such as in Polish (Buczkowska & Weist 1991 as quoted in Rhode 1999: 362).

Difficulties in the acquisition of the English progressive by German L1 speakers are also shown in a later study by Rhode (2002). German learners have problems to "identify the most prototypical function of the progressive form to mark ongoing activities" (211). He also found that interference causes errors due to the morphological resemblance between the English suffix *-ing* and the German infinitive ending *-en*, such as in the case of *singing* and *singen*.

In fact, the role of transfer and interference is essential when looking at the acquisition of English by German L1 speakers. Several studies have considered this in detail without explicitly referring to the Aspect Hypothesis or engaging in the discussion of its accuracy or lack thereof. In a study carried out by Hecht and Green (1983) three sources of errors were identified that could be traced to negative L1 transfer. First, the Future Simple caused difficulties due to the common use of the Präsens for future meaning in German (Hecht & Green 1983: 50-51). This finding is supported by Grzega (2003: 7), who explicates that English makes use of several different morphological forms to refer to future events, whereas German tends to use only one. It should, in addition, be pointed that English use of viable forms depends on the planning, certainty, intention, durativity, completeness, and regularity of a future event as seen from the speaker's point of view. In German, however, future meaning expressed in Präsens is recognized either through contextual cues or lexical marking by adverbs.

The second frequent difficulty identified by Hecht and Green (1983: 51) was manifest in the use of the Present Perfect instead of the Past Simple. Interestingly, their study was able to show that this error is restricted to the southern part of Germany. Significantly, the variant of German spoken in Austria is very similar to that variant of German. As a third error cluster, they identified the underuse of the progressive form. This, however, only accounted for 5% of the tense and aspect errors and thus only played a marginal role in Hecht and Green's study (1983: 52).

Also investigating the effects of transfer in German-speaking learners' acquisition of English, Körberl (1989) studied two groups of Austrian German speakers – one with and one without learning experience in English and/or French – and their evaluation of their acquisition of English and French as L2. Both groups were asked to rate the difficulty of English in comparison to French on a scale from the extrema 'easy' to 'difficult'. The results showed that both groups found English easier than French. Along similar lines, Knapp (1989: 308) observes that English in general is seen to be a language that can be acquired with relative ease, especially because of two factors: Its little-developed morphology and the features of English already familiar to the German L1 speaker. These factors would seem to imply that the use of the simple tenses, which to some extent are similar in German and English, should be without difficulty for advanced learners of English. However, Knapp (1989: 308) also admits that with regard to the aspect and tense system the large extent of what is "seemingly known" leads to interference and thus, in turn, can increase difficulty.

While, as we have seen above, similarities may lead to difficulty for the German-speaking learner of English, this has also been proven for differences between the two languages. In particular, the lack of aspect marking in German is an important factor in German L1 speakers' acquisition of English, leading to frequently incorrect use of aspectual forms. Liszka (2002: ii) points out that "establishing the syntactic representation of tense/aspect features is problematic, if these are not instantiated in a speaker's first language, giving rise to persistent difficulty". This suggests that the non-existence of the progressive forms, for instance, in German leads to persistent problems for German-speaking students of English.

The often anecdotal impression that German-speaking students commit specific mistakes more often than others has been investigated in various studies looking for error clusters indicating particular difficulties and their sources. Erling (2004: 249), for instance, found three variations in the use of tense and aspect in German English[14], in the sense of deviations from standard Englishes. First, the use of the

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[14] Viereck (1996:16) argues that "just as it has become accepted practice to speak of African English and Asian English one can also refer to European English or Euro-English bearing in mind that sub-varieties exist, such as Italian English or German English".

Present Simple instead of the Present Perfect is a common mistake of German L1 speakers. Another such deviation of German English is the erroneous use of the Present Perfect instead of the Past Simple, especially when past adverbs such as *in 1973, ago, yesterday*, etc. are involved. The third variation in German English according to Erling (2003: 250) is "the overuse of the progressive aspect or the use of the progressive with stative verbs". Specifically, she refers to the predominant use of stative verbs that also have a dynamic meaning, such as *have* in *Mark is having a good time*, which would then characteristically be misused by German-speaking learners of English in utterances such as *Mark is having many books* (Erling 2003: 250). Learners may thus lack the essential understanding of lexical aspect and its interplay with grammatical aspect. Whether these findings apply equally to what Erling might term 'Austrian-German English' remains to be investigated.

Although children in Austria today to some degree may acquire English as an L2 outside the classroom, the tutored form of learning taking place in Austrian schools must be considered the main source of acquiring English. Moreover, it is the only form in which tense and aspect (as tense forms) are explicit subjects of learning and testing. By implication, it is also the only viable venue to improve teaching with the help of insights gained in SLA research.

The subject English is compulsory in Austrian AHS schools and, in most schools, is taught as the first foreign language (BMUKK 2004). The role of crosslinguistic interference recently seems to have been considered in developing the new curriculum for first and second foreign language in Austrian schools, introduced in 2004. Even with more emphasis than the preceding curriculum (which was valid until 2003 and thus for the majority of time that the students in my study were taught), the new curriculum demands the promotion of the 'reflective comparison of languages' in the classroom. Its declared aim in this is to raise the efficiency of the language acquisition:

> Der reflektierende Umgang mit Sprache (auch im Vergleich mit der Unterrichts- bzw. Muttersprache, mit Volksgruppen- und Nachbarsprachen bzw. mit anderen Fremdsprachen) ist im Unterricht zu fördern. Durch vergleichende Beobachtungen ist die Effizienz des Spracherwerbs zu steigern, die allgemeine Sprachlernkompetenz zu erhöhen und ein vertieftes Sprachverständnis zu ermöglichen. (BMUKK 2004: 2)

In contrast, the old curriculum was much more specific with respect to the learning goals for tense aspect. It not only mentioned "Aspekt", but also specified "progressive" and "non-progressive aspect", lexical aspect at least in terms of stative verbs, "perfective" and "non-perfective aspect" (particularly with respect to time adverbs), distinguished between "time" and "tense" as well as factors which determine use of future forms (mentioning intention and promise) (BMUKK 2002: 4-11).

The changes in the curriculum thus on a general level reflect what Schloter (1992: 138) points out by way of his criticism of Dulay, Burt and Krashen's (1982: 269) rule "Do Not Refer to a Student's L1 When Teaching the L2". The tendency, exemplified by the Austrian curriculum for English as L2, is thus to more extensively compare languages within the foreign language teaching classroom. However – and in contradiction of this general trend –, the Austrian curriculum has completely dropped the issue of tense and aspect in English as L2, referring to grammar only as an overall category to be subordinated to communicative functions.

Besides the curriculum, the teaching and acquisition of tense and aspect in the English classroom is connected to the material that is used in the lessons. Römer (2005: 171) points out that "the first five few years of English language instruction in German school are very much determined by a particular course book series". The situation in Austria is quite similar concerning the prevalence of specific textbook series. Looking at the most widely used textbooks in Austria (e.g. the *More!, Headway* and *You and Me* series), it must be noted that by the end of the 7[th] grade AHS (English being taught as the first foreign language) all tense forms should have been acquired by the students. By the classroom definition of tense, this would also include all grammatical aspect forms, i.e. progressive and perfect compound tenses. Following a recently introduced series of textbooks, the 9[th] grade AHS begins teaching English tenses from the beginning (see the *New Opportunities Pre-Intermediate* textbook series): The Present Simple is taught as the first tense form, followed by the Past Simple etc. This repetition is intended to serve as a profound basis to gain proficient knowledge of the use of the English tense and aspect system.

Regardless of the specific textbook used, a certain pattern in the sequence of teaching tense forms can be observed: Simple forms are always taught before progressive forms, such as the Past Simple being taught before the Past Progressive. Niemeier and Reif (2008: 328) confirm that

> [although] the English tense and aspect system occupies a prominent place in the grammar sections of German school curricula for the subject of English [...] it seems that [it] constitutes a major source of error even for advanced learners of English.

Niemeier and Reif (2008: 326) go on to link this persistent difficulty to textbook grammars, which emphasize form and use of grammatical constructions, but often ignore their meaningfulness. Therefore, certain grammatical units, which are different to those in the students' L1 or do not even exist in their L1, are more likely to cause difficulties. They argue that in teaching the difference between *Eric built a snowman* and *Eric was building a snowman* German learners should be made aware that the simple and progressive forms merely express different ways of interpreting a situation, rather than different situations, in order for them to understand and, consequently, be able to apply progressive and simple forms correctly in any other tense as well (ibidem 331).

Niemeier and Reif (2008: 326) furthermore argue that simplified rules used in schools may cause overgeneralizations which result in incorrect uses of tense and aspect forms. This includes, for instance, the rule that sentences including the Present Perfect never include a precise point in time (see their example of the textbook *English G 2000*, Derkow-Disselbeck, Harger & Woppert 2000). The textbook *More! 3*, which is predominantly used for the 7th grade in Austrian schools at the time of writing, includes a similar rule:

> Du verwendest das present perfect, um auszudrücken, dass etwas vor kurzem oder zu einem unbestimmten Zeitpunkt passiert ist. Die genauen Zeitumstände interessieren dich dabei aber nicht. (Gerngross et al. 2009: 65)

According to this rule, a sentence like *The Dalia Lama has been living in exile since 1959* would be regarded as grammatically incorrect and would confuse German learners of English. Thus, Niemeier and Reif (2008: 332) recommend that time concepts in tense and aspect marking be explained in order to make rules as

the aforementioned redundant. Taking a strong stance on teaching, they posit that students "need to realize that in English, the speaker has to make a choice between the progressive and non-progressive aspect every time he/she wants to refer to a situation" (ibidem 347). Owing to the difficulties resulting from both similarities and differences between the German and English tense and aspect system, and being insufficiently prepared by school teaching, so Niemeier and Reif's conclusion, German learners of English often confuse the progressive and the simple forms, lacking a fundamental understanding of their concepts, and therefore regularly neglect the progressive and erroneously use the simple tense as a neutral form (ibidem 349).

Keeping in mind the current state of research on German L1-speaking learners of English, specifically the limited amount of research that has been conducted on learners speaking the Austrian German variant, it is likely that insight and a better and understanding of the error clusters produced by this specific group can be used didactically to reduce the number of errors and thus help facilitate the acquisition of English as L2 in Austrian schools.

3.3. Error Analysis

We learn from failure, not from success!
(Bram Stoker, *Dracula*)

Looking for a definition of error, I found Lennon's formulation especially useful: "A linguistic form or combination or forms which, in the same context and under similar conditions of production, would, in all likelihood, not be produced by the speakers' native speaker counterparts" (1991: 182). While some linguists differentiate between the two criteria of grammaticality and acceptability, the definition given above does not distinguish between them. Grammaticality, on the one hand, can be measured by not-breaking-the rules. Acceptability, on the other hand, is a subjective assessment that often includes stylistic rather than grammatical evaluations (Ellis 2005: 56).

Error Analysis (henceforth EA) looks at errors that students make in their learned language either in speech or writing and "consists of a set of procedures for identifying, describing and explaining learner errors" (Ellis 2005: 51). This approach aims to identify what learners actually know by comparing the errors

when producing the target language (TL) and the TL form itself (Gass & Selinker 1994: 67). Error analysis is thus an analytical framework for studying learner mistakes as in my empirical analysis. Hence, its procedures and principles, described in the following, inform my study.

The first step in EA is to analyse the learner language is and then attempt to explain the errors. These errors may be due to the differences of the native language and the target language. As an analytical framework, EA is not concerned with predicting errors, but provides feedback for teaching and also attempts to show how languages are acquired (Ringbom 1994: 740). It is similar to contrastive analysis "in that both start from learner production data, although with contrastive analysis the comparison is made with the native language and with error analysis it is made with TL" (Gass & Selinker 1994: 67). Therefore, error analysis relates to the contrastive approach as an explanatory component.

Errors show evidence of the status/condition of a learner's knowledge of the second language. Gass and Selinker consider errors as an enriching feature for research into SLA, because they can be seen as clues to how the learner tries to find out how the L2 functions and "imposes regularity" on the language learned (Gass & Selinker 1994: 66). Corder argues when L2 learners "produce sentences that differ from the target language, we may assume that these sentences reflect the learners' current understanding" (1967: 24).

Critics of EA have pointed out that, in the absence of other information, it is problematic to rely on errors as the sole piece of evidence. EA does not provide a complete whole of learner language, because it misses what learners do correctly by focussing only what they do not do correctly. Thus, the problem is that a non-existing mistake, i.e. a mistake that is not made, does not necessarily mean that the learners do not make it, but may indicate simply that they avoid using the respective form (Ellis 2005: 70). Such avoidance might occur because the student does not have a certain grammatical feature in his/her L1, e.g. relative clauses, and might therefore not use it in the TL. However, if the learner uses the unfamiliar construction, then he/she probably uses it very cautiously and accurately. As a result, the learner does not err and might be seen as having more competence of the L2. However, if the learner erroneously uses a construction, maybe because

his/her L1 features a similar but nevertheless different construction, and errs, then this counts as a mistake (Gass & Selinker 1994: 68-70).

EA has a long history of analysing learner language that reaches back to the 18[th] century when prescriptive grammarians approached the topic to show which forms should be used and which should not. Error analysis as it is understood and practiced today, namely being "a research tool for investigating how learners acquire an L2" (Ellis 2005: 52), developed in the 1960's when it was seen as a superior alternative to contrastive analysis.

As a by-product of EA, dictionaries of errors have been published, such as "Learner English: a Teacher's Guide to Interference and other Problems" by Swan and Smith. These function as guidelines for teachers to familiarise with the errors their students will likely make (Ellis 2005: 51-52). EA has effectively shown that many learners produce errors due to the wrong interferences about the rules of the SL.

According to Corder (1974) the following five steps need to be taken when conducting an error analysis:

1. Collection of sample learner language

2. Identification of errors

3. Description of errors

4. Explanation of errors

5. Error evaluation

By way of expanding the sequence of steps suggested by Corder, Gass and Selinker (1994: 67-68) add a 6[th] step called Remediation, which focuses on pedagogical intervention based on the results of the analysis. For the purpose of my study, I focus on the initial 5 steps and finally provide some ideas on how to avoid or reduce certain errors identified in my analysis. In detail, the five steps work as follows:

Step 1) Collection of sample learner language: While this is typically done with written material, oral data can also be used. The kind of samples that are used for carrying out a study influences the "nature and distribution of the errors observed" (Ellis 2005: 57). Therefore, there are two possibilities for

how to handle these factors: They are either controlled by narrowly specifying the samples (e.g., by taking only a few samples and focus on a specific item, such as tenses). Alternatively, a broad sample is collected, covering different features of language, different students and different production conditions. In this case, the productions have to be explicitly described in order to examine the outcome in correlation with the different conditions.

Step 2) Identification of errors: Referring to the definition of error given above, the language of the learner and the language of a native speaker counterpart are compared. In addition, the error has to be identified, e.g. wrong verb form or incorrect use of tense.

Step 3) Description of errors: In this step the type or category of error needs to be labelled. Corder (1974: 128) states that the description of errors is "essential a comparative process, the data being the original erroneous utterance and the reconstructed utterance". Therefore, descriptive categories have to be set up in order to classify the errors, such as an agreement error or a error in irregular verbs (Ellis 2005: 60). As a follow-up to describing errors, they are quantified according to the categories used. The surface structure taxonomy developed Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982: 150), which focuses on a predefined set of errors resulting from the way that learners modify target forms, is only marginally relevant to the study of tense and aspect errors (see Chapter 4).

Step 4) Explanation of errors: This step involves determining the source of the errors identified in order to understand why they were made. In a very practical sense, this is the most important step or error analysis. In principle, there are both psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic sources of error (Ellis 2005: 62). My study, being limited by the data available, deals only with psycholinguistic sources of errors. At this stage, Gass and Selinker distinguish between interlingual and intralingual error types. The former happen due to the interference of the native language, whereas the latter are independent of the NL and occur due the target language (Gass & Selinker 1994: 68).

Step 5)   Error evaluation: This stage or error analysis involves judging the gravity of the errors by category with a view to deciding which should receive further instruction.

Having given a theoretical and methodological basis for the analysis of my data, the following chapter will present my study and its results, ending with a discussion of my findings and their implications.

4. The study

It is not that I'm so smart.
But I stay with the questions much longer.
(Albert Einstein)

My study focuses on the errors made by student learners of English in Austria using the English tense/aspect systems. The data used in the analysis comprises 30 test papers of AHS-students written in 12th grade. The aim of the study is, first, to investigate what kind of tense, aspect and tense-aspect combination errors occur and provide a quantitative analysis of their frequency. Second, the data was analyzed to show whether there are specific areas that are more probable to contain errors, i.e. a cluster analysis based on earlier findings. Third, in discussing pertinent clusters of errors and their distribution, factors that likely affect the acquisition of the tense and aspect system in English by German native speakers are taken into account in a qualitative analysis.

4.1. Participants

The participants of the study[15] were a class of 15 Austrian students at an AHS in 1230, Vienna. They attended the same 12th grade class and, at the point of writing the tests analyzed here, had had the subject English for at least 7 years in school. While no information on the students' L1 was available, they all reached 12th grade, thus demonstrating proficiency in German. The tests took place in the school year of 2004/2005 with one test in each semester. The first test was on December 22nd, 2004, and the second test on April 15th, 2005. That was also their final year before graduating with the Austrian Matura, where they had the possibility to choose English as a subject. English is obligatory in the written Matura, but is optional for the oral Matura exam (it can be replaced with another language subject).

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[15] The participants' names are not included in my thesis for reasons of data privacy protection.

The first test in their final school year – and thus also the first test included in my analysis – consisted of three obligatory tasks (see Appendix 2):

1. **Listening comprehension** (not considered in the analysis)
2. **A phone-in-program**

    Four to five people call in and comment on the film "Super-Size Me" and in how far it may influence people's attitude to eating healthy food, keeping fit and avoiding obesity.

3. **Inner monologue**

    A person of importance, about to reach his/her aim to be able to influence other people and exert power, contemplates his/her fears, problems that might arise and his/her responsibilities.

The second test consisted of four obligatory tasks:

1. **Listening comprehension** (not considered in the analysis)

2. **Explaining terms**

    The terms given were AIH, donor insemination and IVF.

3. **Discussing a given topic**

    Genetic engineering and cloning experiments and their commercial use as a serious threat to the welfare of farm animals.

4. **A text given**

    "Traitors or Martyrs – What motivated three young British Muslims to die, allegedly while fighting for the Taliban" in *Time*.

    a) **Questions on the text: Reading comprehension**

    1. How did Al-Muhajiroun get famous all over Britain?

    2. Give some information on the three young men who went to Afghanistan to join the jihad.

    3. What are the different views of British Muslim leaders and the British authorities regarding the young fighters' involvement?

    4. Give your personal opinion on what makes young British Muslims want to become martyrs.

    b) **Task beyond the text: A phone-in-program**

Four to five people call in to discuss the topic "Dying for Allah –
insane or righteous?" and make different statements.

As indicated above, my analysis does not include errors made in the listening
comprehension as I could not gain access to the original recordings and was
therefore unable to verify contextual references made in the tests with respect to
possible errors. Instead I focused on the free writing tasks, i.e. the phone-in-
programs, inner monologue, explaining terms and discussing a given topic, as well
as the reading comprehension. The original test instructions are reproduced in the
Appendix 2.

The total corpus consists of 20.434 words in 30 tests. The single longest test,
written by student 3, comprises 1.011 words, while the shortest test, written by
student 10, only runs to 385 words. The individual figures, totals and averages for
all tests are given in Table 4 below.

Student	Test 1	Test 2	Sum
1.	494	642	1.136
2.	550	736	1.286
3.	913	1.011	1.924
4.	436	775	1.211
5.	591	607	1.198
6.	565	776	1.341
7.	643	700	1.343
8.	816	686	1.502
9.	604	902	1.506
10.	385	668	1.053
11.	921	874	1.795
12.	594	625	1.219
13.	478	730	1.208
14.	651	858	1.509
15.	622	581	1.203
Total	**9.263**	**11.171**	**20.434**
Average	**618**	**745**	**1.363**

Table 4: Number of words per test, totals and averages

The group was selected for attending the same class, rather than a homogenous level of proficiency, which consequently varies among the students. The average grade for the first test was 3.53 and for the second was 3.26, yielding an overall average of 3.4.

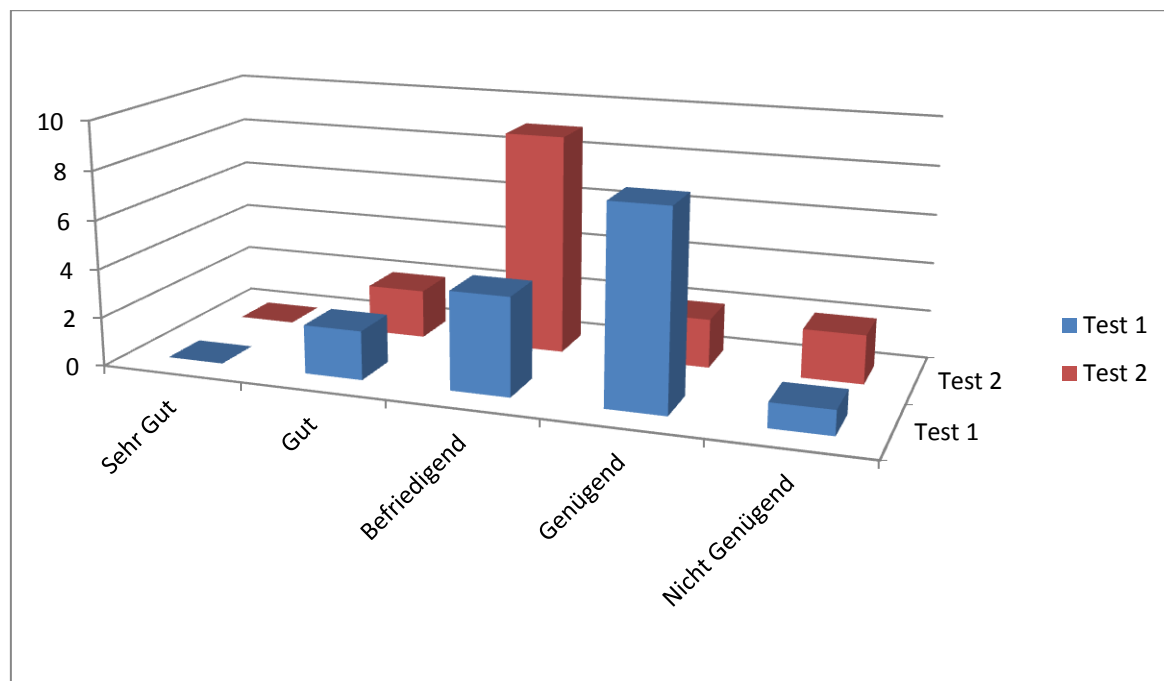The following table shows the distribution of grades for both tests:

Table 5: Distribution of grades per test

The above diagram shows that test grades were located in the middle range, Befriedigend (3) and Genügend (4) being the most common grades. There were no Sehr Gut (1) in either test and only one and two Nicht Genügend (5), respectively. There is a visible tendency that the students received better marks on their second test. Whether the individual students improved their overall writing skills could not be observed, as the focus of my analysis was on tense, aspect and tense-aspect combination errors only.

4.2. Analytical Procedure

I collected 15 test books from the 8[th] grade of an AHS in Vienna 1230 and compiled data from the two tests the students had written (see above for an account of the tasks for each test). Each student was given a number in order maintain anonymity, so that the codes ranging from S1 to S15 indicate the student,

while the suffixed code T1 or T2 indicates the first and second test, respectively. S1_T1 thus refers to the first test written by student number one, S9_T2 the second test written by student number nine.

A preliminary reading of the test papers indicated that the original marking of errors made by the grading teacher was unsystematic and neglected several tense and aspect errors as well as tense-aspect combination errors. I therefore did not base my work on the corrections made by the teacher and disregarded his/her notes and suggestions for corrections.

The first analytical step was consequently to identify and note all errors that were made in connection to tenses and aspect. In doing so, I disregarded verb errors that concerned agreement, as for example the missing *-s* in the third person, or the wrong use of the auxiliary *to be* with the progressive form as in *you is going*. Furthermore, I did not compile other kinds of errors and therefore ignored spelling, grammar and other mistakes. It should be noted, however, that the tests included a substantial number of spelling mistakes in particular.

Subsequently, I documented all errors previously identified in a table and assigned an error category according to the following criteria. The errors codes used consist of two main parts: first, a string of shorthand notations that denotes the tense or tense-aspect combination that was erroneously used and then the tense or tense-aspect combination that should have been used. For example, S2_T2 contains the following sentence:

(84) *I don't know that Cola contains so much sugar.*

Here, the Present Simple is used instead of the Past Simple, giving an error coding of PrS iso PaS. If further explanations or comments were necessary, I noted those in a separate column of the table. In some cases, there was more than one possibility for correcting an error, either because the context of the sentence did not indicate a clear interpretation or because the context allowed more than one version. In these cases, I assigned error codes according to all possible corrections and counted the error as many times.

Second, the errors thus coded were grouped into three main error categories for the system of the English grammar involved in the respective error – T for tense, A for aspect and TAC for tense-aspect combination errors – so that the erroneous

use of a tense was always coded as T, even if the form included aspect, as long as the aspect was used correctly. Similarly, aspect errors were coded as A when only the aspect was used erroneously. The final category of TAC was used to code errors in which both tense and aspect were erroneously used. In the example sentence quoted above, the full code string is thus T PaS iso PrS. This system proved reliable and robust in the analysis.

The table below shows the full error codes used in the study:

Error Codes - List of Abbreviations	
Tense Error	T
Aspect Error	A
Tense-Aspect Combination Error	TAC
Present Simple	PrS
Past Simple	PaS
Future Simple	FuS
Present Progressive	PrPro
Past Progressive	PaPro
Future Progressive	FuPro
Present Perfect	PrPer
Present Perfect Progressive	PrPerPro
Past Perfect	PaPer
Past Perfect Progressive	PaPerPro
Future Perfect	FuPer
Future Perfect Progressive	FuPerPro
Conditional One	Con1
Conditional Two	Con2
Habitual Past	HPa
Going-to Future	GoFu

Table 6: Error codes used in the study

The following sample shows an example of the full notation table used for the analysis as described above:

Error code	Error category	Error (full clause or sentence)	Correct form (ignoring spelling, agreement and other mistakes)	Comments
S12_T1				
A PrS iso PrPer	aspect: perfect of persistent situation present simple instead of present perfect	It doesn't work by now but I want to try it and go on with it.	It hasn't worked by now but I want to try it and go on with it.	situation seen only at the moment, situation up to now is disregarded
A PrS iso PrPro	aspect: general facts use present simple present progressive instead of present simple	I't creazy I'm sitting in my room and think about my play.	I't creazy I'm sitting in my room and thinking about my play.	not adapted to the first progressive form
TAC PaS iso PrPer	tense/aspect: sequence of tenses (R is ignored) past simple instead of present perfect	The forest into which Valentine goes after the Duke sent him away is my forest and in it my tree.	The forest into which Valentine goes after the Duke has sent him away is my forest and in it my tree.	the present of *goes* requires present perfect tense according to the sequence of tense rules (R)
S12_T2				
A PaPer iso PaS	aspect: sequence of tenses (R is, in fact, non-existent) past perfect instead of past simple	Before he had been killed he also lives there.	Before he was killed he had also lived there.	no use for the past perfect tense since there is no reference point (R)
TAC PrS iso PaPer	tense/aspect: sequence of tenses (R is ignored) present simple instead of past perfect	Before he had been killed he also lives there.	Before he was killed he had also lived there.	careless mistake: student seems to have added this sentence later (was squeezed in between the lines in small letters)
T PaS iso PrS	tense: event in the present past simple instead of present simple	I mean what do people think if they decided to die.	I mean what do people think if they decide to die.	no need for past tense as decision has already been made

Table 7: Notation table used for the analysis

Once these analytical steps had been completed for all 30 test papers, I moved on to the quantitative stage of my analysis. This involved counting the total number of tense, aspect and tense-aspect combination errors for each student and consequently calculating the total number of errors for all students. Subsequently, I ran a number of statistical operations in order to identify error types with exceptionally high or low frequency, aiming to identify categories that cause particularly severe difficulties. Finally, I focused on the discrepancies and clusters of errors thus identified, trying to form plausible hypotheses explaining why certain errors occur more frequently than others, drawing on the theories and findings provided by research into error analysis and SLA (see Chapters 3.2 and 3.3).

The following section presents the main results of my study.

4.3. Results

My analyses found 168 errors in verbs connected to tense, aspect and tense-aspect combination errors. As the results show, most errors occurred in the category of tense (T) with 69 errors (41%) of the total 168. These numbers were not related to the total number of tense and aspect usage in the tests, but only to the total number of errors as relevant category of testing. Aspect errors (A) occurred second most frequently, with a total number of 60 (36%). Errors involving tense-aspect combinations (TAC) occurred 39 times in the tests (23%). It is noteworthy that the number of tense-aspect combination errors is only about half that of the tense errors. If one adds errors concerning aspect and tense-aspect combinations, however, the accumulated category far outweighs the category of pure tense errors at 64% to 36%, respectively.

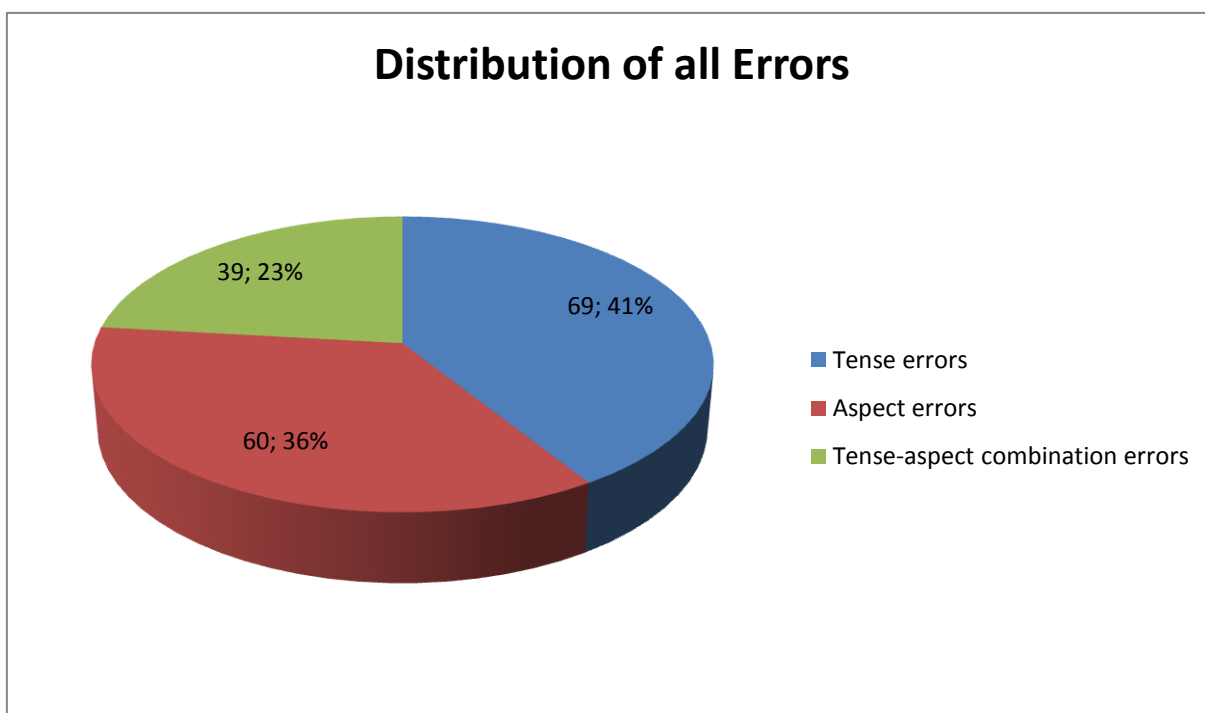The following diagram shows the distribution of all errors across the data:

Figure 11: Distribution of Errors

The following table shows the distribution of all errors by student, providing a rough indication of individual students' competences:

Student	Total Errors	Tense Errors	Aspect Errors	Tense-Aspect Combination Errors
1.	11	1	7	3
2.	19	11	5	3
3.	26	10	14	2
4.	14	7	1	6
5.	7	2	3	2
6.	11	7	2	2
7.	6	4	1	1
8.	8	4	3	1
9.	3	1	2	0
10.	17	3	11	3
11.	8	2	5	1
12.	6	1	3	2
13.	8	3	1	4
14.	14	7	2	5
15.	10	6	0	4
Total	**168**	**69**	**60**	**39**

Table 8: Distribution of all Tense, Aspect and Tense-Aspect Combination Errors

Looking at the types of error made by individual students, it can be seen that the range of total errors is notably wide, with the highest number at 26 (S3) and the lowest at 3 (S9). This discrepancy suggests that the students' competencies with respect to tense and aspect in English differ substantially, despite the fact that they are all in their final school year. The table above also shows that out of 15 students, seven most frequently made errors in the field of tense, seven made the most errors in the field of aspect, and only one student committed most of his/her errors in the field of tense-aspect combinations. The table also indicates that, no matter how many errors the individual students made, errors in all three categories (T, A and TAC) can be found in tests written by 13 of 15 students (87%). Obviously, the numbers of mistakes for individual students are particularly high for specific error types, as they repeat the same type of mistake throughout their tests.

4.3.1. Tense Errors

Ten categories had to be used to code the tense errors which occurred in the data, four of which occurred significantly more frequently than the rest.

The most common error type was the erroneous use of the Present Simple instead of the Past Simple (PrS iso PaS: 23). The reverse mistake, in which the Past Simple was erroneously used instead of the Present Simple, was the fourth most common category (PaS iso PrS: 7). The second most common error type was the use of the simple present instead of the Future Simple (PrS iso FuS: 19). The fourth most frequently committed error was the reverse of this: The Future Simple was used instead of the Present Simple (FuS iso PrS: 11). The other six types occurred significantly less frequently: The Future Simple was used instead of the Past Simple three times (FuS iso PaS: 3), the Present Simple was used instead of the going-to future twice (PrS iso GoFu: 2). The following errors were found only once each: the Present Perfect was used instead of the Future Perfect (PrPer iso FuPer: 1) and the Conditional One was once used erroneously instead of the Present Simple, the Past Simple and the Future Simple each (Con1 iso PrS: 1, Con1 iso PaS: 1, Con1 iso FuS: 1).

The following table shows the numbers of all tense errors listed by the individual student:

Student	Total	PrS iso PaS	PrS iso FuS	FuS iso PrS	PaS iso PrS	FuS iso PaS	PrS iso GoFu	PrPer iso FuPer	Con1 iso PrS	Con1 iso PaS	Con1 iso FuS
1.	1	1									
2.	11	4	2	4					1		
3.	10	3	3	1	1	2					
4.	7	2	1	2	2						
5.	2		2								
6.	7	5	1		1						
7.	4	1	1		2						
8.	4		3				1				
9.	1	1									
10.	3	1				1		1			
11.	2		2								
12.	1				1						
13.	3	2					1				
14.	7	2	1	4							
15.	6	1	3							1	1
Total	69	23	19	11	7	3	2	1	1	1	1

Table 9: Tense errors

Across all students and tests, the overall distribution of tense errors shows that most students made errors using the Present Simple instead of either the Past Simple or Future Simple.

Overall Distribution of All Tense Errors

Looking at the most frequent errors that occurred in the field of tense, the following pages discuss in detail and illustrate the overall distribution of the most common types. As indicated by Figure 12 these are: Present instead of Past, Present instead of Future, Future instead of Present and Past instead of Present. Together, these four types account for over 77% of all tense errors.
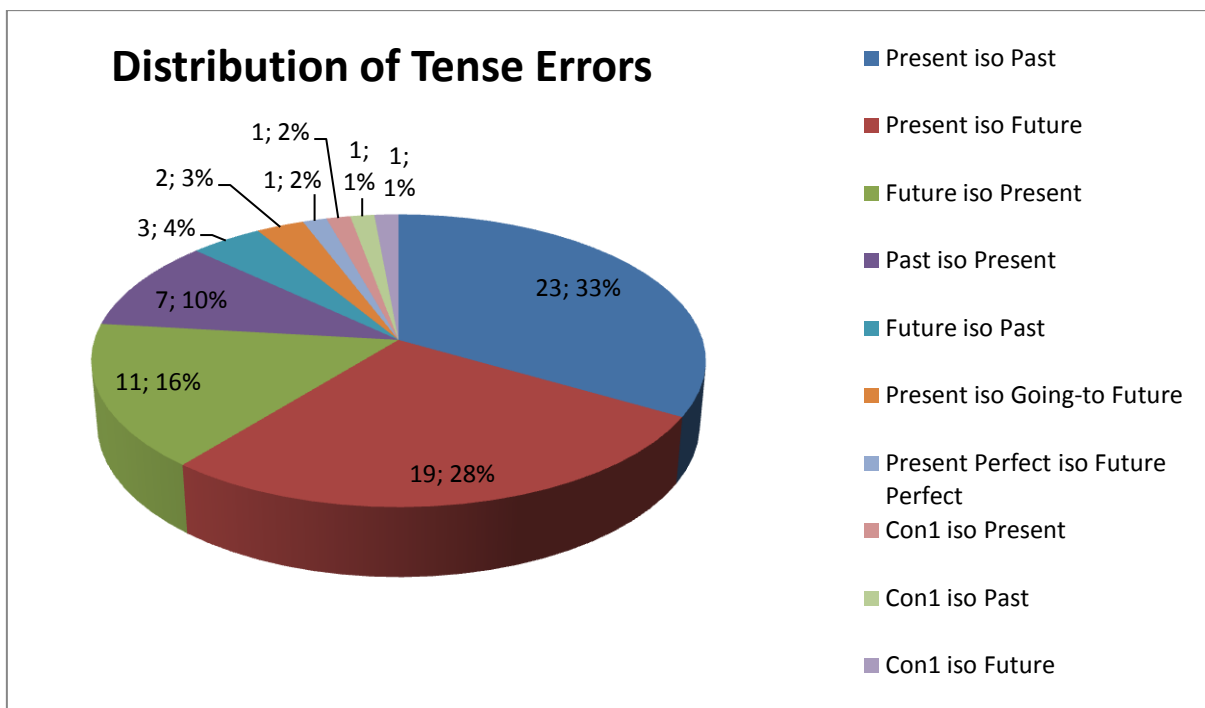
Figure 12: Distribution of Tense Errors

Taking a closer look at the most frequent errors in the field of tense, I will now discuss the four main types. In the contexts were Present Simple was used instead of the Past Simple, there seem to be not one, but many reasons why these errors occur.

Present Simple instead of Past Simple

The most frequently occurring tense error is the erroneous use of the present tense instead of the past tense (PrS iso PaS), which 11 out of 15 students committed in their test papers. Student 2, for instance, wrote the following passage in her first test paper:

> (85)   *I mean the fact about Coca-Cola. I **don't know** that Cola*
>   *contains so much sugar. That's realy fascinated.* (S2_T1)

In this case, the student wrote a scene in a phone-in-program about the documentary *Supersize Me*, depicting the consequences of eating only at McDonald's for one month. In the scene, a caller phones in to discuss the many fascinating facts she had not known before she saw the movie. In the above passage, the verb phrase *don't know* erroneously expresses that she is still not aware of the fact that Cola contains so much sugar. Since she subsequently

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expresses her own fascination with that fact, she is quite clearly aware of it at that moment.

The same type of error, using Present Simple instead of Past Simple, also occurs in a different context. Student 1 wrote the following passage in his first test paper:

> (86) *Hello, I was the owner of a McDonalds restaurante in Texas, but since this movie, I changed work. I never thought that it **is** so unhealthy, fat and over-sugared. Now it doesn't surprise me that fat people come two times a day for eating…* (S1_T1)

As in the earlier example, the above passage presents a caller commenting on *Supersize Me*. Here, the issue is that his realization of the unhealthiness is in the past and therefore the fact should also be presented as such with *it was*, even if the fact remains true in the present as in *it is*. The choice of tense is always deictic and understandability should be given preference over the fact that a given situation still has value or validity in the present.

A further instance of Present Simple instead of Past Simple occurs in one of the papers written for the second test, illustrating another source of the error:

> (87) *Choudary and Yahya joined the Al-Muhajiroun and they speak for only a tiny fraction of Britain's 2 million muslims. They **get** famous, because their views were received in the news, because three British born Muslims were killed in the jihad.* (S3_T2)

Discussing the recent rise to fame of a militant Islamist group in Britain, the writer used the Present Simple *get* where the Past Simple *got* is needed since the *they* of the sentence are, in fact, dead. Five students made exactly the same error with the verb *get* in this particular test, indicating a common source of the mistake. Indeed, the test question provides a clue: "How did Al-Muhajiroun get famous all over Britain?" correctly uses the form *get* because of the interrogative form including *did*. It appears plausible that the students were not aware of the necessity of using the form *got* in a non-interrogative past tense sentence and therefore copied the form *get* of the question into their texts unchanged.

Another instance of Present Simple instead of Past Simple happens with the idiom *to be born*. Student 14, for instance, wrote the following paragraph in her second test paper:

> (88) *I really can't understand why some British Muslims want to become martyrs and risk their lives. Those people **are born** in Britain and have grown up there.* (S14_T2)

The student was asked to give his/her personal opinion on what makes young British Muslims want to become martyrs and uses the Present Simple *are born* instead of the correct form *were born*. Three students erred the same way/made the same mistake and thus implying a frequent source of mistake. The German interference *geboren sein* translated to *be born* seems to be the explanation for this error, since German uses the Präsens for being born and English requires the past tense.

Present Simple instead of Future Simple

The second frequently occurring error in the range of tense errors is the erroneous use of the Present Simple instead of the Future Simple (PrS iso FuS), which ten out of 15 students made in their test papers. For example, student 2, produced the following sentences in her first test paper:

> (89) *It is so stupid to go to the Mc Donalds and eat a Super-Size-Menu. It is so clear, that you **feel** ill after the Menu. And so I think the film is non-sensical.* (S2_T2)

Here, the writer formulates a comment of a caller on the film and erroneously uses the present tense and therefore disregards the reference point R which is the eating of the menu. The future tense must be used in order to show that feeling ill is a consequence of eating the menu, which is located in the present as R by the introductory phrase *it is so clear*, and therefore happens after said reference point.

In the test paper of student 2 another example of the same error type can be found, but has a different reason for which the future tense is needed. She writes an inner monologue of a personality of importance:

> (90) *I need holidays. I hope that my fans **stay** by me. No, I don't hope it, I know it.* (S2_T2)

In this passage, the verb *hope* indicates that the writer is not sure about the future and therefore the following part of the sentence needs the Future Simple and not the Present Simple in order to show the uncertain future.

Another instance of Present Simple instead of Future Simple occurs in one of the papers written for the first test, illustrating another source of the error:

> (91) *Thank you, Joana for your call. Now we* **talk** *to a serious woman!*
> *Hi, at all. I'm obese and I don't know why I was getting so much overweight.* (S3_T1)

In this example, the future tense is erroneously not used, but is required because the radio host, after thanking the last caller for her call, makes a spontaneous comment about the next caller. Such an announcement before the start of an exchange asks for the Future Simple.

A further example of Present Simple instead of Future Simple can be seen in a test of student 6, who writes the following piece of dialogue for a caller during the above-mentioned radio show on the documentary *Supersize Me*:

> (92) *I think it is important to eat healthy food but we will see what the future* **bring**. *When today 300.000 americans* **died** *on obesity.* (S6_T1)

Although the writer erroneously did not attach the third person *-s* to the verb *bring*, she clearly intended to use the present tense. Here, the interference of the German colloquialism *was die Zukunft bringt* seems to be the likely reason for her mistake. In formal German, too, the Futur Eins should be used, i.e. *was die Zukunft bringen wird*, but in conversational speech the Präsens form is used instead. In the second sentence, the past tense is also applied wrongly, because here the Present Simple would be appropriate since general facts require the present tense. The erroneous use of the past tense instead of the present tense is the fourth most frequent type of error and will be discussed later.

Similarly, the error in the following passage seems to be due to German interference:

> (93) *What's wrong at eating at Mc Donald's, we will die anyways, it doesn't matter, eighter I **die** on a car accident, or a plane crash or on obesity.* (S6_T1)

This student correctly uses the Future Simple in her first sentence, but then wrongly applies the Present Simple instead of the Future Simple. In this case, a German speaker would probably use the Futur Eins for *will die* in any event, but then apply the Präsens for the future situation *in einem Autounfall sterben*. Obviously, this particular student had difficulties using the English future tenses, since 4 out of her 8 errors in total are a result of not using future tense forms.

Future Simple instead of Present Simple

The incorrect use of the simple future instead of the simple present (FuS iso PrS) is the third most frequent mistake. With a frequency of 11, this type of error is almost only half as frequent as its reverse, i.e. the erroneous use of the future tense instead of the present tense. This error type was restricted to two specific writing prompts and four students. The first of these prompts asked students to write dialogues for a call-in program about *Supersize Me* and American eating habits. In the second prompt, which led to all except 2 of these errors, the students had to explain several terms connected to fertilization. One student wrote in her explanations:

> (94) *At the second methode, one egg **will be taken** out of the womans body and **put** into a test tube. There the egg **will be fertilized** and later it **will be put** back into the womb of the woman.* (S14_T2)

This particular prompt clearly proved difficult for several students, because it asked them to describe something in abstract terms rather than as a concrete situation. This can also be seen in the mistake student 2 produced in discussing genetic engineering and cloning experiments:

> (95) *The therapeutic cloning is legal. In this type the scientists also creat an embryo but they don't transplant the embryo. The scientists research the embryo and after that the embryo **will be destroyed**.* (S2_T2)

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The source of this mistake seems to be German interference when constructing the passive voice. As the Präsens Passiv in German is built by the auxiliary verb *werden*, i.e. *werden* is also used for the passive without future meaning, the student may have been under the impression that he/she was using the present passive. Due to the interference, he/she did, however, end up using the form of the Future Simple. In English the description of general facts requires the Present Simple and hence such generic explanations as in the example above of a process must be written in present tense.

Past Simple instead of Present Simple

The fourth most common error type in the domain of tense errors is the erroneous use of the past tense instead of the present tense (PaS iso PrS). Looking at the contexts in which the simple past was used erroneously, there seems to be no specific reason, leaving the possibility of performance errors due to inaccuracy or oversight on the part of the students or a result of pressure in the test situation. In many cases, the overall context of the students' text is in the past and they seem therefore to have used the past tense indiscriminately instead of the present tense.

> (96) I *was shocked when I saw this documention about what* can **happened** *by eating a lot of junk-food.* (S7_T1)

The student here seems to have followed the past tense pattern of *I was shocked* and *I saw* and therefore applied the past tense also to the next verb *happened* instead of *could happen* or even *what can happen*.

The remaining errors in this category all seem to be variations of similar inaccuracies or oversights. Student 2, for instance, erroneously uses the past tense to describe a situation (*hated*) that is the precondition for an action he describes in the present (*fight*).

> (97) *The British Muslim leader Muhammad Sulaiman can't understand why they fight for Afghanistan. He would fight for Britain. The fight for Afghanistan because they* **hated** *the Americans.* (S2_T2)

The same student at times appears to apply tenses randomly and does not follow any recognizable *pattern* of tense use in the following passage:

> (98) *Donor insemination: Sperms **were collected** from a dona. Only one sperm will be places in the ove. The chance of a pregnancy get higher.* (S2_T2)

Another source of this error type is that students neglect the rule that general facts in English require the present tense. Hence, the student in the following example used the past to describe a fact that was true last year, but remains true in the present.

> (99) *I think it is important to eat healthy food but we will see what the future bring.* When today 300.000 americans **died** on obesity. (S6_T1)

To summarize the results for tense errors in the tests analyzed, we could see that this type of error apparently has several sources, some of which are quite distinct and identifiable, while other remain oblique or may be the consequence of simple oversight.

4.3.2. Aspect Errors

Nine categories had to be used to code the aspect errors which occurred in the data, four of which occurred significantly more frequently than the rest.

The most common type of error in this category was the erroneous use of the Present Progressive instead of the Present Simple (PrPro iso PrS: 25). This was virtually the only type of error where the progressive aspect was used instead of the simple tense, while the tense itself was actually correct (there was only a single other mistake, in which the Past Progressive was used instead of the Past Simple). The reverse mistake, in which a simple tense was erroneously used instead of the corresponding progressive form, occurred exclusively in the present tense with a frequency of 6 (PrS iso PrPro: 5). Thus, the total number of pure aspect mistakes concerning the progressive form runs to 30.

The second overall most common error type was the erroneous use of the Present Simple instead of the Present Perfect with a total frequency of 11 (PrS iso PrPer: 11). Other errors concerning the use of perfect forms were the third and fifth most common mistakes, which are also reverses of each other: Past Simple instead of Past Perfect (PaS iso PaPer: 9) and Past Perfect instead of Past Simple (PaPer

iso PaS: 5). The total number of pure aspect mistakes concerning the perfect form thus totals 26.

The remaining mistakes concern either the erroneous use of simple forms instead perfect progressive (PrS iso PrPerPro: 3) and habitual (PaS iso HPa: 1) or of a progressive form instead of a perfect progressive form (PaPro iso PaPerPro: 2). The total number of these errors, however, is very low.

The individual students show strikingly different numbers of aspect errors in total as well as in their distribution over the range of aspect error categories. Three students had significantly more aspect errors than their colleagues (S3, S10 and S1 with 14, 11 and 7 errors, respectively), while the majority of students made between 0 and 3 aspect errors in their tests. Concerning the error type per student, the 11 counts of PrPro iso PrS in the tests written by student 10 obviously stand out as the highest number of errors for a single error type, followed by the counts of 6 and 4 for the same error type for students 3 and 11, respectively (see Figure 13 and Table 10 below).
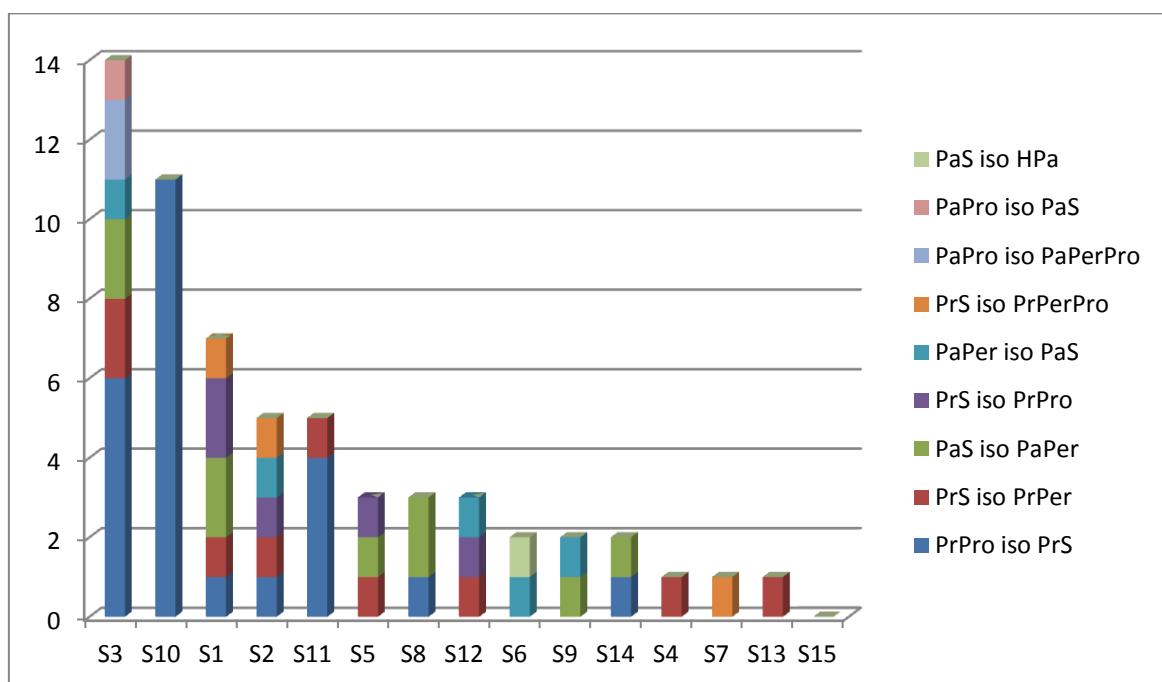

Figure 13: Bar diagram of aspect errors (by type) for each student

Student	Total	PrPro iso PrS	PrS iso PrPer	PaS iso PaPer	PrS iso PrPro	PaPer iso PaS	PrS iso PrPer Pro	PaPro iso PaPer Pro	PaPro iso PaS	PaS iso HPa
1.	7	1	1	2	2		1			
2.	5	1	1		1	1	1			
3.	14	6	2	2		1		2	1	
4.	1		1							
5.	3		1	1	1					
6.	2					1				1
7.	1						1			
8.	3	1		2						
9.	2			1		1				
10.	11	11								
11.	5	4	1							
12.	3		1		1	1				
13.	1		1							
14.	2	1		1						
15.	0									
Total	60	25	9	9	5	5	3	2	1	1

Table 10: Aspect errors

No coherent pattern of error distribution emerges from the analysis with respect to individual students and difficulties concerning either the progressive or perfect aspect. Student 10, for instance, only made errors using the progressive, while student 3 made an equal number of mistakes using progressive and perfect forms.

Overall Distribution of Aspect Errors

Looking at the most frequent errors that occurred in the field of aspect, the following pages discuss and illustrate the overall distribution of the five most common types.
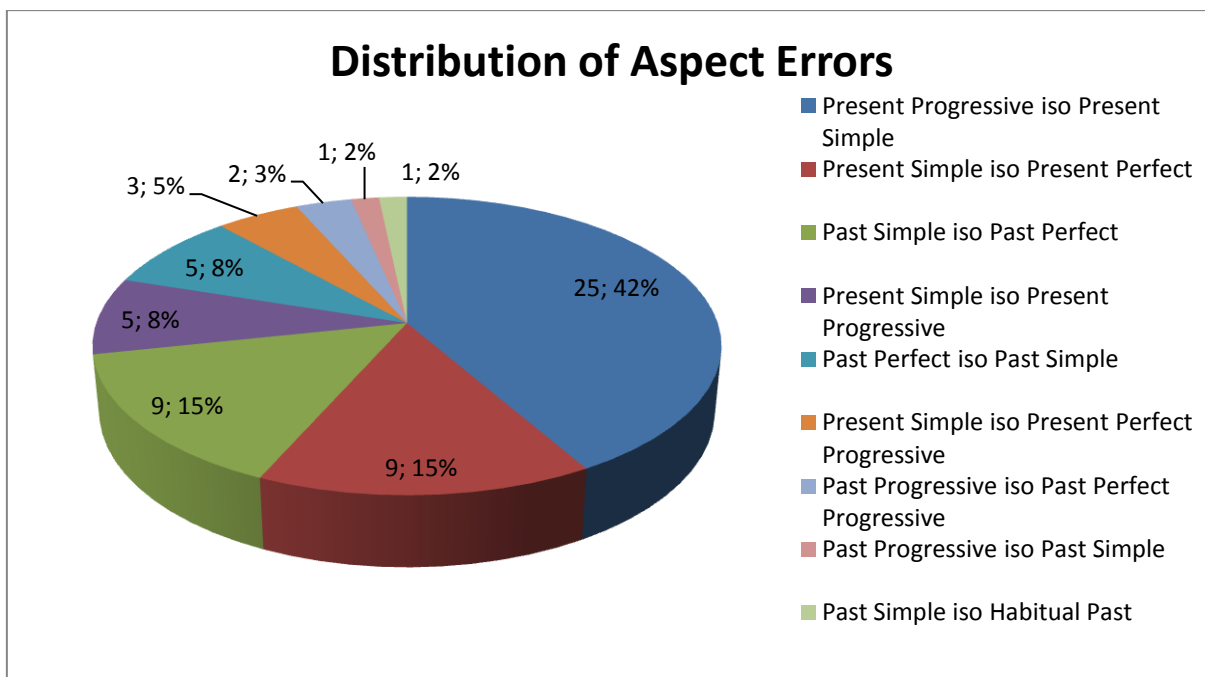
Figure 14: Distribution of Aspect Errors

Present Progressive instead of Present Simple

The most frequent aspect error is the erroneous use of the Present Progressive instead of the Present Simple (PrPro iso PrS), occurring in tests written by seven out of 15 students. With a frequency of 25, this mistake occurred exactly five times more often than its reverse, i.e. the erroneous use of the Present Simple instead of the Present Progressive.

All errors of this type except one had the same probable source, i.e. the erroneous use of progressive aspect for general facts. Student 3, for instance, wrote the following passage about a caller during a phone-in-program about the documentary *Supersize Me*:

> (100) *I can't believe that someone, who goes twice a week to the Mc Donalds **is becoming** really fat. I am a lawyer and I haven't enough time to go in a restaurant, so I go to the Mc Donalds, not everyday but very often.* (S3_T1)

The caller talks about consequences: If one does one thing, another thing happens as an outcome. In the first part of the sentence the student uses the correct simple form *goes*, but then uses the progressive form *is becoming*

erroneously in the second part. The form of the Present Simple must here be used due to the fact that general facts require the simple and not the progressive form.

In the same test, student 3 also writes:

> (101) If you **are not doing** any sports it doesn't matter if you **are eating** healthy, because without sports you will become fat. Do sports and keep fit! You will be surprised, how much weight you loose. (S3_T1)

Here again the student applies the wrong form, erroneously using the Present Progressive instead of the Present Simple. The caller clearly means to talk about consequences and general facts, therefore *if you don't do* and *if you eat* should be used.

This type of error also occurs frequently with keywords that require the Present Simple rather than the Present Progressive. Student 10, for instance, writes:

> (102) You can't tell me that Mc Donalds does bad things to our body! Everyone loves it. Especially the children. **I'm eating** once a week at Mc Donalds and I'm not fat. I'm 1.65cm and my weight is 90kg. I love Mc Donalds, KFC, Wendys and King! (S10_T1)

In this passage the phrase *once a week* indicates the use of the simple form of the verb *to eat* due to its regular occurrence. The student wrote this statement as that of a caller who describes herself in general rather than talk about temporary actions. Apart from the initial error in this passage, the student used the simple form for the verbs correctly in the rest of the caller's description.

Similarly, student 11 used a keyword without the corresponding aspect form:

> (103) There is no way to get attention from the people. I just want them to open their eyes and look at things, which **are happening** everyday! Maybe in their surrounding area…
> (S11_T1)

This passage is taken from the student's presentation of the inner monologue of an author thinking about his aims and possibilities to influence other people.

Student 11 makes use of the keyword *every day* (albeit with incorrect spelling), which asks for the Present Simple instead of the Present Progressive.

The aforementioned exception, in which the error type Present Progressive instead of Present Simple was due to a different reason, was not related to the convention of presenting general facts in the Present Simple. In this instance, a verb that cannot be used in the progressive form was used thus:

> (104) *Good Morning. I'm really surprised how much people **are** **believing** this BS about Supersize Me. I can't believe that someone, who goes twice a week to the Mc Donalds is becoming really fat.* (S3_T1)

The use of the verb form *are believing* is incorrect here, because *believe* is a stative verb that must be used in the simple form in this context. The writer wants to express the caller's opinion about the state of a belief, therefore the verb is used in its stative meaning. While it is, indeed, possible to use *believe* in progressive form, this would depend on a context allowing imperfective aspect, the so-called 'stative progressive'. In this case, the student could have used the progressive form to emphasize the temporary belief of the people, but did not. As the following sentence (see above) indicates, she was not aware that the use of the Present Progressive is semantically impossible for this meaning of *believe*.

All three students mentioned in the examples above (i.e. students 3, 10 and 11) had difficulties using the Present Progressive in general. They characteristically overused the Present Progressive, using it instead of the correct Present Simple. By contrast, the other three students that committed this type of error only had one error each (i.e. students 1, 2 and 8).

Present Simple instead of Present Perfect

The second most common error type in the domain of aspect errors is the erroneous use of the Present Simple instead of the Present Perfect (PrS iso PrPer). The reverse, i.e. Present Perfect instead of Present Simple, does not occur in the data analyzed. With a frequency of 9, this type of error is less than half as frequent as the most frequent aspect error. This error was found in the tests of 8 out of 15 students. Except for one instance, there is always the same source for this error.

(105) *Since I have seen the movie I* **boycott** *all junk food companies. I make myself lunch and dinner. I have lost 10 pounds of my weight and now I have a bigger pocket.* (S4_T1)

The student wrote this passage as part of the comment of a caller to a phone-in-program, using the Present Simple instead of the Present Perfect. The writer presents a situation that started in the past and has continued until the present. For this situation, the perfect of persistent situation needs to be used in English. However, in German the Präsens would be used to describe such continuing-up-to-the-present-situations and this interference seems to the source of this error here. The German interference in the student's writing seems to be pronounced, since he also used the wrong verb form in the first part of the statement, where the past tense should have been used. However, this erroneous use of the Present Perfect instead of the Past Simple is a tense-aspect combination error and will therefore be discussed in the following chapter.

Virtually all other examples of the erroneous use of the Present Simple instead of the Present Perfect also seem to have their source in German interference in the L2 learner's writing:

(106) *Now I* **am** *3 years one of the best-known senators of the USA.* (S5_T1)

(107) *That time my parents didn't allow me to join this organization, because the father of my mother, my grandfather, died by a bomb-attack and since that accident they just* **want** *to live in peace.* (S11_T1)

In both examples above – taken from the inner monologue of a politician and a phone-in-program about "Dying for Allah – insane or righteous?", respectively – the Präsens would be used in German due to the focus on the present. In German, neither the duration nor the beginning in the past would be expressed in the verb, but only by the lexical items equivalent to *3 years* and *since that accident*.

There was one exception to the otherwise dominant source of error for the type Present Simple instead of the Present Perfect. In this instance, the error is not due

to non-use the perfect of persistent situation, but due to the non-use of another type of perfect:

> (108) *On my table lie an empty paper and I don't know what I should write. That was my greates fear. But now it is real.* (S2_T1)

Here, the student wrote about the fears of an author and erroneously used the Present Simple instead of the Present Perfect. The situation described here asks for the perfect of result, because something happened in the past and has a result in the present. The appropriate formulation therefore requires use of the perfect in combination with a different description of the situation, i.e. by *has become true*. The German colloquialism *Aber jetzt ist es wahr* instead of the correct form *Aber jetzt ist es wahr geworden* seems to be the likely reason for the student's mistake, especially considering that the preceding sentence is also characterized by the influence of German interference.

Past Simple instead of Past Perfect

The incorrect use of the Past Simple instead of the Past Perfect (PaS iso PaPer) is the third most frequent aspect error. With a frequency of 9 it occurs twice as often as its reverse, i.e. the erroneous use of the Past Perfect instead of the Past Simple. Looking at the contexts in which the Past Simple was used erroneously, two sources appear relevant for this error. In both cases, however, the source of error is the incorrect conception or placement of the reference point R as in the present rather than in the past, forcing a shift into the Past Perfect. Student 2, for instance, wrote the following passage in her first test paper:

> (109) *Last week I saw this movie and I never believed that fast food (especially Mc Donalds) can be so dangerous.* (S2_T1)

The student here writes about a time in the past: Before the caller of the phone-in-program saw the movie, he had not believed in the danger of fast food. Using the past tense of *believe* would not express that because R - the watching of the movie - is ignored. To make the situation comprehensible the reference point has to be considered: The Past Perfect must be used for the action that happened

chronologically before R, while the past tense must be used for the action that happened later.

The other source for this error type occurs in connection with reported speech. In these cases the time of the reporting of information functions as R and therefore the verbs included in the information have to be changed accordingly. Student 3 wrote in her second test paper:

(110) *She told me that Michael **talked** to Hamid and maybe Hamid will fight for the Taliban.* (S3_T2)

Here, the speech event in the past constitutes R and hence *the talking to Hamid* has to be placed before. The original statement of the writer is in direct speech in Past Simple and thus has to be transformed to Past Perfect**.**

Present Simple instead of Present Progressive

The fourth most common error type in the domain of aspect is the erroneous use of Present Simple instead of Present Progressive (PrS iso PrPro). Four students committed this mistake, which has a total frequency of 5, with each student erring once; only one student committed this mistake two times. Its reverse, i.e. the Present Progressive instead of the Present Simple, occurred exactly five times as often. The following examples occur in contexts in which a current development is described.

Student 1 wrote in her second test paper:

(111) *But embryos are also human being and we don't know if we **destroy** something.* (S1_T2)

Here, the student states her opinion about genetic engineering and cloning experiments. The destroying is a current development as well as an uncertain future event. The source of the error here seems to be the student's belief that she is writing about general facts and does not consider the changing situation. Similarly, the same student wrote in response to the same prompt:

(112) *In my opinion the medicine **grows** too fast and we should wait and search for 100 per cent right and safe solutions to clone.* (S1_T2)

Here, the growing of the medicine is a current situation and thus has to be formulated in progressive aspect. As in the example above, the student seems to have used the Present Simple because she has not taken the current development into account.

In the following sentence, the source of the error is different.

> (113) *I'm sitting in my room and* **think** *about my play.* (S12_T1)

This sentence is taken from the student's presentation of the inner monologue of an author thinking about his fears. He is doing this at the moment, hence the student correctly used the progressive of *sit* in the first part of the sentence, and it would therefore be feasible to use the same auxiliary verb *am* (here the contraction *'m*) with the second verb *think* as well. However, the student erroneously used the simple form of *think*. The same is true for the mistake in the following passage:

> (114) *We should be glad that we have enough food and enjoy our life! In Africa the people suffer because of their hunger and we are discussing about what we* **eat** *instead of helping them!* (S5_T1)

Student 5 wrote this as part of a scene in a phone-in-program about the documentary *Supersize Me*. The verb *suffer* is erroneously used in the Present Simple, but should be used in progressive aspect since the writer refers to a situation happening at the moment while the radio show is on air. This is also correctly expressed in the second part of the sentence in the verb phrase *are discussing*.

Past Perfect instead of Past Simple

The erroneous use of the Past Perfect instead of the Past Simple (PaPer iso PaS) is the fifth most frequent error in the range of aspect errors. All five students who committed this mistake produced it once only. Three occurrences of the error seem to have the same source. Student 2, for instance, wrote the following sentences in her first test paper:

(115) *Yasir Khan was 28 years old. He* **had gone** *to Pakistan for humanitarian work. Afzal Munir was a computer engineering student and Aftab Manzoor was a taxi driver. Afzal and Aftab were 25 years old.* (S2_T1)

The student here had to give information about three young men mentioned in the text *Traitors or Martyrs* and erroneously wrote *had gone*. In this sentence there is no use for the Past Perfect, because the student wrote about an event in the past that has no reference point R in the past that would ask for perfective aspect. Yasir was 28 when he went to Pakistan. The use of the Past Perfect would indicate that the going to Pakistan had happened before he was 28, which is not the case here. The most probable reason why the student used the Past Perfect in this sentence can be found in the text assigned for the test:

> The deaths of the three young men shocked their families. In Crawley, an industrial town 53km south of London, the mother of Yasir Khan, 28, insisted her son **had gone** to Pakistan for humanitarian work. (Gibson Luton, November 12, 2001)

In the text "Traitors or Martyrs" *had gone* is used correctly, as it occurs in reported speech, and *insisted* in the past form functions as reference point R that asks for the Past Perfect. It appears plausible that the student copied the tense into her text, unaware that in her case a different tense was needed. Similarly, student 12 wrote in her second test paper:

(116) *The mother of one of these boys lives in an industrial town 53km south of London. Before he* **had been killed** *he also lives there.* (S12_T2)

The student also wrote about the text "Traitors or Martyrs" mentioned above and erroneously used *had been killed* instead of *were killed*. Again the text provides a clue to the source of error:

> Choudary and Yahya belong to the extremist Islamic group Al-Muhajiroun, and though they speak for only a tiny fraction of Britain's 2 million Muslims, their views received grim publicity last week with the news that three British-born Muslims **had been killed** in Kabul-allegedly in a U.S. bombing raid on a Taliban compound-after volunteering for the jihad. (Time, November 12, 2001, Helen Gibson Luton)

In this text passage the Past Perfect is used due inside reported speech with a reference point R, i.e. the receiving of the news *last week*, which is formulated in the Past Simple. Therefore the killing must here be presented in the Past Perfect, because it describes the time before last week. In the passage written by student 12, the erroneous use of *had been killed* is likely due to the student copying the verb phrase for her text without adapting it.

The same type of error, using Past Perfect instead of the Past Simple, also occurs for a different reason. Student 6 wrote in her second test:

> (117) I lost my best *friend* and he was also a Muslim. He **had died** because in Britan are many people who hate our religion. I don't know why. (S6_T2)

In this passage the student wrote a scene in a phone-in-program about *Dying for Allah - insane or righteous?* and erroneously used *had died*. However, there is no need to use the Past Perfect for the dying, since the reference point R is the present moment of speech, calling for the simple past tense. The reason why the student used the Past Perfect here may have been her thinking that the loss of the friend is in the past and that the feeling of loss as the consequence of her friend's death happens (or persists) later.

Another example of Past Perfect instead of the Past Simple can be seen in the text of the first test written by student 3. The following piece of dialogue was written for a caller during the radio show on *Supersize Me*:

> (118) I have two sweet kids and both of them are not allowed to eat at Mc Donalds, Burger King since I *had seen* Supersize Me. (S3_T1)

Here, the writer erroneously used *had seen* instead of *saw*, as there is no need for the Past Perfect, because the reference point R is in the present moment rather than the past. The source of this mistake seems to be a combination of German interference and insufficient mastery of the English tenses. In this sentence, a German speaker would probably use *seit ich Supersize Me gesehen habe* and it is very likely that the student confused the English Past Perfect with the German Perfekt form. Indeed, this student had the highest number of aspect errors in total, most of them due to German interference.

4.3.3. Tense-Aspect Combination Errors

The tense-aspect combination errors made by the students included in the study fall into eight categories, two of which occur significantly more often than the rest.

The most frequent category is the use of the Past Simple instead of the Present Perfect (PaS iso PrPer: 21). This error occurred 21 times, while its counterpart, i.e. the use of the Present Perfect instead of the Past Tense (PrPer iso PaS: 9), was the second most frequent type with a frequency of eight. Three types occurred two times each: the erroneous use of the Present Simple instead of the Past Perfect (Prs iso PaPer: 2), of the Present Progressive instead of the Future Simple (PrPro iso FuS: 2), and of the Present Perfect Progressive instead of the Past Simple (PrPerPro iso PaS: 2). The remaining three types had an occurrence rate of only one error: the erroneous use of the Present Simple instead of the Past Progressive (PrS iso PaPro: 1), of the Present Perfect instead of the Past Perfect (PrPer iso PaPer: 1), and of the Future Simple instead of Conditional Two (FuS iso Con2: 1).

The following table and bar diagram show the numbers of all tense-aspect combination errors listed by individual student.
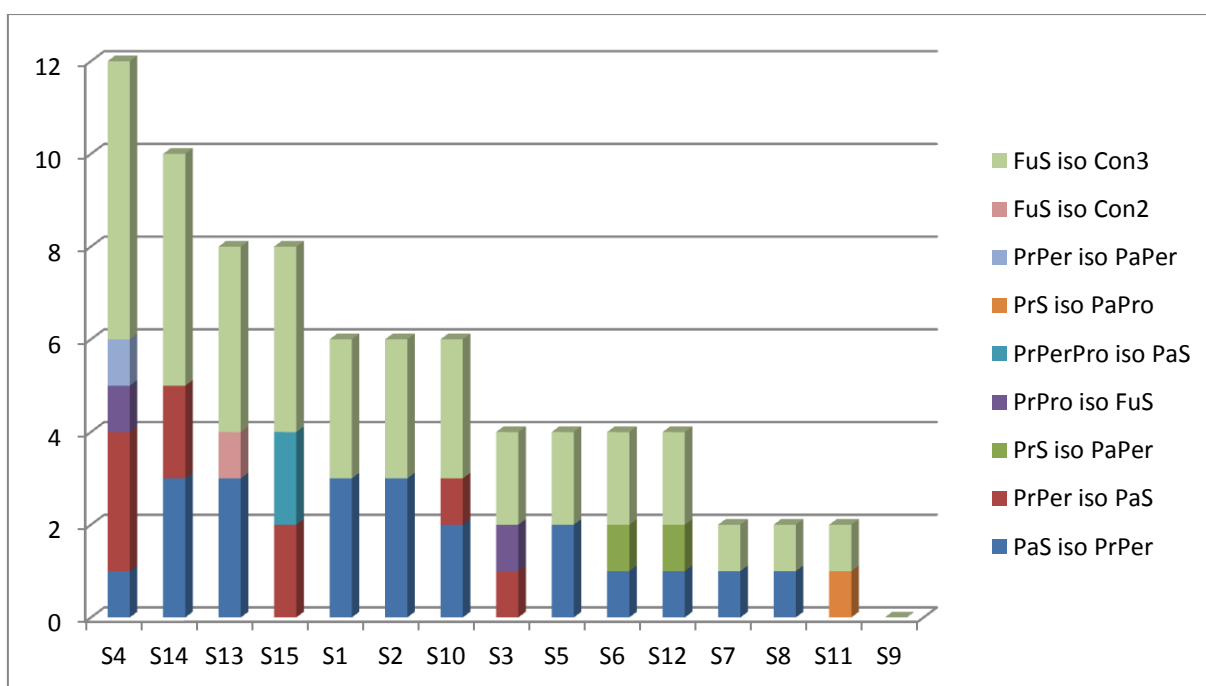

Figure 15: Bar diagram of tense aspect combination errors (by type) for each student

Student	Total	PaS iso PrPer	PrPer iso PaS	PrS iso PaPer	PrPro iso FuS	PrPerPro iso PaS	PrS iso PaPro	PrPer iso PaPer	FuS iso Con2
1.	3	3							
2.	3	3							
3.	2		1		1				
4.	6	1	3		1			1	
5.	2	2							
6.	2	1		1					
7.	1	1							
8.	1	1							
9.	0								
10.	3	2	1						
11.	1						1		
12.	2	1		1					
13.	4	3							1
14.	5	3	2						
15.	4		2			2			
Total	39	21	9	2	2	2	1	1	1

Table 11: Tense Aspect Combination Errors

Across all students and tests, the overall distribution of tense-aspect combination errors shows that most students made errors by underusing the Present Perfect; this can be observed even with students who committed only very few errors in total.

Overall Distribution of All Tense-Aspect Combination Errors

Looking at the most frequent errors that occurred in the field of tense-aspect combination errors, the following pages discuss in detail and illustrate the overall distribution of the most common types.
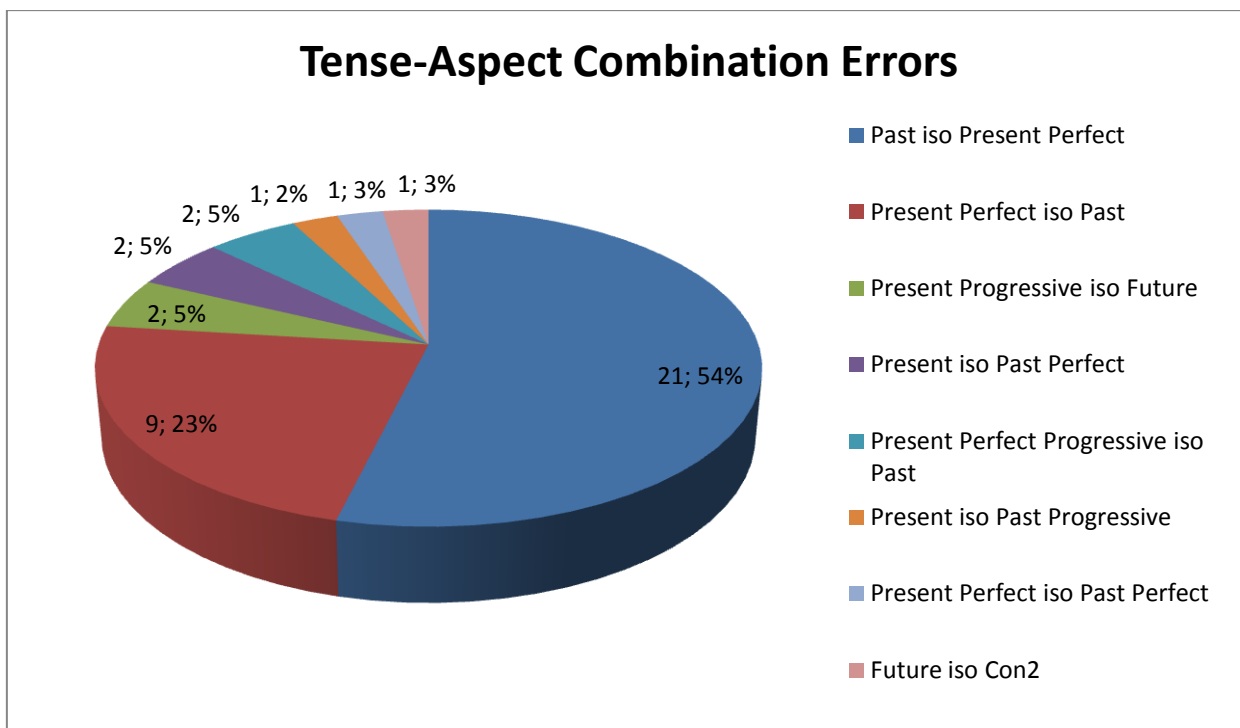
Figure 16: Tense-Aspect Combination Errors

Taking a closer look at the most frequent errors in the field of tense-aspect combination errors, I will focus on the two main types, which are each other's reverse.

Past Simple instead of Present Perfect

The most frequently occurring tense-aspect combination error is the erroneous use of Past Simple instead of Present Perfect (PaS iso PrPer), which 11 out of 15 students committed in their test papers with a total frequency of 21. Student 1, for instance, wrote in his second test:

> (119) Today*, there are many cloning experiments. Genetic engineering* **made** *a consiterable step forward. A good example is the sheep "Dolly".* (S1_T2)

In this passage the student discusses genetic engineering and cloning experiments and erroneously uses the Past Simple instead of the Present Perfect. What he describes as genetic engineering making a step is a process that has a result in the present, hence the perfect of result has to be used here. Similarly, student 5 wrote:

> (120) Now *I am 3 years one of the best-known senators of the*
> *USA. What* **did** *I* **change**!? *I always wanted to be a*
> *politican.. I wanted to change the word a little bit.* (S5_T1)

This sentence is taken from the student's presentation of the inner monologue of a politician thinking about his aims. The past form is incorrect here, because the student refers to a period that began in the past and extends into the present. As in the previous example, the perfect of result is needed, making *what have I changed* the correct form in this sentence. In 7 out of the total 21 errors of this type, the non-use of the perfect of result was the underlying reason for the error. As this form of perfect in English does not have a German equivalent in form, this is a likely area of German interference for the students.

Another source for this type of error is linked to another kind of perfect, as illustrated by the following example:

> (121) *They are treatend like strangers but they* **lived** *in Britain*
> *their whole life.* (S10_T2)

In this passage the writer had to state her personal opinion on British Muslims wanting to become martyrs. Here, the Past Simple is not correct, as the Present Perfect must be used. The perfect of persistent situation applies to the fact that the Muslims that student 10 referred to still live in Britain at the moment of writing. Another example with the same source of error was found in the first test paper of student 13:

> (122) *I have been going on every demonstration against fast-*
> *food in my city, but there* **weren't** *many. I* **waited** *very*
> *long for a film like this. A film that shows the world how*
> *bad this food is for your health.* (S13_T1)

Here, the student wrote a scene in the phone-in-program about the documentary *Supersize Me*. In two cases, he erroneously used the Past Simple instead of the perfect. In both instances, the situation is persistent and extends to the present.

A further example of Past Simple instead of Present Perfect was found in the first test paper of student 6:

> (123) *Nobody want to cook any more every one buy tin-food or*
> *frozen food. The movie* **changed** *my mind about fast food*

> *because I went twice a week to "Burger King" or to "Mc*
> *Donald". Today I cook my own dinner because I know*
> *how much fat I have on my "plates". (S6_T1)*

This passage was written as the statement of a caller in the aforementioned radio program. She erroneously used the Past Simple instead of the perfect. Here, the point of reference R is the watching of the movie, which led to a change of mind that extends into the present. Accordingly, the Present Perfect has to be used as it falls into the category of the perfect of result. A similar mistake can be found in the following example:

> (124) *Now I'm 47 years old, I've written twelve books and ten of*
> *them **were** on bestsellerlists, but what have I reache.*
> (S7_T1)

In this passage the student wrote down a fictional author's thoughts and erroneously used the Past Simple instead of the Present Perfect. R is ignored in this sentence because the books have been bestsellers from the moment they appeared on the lists until now. Even if these books are not bestsellers at the moment, the fact that they *made it* to bestseller lists still holds true, giving an alternative formulation with a verb of a different aspectual class, i.e. a verb belonging to the aspectual class of accomplishment.

Present Perfect instead of Past Simple

The second most common error type in the domain of tense-aspect combination errors is the erroneous use of Present Perfect instead of Past Simple (PrPer iso PaS). With a frequency of 9, this type of error is less than half as frequent as its reverse, the most common error type discussed above. In all cases of this, the same source of error can be identified. For example, student 4 produced the following sentences in her first test paper:

> (125) *Since I **have seen** the movie I boycott all junk food*
> *companies. I make myself lunch and dinner. I have lost 10*
> *pounds of my weight and now I have a bigger pocket.*
> (S4_T1)

The student wrote this passage as part of the comment of a caller to a phone-in-program, using the Present Perfect instead of the Past Simple. The writer presents a situation that occurred in the past and since there is no connection to the present, there is no need for the perfect. Furthermore, the keyword *since* asks for a specific point or period in time which the Present Perfect cannot express. The source of this error seems to be interference of the student's L1 German. The verb phrase construction in the appropriate German formulation *Seit ich den Film gesehen habe* is morphologically similar to the English formulation *Since I have seen the movie* which, however, uses incorrect tense and aspect.

A further example of this error type can be found in the next example:

> (126) *After the movie I have decided to loose weight, but it is not so easy.* (S15_T1)

Here, student 15 wrote a comment of a caller to the radio show and erroneously used the Present Perfect instead of the Past Simple. A roughly word-for-word translation of the German *habe ich mich entschieden* seems to be the reason why she used the perfect here. However, since *after the movie* is a specific point in time that is completed, the simple past form must be used here.

A further example can be found in the second test paper of student 14:

> (127) *There are big differences between the three Muslims, who have died. The oldest of those three was Yasir Khan, 28.* (S14_T2)

In this passage the writer gave her personal opinion on young British Muslims, using the Present Perfect rather than the Past Simple. Again, German interference is the probable source of the error. Even if the German Perfekt *sind gestorben* is built with the German equivalent of the auxiliary *be* ('sein') in this context rather than *have* ('haben'), it may still have reminded the student of the compound form of the Present Perfect. Similarly, the same student wrote:

> (128) *Those people are born in Britain and have grown up there.* (S14_T2)

In this sentence the student refers to Muslims who are already dead. Therefore, the Present Perfect form of *have grown* is wrong, as the Past Simple form *grew* must be used. German interference seems to be the source of this mistake, too,

because the Geman Perfekt form *sind geboren* is morphologically similar to *are born* and the German verb phrase *sind aufgewachsen* may have reminded the student of the English compound tense form *have grown up*.

4.4. Discussion of Results

Results in some respects corresponded to expectations and the tendencies noted (or hypothesized) by previous studies, while in other respects – some of which can be considered crucial – they did not bear out previous findings.

It should be noted that, in the student tests analyzed for this thesis, the total number of errors was significant considering the curricular goals of the 12[th] grade concerning tense and aspect (BMUKK 2002: 11-12). This supports my earlier impression as a language trainer and teacher in adult education that many English learning students seem to have difficulties in mastering the English tense and aspect system, especially because they are not aware that something like aspect even exists. This, in turn, causes the erroneous use of tenses in situations that not only require the profound knowledge of the tense and aspect system, but also require the application of the grammatical rules for more commonly known features, such as reported speech, which relate to the aspect system (here the existence of a reference point R. Overall, the existence of such a reference point in a situation described was a frequent source of error.

As found in much SLA research, a major source of difficulty seems to be crosslinguistic interference of the learners' L1 German on several levels, most notably:

- different grammatical rules to describe situations and relations that use aspect in English, but do not in German
- morphological similarities in the forms despite semantic differences ('haben'/'have')
- more specifically, interference of German colloquialisms (Präsens for past and future events, where a reference point R is de facto ignored by the students' English formulations)
- English verbs that resemble German verbs either on the semantic or morphological level, but belong to different aspectual classes

- interference of German idioms ('geboren sein' translated as 'be born' where past tense is required)

- the deictic nature of tense choices (understandability is given preference over the fact that something is still true in the present)

- the lack of knowledge of English grammar, i.e. specific uses of tenses (general facts use Present Simple) or the rules of reported speech

- some errors may be nothing more than the result of oversight or pressure in the test situation (confusing morphologically similar forms in English, such as 'got'/'get', 'won't'/'want').

Looking at the three main error categories used in the analysis – i.e. tense, aspect and tense aspect combination errors – it must be concluded that errors involving some form of aspect (erroneous use or non-use involving only aspect or both tense and aspect) outweigh errors involving only tense at approximately 3 to 2 (99:69). Before looking into the distribution of errors in more detail, it can be noted that these general results are in keeping with Schmiedtová's cognitive-linguistic insight that, even at a proficient level, German native-speakers retain their L1-determined patterns and therefore find English aspect difficult. Out of the former group of categories, errors concerning only aspect forms, in turn, outweigh errors involving both tense and aspect at 2 to 1 (60:39). On the most general level, as suggested by previous research in SLA, this means that the grammatical system of aspect is a serious source of learners' difficulties in acquiring English. Part of this difficulty may be seen in the fact that 'aspect' as such is not taught in Austrian schools and is therefore not known to students even at their A-levels. Niemeier and Reif's (2008: 236) suggestion that "meaningfulness" of aspectual distinctions should be emphasized before form and rules should be taken into account here.

Aspect errors in the students' tests apparently have various sources, most of which are quite recognizable applying the theoretical framework of tense and aspect as well as crosslinguistic interferences. While some errors may be due to ignoring of R, most errors occur due to the erroneous use of the progressive for general statements and facts as well as the interference of German as L1, which asks for Präsens in describing situations that are connected to the now, but should be recounted in the Present Perfect in English.

Second, the source of **tense-aspect combination** errors could be narrowed down to two main reasons: German L1 interference due to morphological similarities ('have seen'/'habe gesehen') and the learners' ignoring of the perfect of result or perfect of persistent situation.

The third most common category, **tense errors**, seem to have occurred due to several distinct reasons in the student's data: German L1 interference due to semantic and morphological similarities ('are born'/'sind geboren', 'has'/'hat'), interference of German colloquialisms ('was die Zukunft bringt', 'what the future brings'), the learners' ignoring of a reference point R and simple oversight.

Regarding the distinction of simple and compound forms, some significant numbers could be gleaned from the data. The students committed a total of 164 errors involving simple forms (either used or not used erroneously), meaning that only 4 errors did not involve a simple form, i.e. only compound forms. Considering that 168 errors were found in total, the vast majority of mistakes involved simple forms in one way or the other. These findings do not support Knapp's (1989) observation that, because of the little-developed morphology and the familiarity of English features to German L1 speakers, simple tenses should pose no difficulty for advanced learners. Out of these 164 errors involving simple forms, 64 were pure tense errors, where no erroneous use of aspect occurred, i.e. no aspect was involved or it was used correctly. Considering that the simple forms should be easier to acquire than compound forms, this result indicates that a notably high portion of mistakes made by the students is not due to problems with form distinctions, the morphological complexity of compound forms or morphological similarities with German. Knapp's (1989) observation noted above thus is exemplary of the view criticized by Niemeier and Reif (2008) as focusing inordinately on form and rules, neglecting meaningfulness to the detriment of learners.

The erroneous use of simple forms instead of compound forms (54) was slightly more frequent than its opposite, the erroneous use of compound forms instead of

simple forms (47).[16] The reasons for the high frequency of erroneous use of the simple form seem to be the interference of the German Perfekt, the learners' disregarding of a reference point R, and the non-existence of progressive forms in German. The erroneous use of compound forms is caused mainly by the students' non-use of the Present Simple for facts and general statements and their confusion of the German Perfekt and the English perfect.

Looking at the individual tense and aspect forms, the results showed that some forms show a notably higher frequency of errors than others: The Present Simple was erroneously used 64 times and erroneously non-used 44 times, a total of 108 errors. The frequent erroneous use of the Present Simple leads to the conclusion that the students rely on the Present Simple, which is not only the first tense taught in Austrian schools, but also erroneously used as 'fall-back' neutral form instead the not fully understood progressive (Niemeier & Reif 2008: 349).

The Past Simple was erroneously used 38 times and erroneously non-used 43 times, a total of 81 errors. The high number of erroneous non-use is likely due to the interference of morphological similarities between German Perfekt and English perfect, which is consequently given preference over Past Simple.

The Present Progressive, which is normally taught after the Present Simple, was erroneously used 27 times and erroneously non-used 5 times, a total of 32 errors. The apparent reason for these mistakes is the non-existence of the progressive form in German, which leads to difficulties for the learners. According to Bailey (1987) the Present Progressive is mastered by learners before the Past Progressive. This observation, however, is not supported by my data on a quantitative level; students made 16 times as many mistakes involving present progressive forms than they did with past progressive forms (see Table 12). While this may in part be attributed to a relative lack of occasion or avoidance, we cannot ignore the frequency of these mistakes. In fact, most of them involve the erroneous use of Present Progressive instead of Present Simple, i.e. the overuse

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[16] Here and in the following discussion of error frequencies, every error as coded (see Table 6 in Section 4.2) contains two forms, one of which was used erroneously and another that was not-used erroneously. In the case of PrS iso PrPro, for instance, the Present Simple was erroneously used and the Present Progressive was erroneously non-used. Consequently, the numbers of errors clusters discussed in the following will not add up to the total of 168 errors, but may be more or less than that number.

of a progressive form. Qualitatively, virtually all of these errors concern the violation of the rule that general facts in English require the simple form. Table 12 gives an overview over progressive forms in the present, the past and the future:

Error Type	Total for error type	involving Present Progressive	involving Past Progressive
Tense[17]	69	0	0
Aspect	60	30	1
Tense Aspect Combination	39	2	1
Total	168	32	2

Table 12: Progressive forms of present, past and future tense

I will now turn to error clusters involving perfect forms. The Present Perfect was erroneously used 11 times and erroneously non-used 30 times, a total of 41 errors making it the perfect form most frequently involved in errors. The Past Perfect was erroneously used 5 times and erroneously non-used 12 times, a total of 17 errors. As mentioned before, the interference of the students' L1 appears to be main reason why the Present Perfect is at the center of an error cluster. Table 13 gives the number of all errors involving the perfect form in the past, present and future:

Error Type	Total for error type	involving Present Perfect	involving Past Perfect	involving Future Perfect
Tense	69	1	0	1
Aspect	60	9	14	0
Tense Aspect Combination	39	31	3	0
Total	168	41	17	1

Table 13: Perfect forms of present, past and future tense

If the individual perfect forms are compared, the table above shows that with a frequency of 41, the number of Present Perfect mistakes is significantly higher than other compound forms.

The most frequent individual mistake involving the Present Perfect is that of erroneously using the Past Simple instead of the Present Perfect, which accounts

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[17] Tables 12 and 13, though focused on aspectual forms, both include the error type of tense because the classification scheme used here categorizes an error in which a progressive form is used correctly but in the wrong tense as a tense error. Since the error would involve an aspect form, it is included in these two tables.

for 40% of the total number of mistakes involving this perfect form. Its high frequency is somewhat unexpected considering Erling's (2003) as well as Hecht and Green's (1989) lists of main error clusters, which do not include this error at all (see below). However, its predominance is plausible considering Niemeier and Reif's (2008) observation that simple forms (such as the Past Simple) are used as neutral forms when learners do not grasp meaningful distinctions between forms. The issue here is not one of incorrect form, but of a lack of conceptual understanding of the four forms of perfect (i.e. perfect of result, experiential perfect, perfect of persistent situation and perfect of recent past). Comrie's (1976) insight that not all languages with perfect meaning distinguish all four forms of the perfect may explain why the German-speaking students in my study did not use the Present Perfect specifically for the perfect of result and perfect of persistent situation. In the majority of cases, this led to the use of the Past Simple instead.

The erroneous use of the Present Simple instead of the Present Perfect has its source in the negative transfer from German L1, rather than a misappropriation of the perfect form, especially since no Present Perfect instead of Present Simple mistake was found. This result is in line with Erling's (2003) study on 'German English', specifically her observation that one of three main deviations from standard Englishes is the erroneous use of the Present Simple instead of the Present Perfect. Equally frequent in my data was the erroneous use of Present Perfect instead of Past Simple, which was also identified as a main deviation of 'German English' by Erling (2003), confirming an earlier study on frequent mistakes conducted by Hecht and Green (1983).

The following figure shows all errors that involve the Present Perfect:
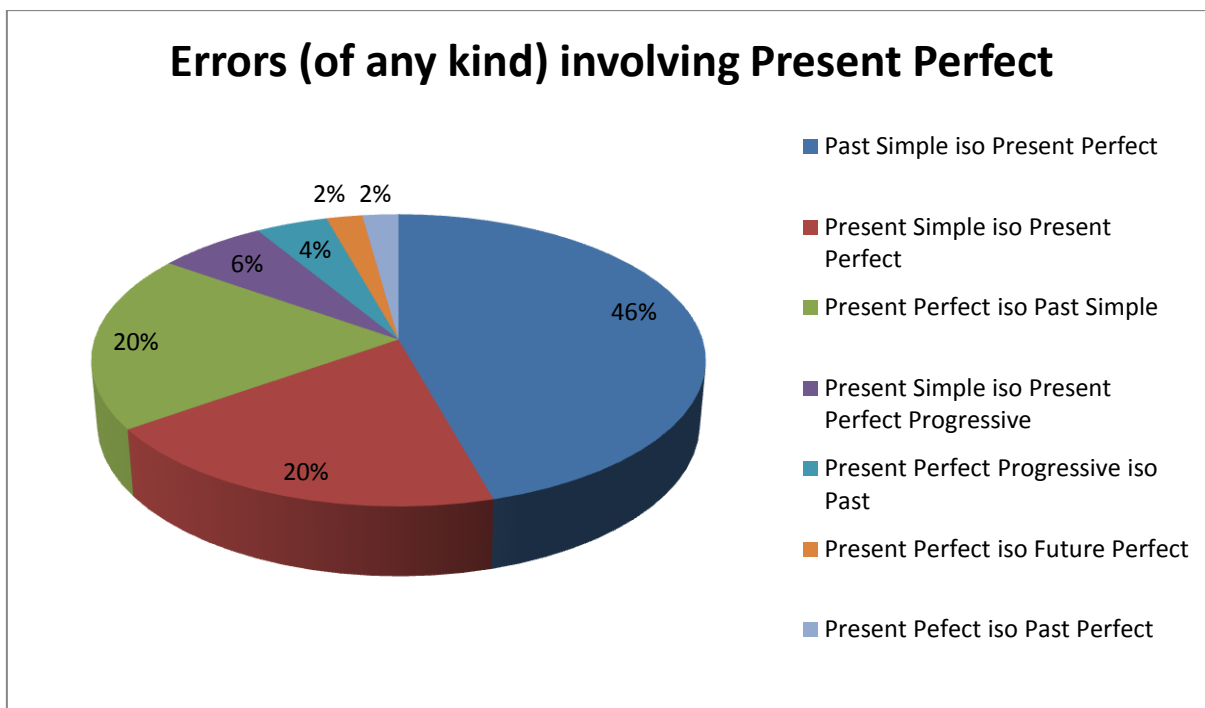
Errors (of any kind) involving Present Perfect

Legend:
- Past Simple iso Present Perfect
- Present Simple iso Present Perfect
- Present Perfect iso Past Simple
- Present Simple iso Present Perfect Progressive
- Present Perfect Progressive iso Past
- Present Perfect iso Future Perfect
- Present Pefect iso Past Perfect

Values shown: 46%, 20%, 20%, 6%, 4%, 2%, 2%

Figure 17: Errors involving Present Perfect

Looking at all errors involving past perfect forms, their frequency of 17 also is notably high as the past perfect does occur frequently in English. This supports another assumption, i.e. that the past perfect form would be frequently underused by Austria students due to the rare use of Plusquamperfekt in Austrian German (Muhr 1995: 227-228). Its counterpart, the erroneous use of Present Perfect, with a lesser frequency of 5, is mainly due to oversight. Hence, both perfective forms are a source of mistakes.

Comparing the frequency of errors involving perfective and progressive aspect (see Figure 18 below), we see that they occur at a ratio of 3:2 (59:37). Thus, the perfective caused more errors than the progressive. This indicates that, although the progressive aspect is difficult for German speaking students of English, the perfective aspect is the more dominant source of error. Presumably it is also the more difficult aspect to master as even linguistic theory remains controversial regarding the nature of English perfect (see Chapter 2).
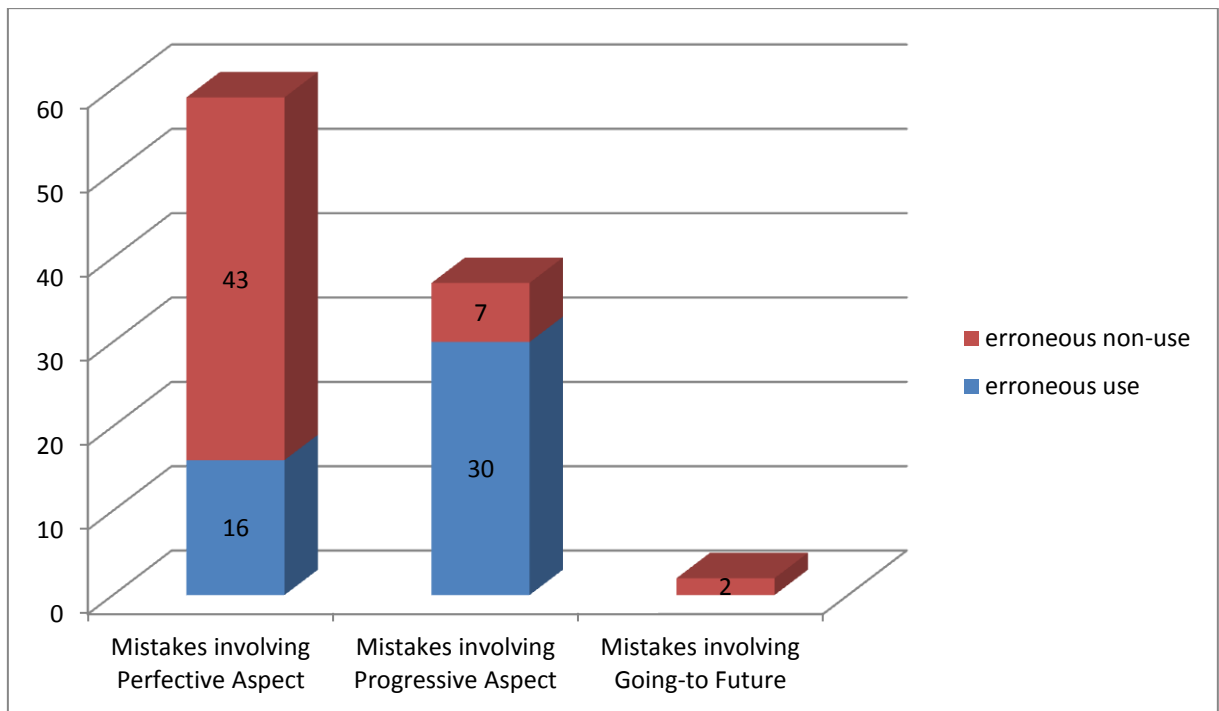
Figure 18: Comparing perfect and progressive errors

Another point of interest in the results of my study is the striking difference between the erroneous use and erroneous non-use of both, the perfective and the progressive aspect (see Figure 18). The bar diagram shows that with regard to the perfective aspect, students made significantly less errors by erroneous use than by erroneous non-use, i.e. students underused perfect forms far more than they overused them. The main reason why errors occurred concerning perfective aspect seems to be interference due to the use of perfect for situations that are described using the Präsens in German, the students' ignoring of a reference point R, and morphological similarities between German and English.

In contrast, progressive aspect exhibited the opposite distribution: Results show that the students committed errors by using the progressive much more frequently than by not using it, i.e. they overused progressive forms more frequently than they underused them. Therefore, the hypothesis originally proposed by Ungerer (2000: 131) is only partly borne out by my results. He argued that German-speaking learners of English face the problem of not having a 'feeling' for how to use the progressive aspect and therefore both neglect and overuse the progressive forms.

> Für uns deutsch Sprechende ergibt sich somit das Problem, dass uns das Sprachgefühl für die Verwendung des progressiven Aspekts weitgehend

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> fehlt. Deshalb neigen wir im Englischen zur Vernachlässigung, aber auch zur übertriebenen Anwendung der progressive form. (Ungerer 2000: 131)

My study, however, corroborates Römer's claim (2006: 231) that

> German-speaking learners of English tend to be particularly confused and error-prone when it comes to deciding on a simple or progressive tense form, and often use progressives in inappropriate contexts.

In my data, the overuse, however, was restricted to the present tense. By contrast, there was no significantly higher number of erroneous overuse of the progressive aspect in other tenses. Indeed, this type of error is almost entirely restricted to the erroneous use of the Present Progressive instead of the Present Simple for describing or stating general facts. This strong result definitely indicates the need for a pedagogic intervention or adaptation of the curriculum.

Moreover, my findings bear out Bardovi-Harlig's (1992: 253-278) insight that language learners acquire meaning after form. The students in my study generally knew exactly how to build the progressive forms, but frequently did not understand how to use them or when not to use them. As has been mentioned before, a major reason is the way in which English is taught in Austrian schools specifically, but also generally in the EFL classroom. Li and Shirai (2000: 52) have correctly observed that tense is seen as more important than aspect in language teaching. However, this one-sided approach – at worst to the complete exclusion of aspect from the curriculum – is likely responsible for most aspect and tense-aspect combination errors. Since German and English share a common heritage and exhibit many similarities, it should be in our interest as language teachers to focus on the specific differences, including the prominent feature of aspect.

My results are also in line with Li and Shirai's (2000: 52) conclusion that tense is acquired before aspect in SLA, as the German-speaking learners included in my study have significant difficulties in acquiring aspectual forms. However, I find Schloter's (1992: 126) view that aspect marking seems to stay forever incomprehensible for German learners to be an overstatement less than helpful.

However, in several important respects the results did not correspond to expectations. The data show a significant frequency of errors involving only tense forms, i.e. involving no aspect at all. Consider, e.g., the Future Simple: a total

number of 37 errors were found in the data. More specifically, it was erroneously used 15 times and almost all errors violated the rule that general statements in English require the Present Simple and not the future tense, as frequently used by the students. The reasons for the erroneous non-use of the Future Simple with a frequency of 22 can be narrowed down to interference by their German L1. My findings bear out findings reported by Hecht and Green (1983: 50-51), stating that German-speaking learners of English have difficulties with the Future Simple due to the common use of the Präsens for future meaning in German.

Another unexpected error was due to the frequent neglect of a reference point R. While the German tense system does involve a similar distinction between Perfekt and Plusquamperfekt, this – and thus also the reference point R – is predominantly disregarded in Austrian German and virtually non-existent in its spoken form (Muhr 1995: 227-228).

A further unexpected result was the modest number of errors involving Present Simple instead of Present Progressive. The few errors which did occur almost all occurred in situations where the action had a broader meaning and is not happening just now, e.g., *medicine grows so fast*. These situations may be seen as bordering on general facts, but need to be distinguished insofar as they are not universal. On the other hand, a significant number of errors involved the erroneous use of the progressive for general facts. In fact, the grammatical rule violated here has a counterpart in German and the students thus act not according to their L1, but overuse a form (the progressive) that does not even exist in German.

As a final note, it should be pointed out that the (admittedly small) student population included in the study also showed a recognizable pattern in the errors they produced. Counting errors involving only tense (tense errors), on the one hand, and errors involving aspect (aspect errors and tense-aspect combination errors), on the other hand, there are two large groups of students: The first group has very few tense errors, but a significantly higher number of aspect errors. Student 1, for instance, had only 1 tense error and 10 aspect errors. The second group, by contrast, had roughly the same number of errors in the two grouping mentioned above. Student 4, for instance, had 7 errors in each group. Only in a few exceptional cases did students produced slightly more tense errors than errors involving aspect (see Table 8).

5. Conclusion

God,
give us grace to accept with serenity the things
that cannot be changed,
courage to change the things
which should be changed,
and
the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.
(Reinhold Niebuhr)

This thesis has analyzed the use of tense and aspect in the English test papers of 12th grade Austrian learners. By necessity, the basis for such an analysis are theories and models of tense and aspect in general and of the English language in particular. The following conception of time and its diagrammatic representation served as the foundation of my analysis of tense and aspect: **Tenses** are deictic, i.e. they depend on context for meaning. Depending on whether their deictic center is at the present moment or another moment under discussion, they are called 'absolute' and 'relative' or 'simple' and 'compound', respectively. For reasons explicated in Chapter 2, this thesis uses the latter set of terms to distinguish English tense forms. In English the absolute tenses are widely agreed to be the present, the past and the future. Definitions of the English compound tenses, however, are controversial: They mainly focus on participle constructions and the use of time adverbials.

My analysis used Reichenbach's three parameters of temporal reference: **speech time S**, **event time E** and **reference point R**, which relate to each other on a timeline, i.e. either precede each other or coincide. While influential, Reichenbach's theory has been elaborated and modified by numerous authors such as Comrie (1976, 1985), DeClerck (1991), Binnick (1991), Klein (1994) and Radden and Dirven (2007), whose criticisms and suggestions were also taken into consideration. Furthermore, additions to the term 'tense' were used to distinguish between '-form', '-meaning' and '-category', as proposed by Klein (1994), whenever there was need for distinction.

Aspect describes the development of an action and is divided into two categories: lexical and grammatical aspect. Lexical aspect or Aktionsart refers to the temporal meaning of a verb as an essential part of its semantics, describing a situation, and

is traditionally classified by Vendler's four verb categories: state, activity, achievement and accomplishment. Grammatical aspect describes the specific viewpoint of an event, seeing it as either perfective or progressive (imperfective). Using these standard categories, both grammatical and lexical aspect were analyzed as they occurred in the test papers investigated. Beyond the analysis of tense and aspect as separate categories, as which some models seem to treat them, their relationship and interplay in language use were taken into account.

To analyze the English test papers, the tense and aspect system of the English language was covered and subsequently compared to the German system in order to contrast the two languages (Chapter 3). The fact that German and English exhibit little distance and show numerous morphological, semantic and grammatical similarities raises specific issues in the process of **second language acquisition or SLA**. For the analysis of papers written by German-speaking learners of English, it is therefore essential to grasp and apply the concepts of contrastive analysis as well as transfer and crosslinguistic interference. To provide a basis for the actual analysis, relevant research on the acquisition of English aspect in SLA in general and for German-speaking learners in particular was reviewed, its results and hypotheses to be later discussed in relation to my own findings. In some detail, the still limited research on the acquisition of English aspect by native speakers of Austrian German was reviewed with respect to possible consequences of the differences and similarities between the different variants of German as a pluricentric language.

The concept of **error analysis or EA** served as the method for the analysis of the errors in the test papers. By comparing the errors the learners produced in the target language (TL) to the accepted/standard TL form itself, the knowledge of the learner could be identified (Gass & Selinker 1994). The study used the method's standard of Corder's (1974) five steps: collection of sample learner language, identification of errors, description of errors, explanation of errors and finally error evaluation.

The **study** reported in Chapter 4 of this thesis analyzed tense and aspect errors in 30 test papers of 15 students in an AHS in Vienna and related the findings to relevant research on German-speaking learners' acquisition of English aspect and tense. Three main error categories (tense, aspect and tense-aspect combination)

allowed me to distinguish the errors and analyze them with regard to quantity and quality. The analysis showed numerous clusters of errors linked to factors that likely affected the acquisition of the tense and aspect system by the learners. A key finding was that **interference** between the learners' first language (L1) German and English was the main source of errors in the students' tests. Interference errors were identified as, e.g., the confusion between German and English verbs or idioms that are morphologically similar but semantically different; different grammatical rules for describing situations and relations that use aspect in English, but do not in German; the ignoring of a reference point R or the deictic nature of tense choices. The lack of knowledge of specific rules of English grammar, such as the rules of reported speech, also caused various mistakes and some errors are likely nothing more than the result of oversight or pressure in the test situation.

Specifically, the analysis showed an overuse of the progressive apparently resulting from the non-existence of a progressive form in German. The opposite situation was observed with the perfective aspect: The students committed errors by not using the perfective much more frequently than by using it.

The tense that caused the most difficulties was the Present Simple, which was not to be expected. Also unexpectedly, it was the simple forms in general that caused the vast majority of pure tense mistakes. In particular, the Future Simple was frequently involved in mistakes due to interference on grounds of the frequent use of Präsens in Austrian German instead of the more formal Futur (Muhr 1995: 227-228). Additionally, the erroneous use of the Future Simple for general statements instead of the Present Simple resulted in a large number of errors. Beyond this particular type of error, the rule that facts and general statements require the simple present was generally neglected by the students.

Among the compound forms, the Present Perfect proved a highly problematic issue. Here, interference again caused most of the mistakes. Another key finding was an underuse of the Past Perfect that could be linked to the rare use of the Plusquamperfekt in Austrian German. Strikingly, almost all students produced more aspect than tense errors, or at least roughly the same number of aspect and tense errors. However, 40% of all errors were pure tense errors with no aspect involved.

Results from other studies could be mainly corroborated (Li & Shirai 2000, Bailey 1987) with respect to the frequency of errors or problems in second language acquisition as well as error sources in L1 interference. In particular, the conclusion reached by Bardovi-Harlig (1992) that form is acquired before meaning was borne out by my results. With respect to general observations, such as Ungerer's (2000) claim that German-speaking learners of English experience difficulty with the progressive and therefore both under- and overuse it, my results allow a more detailed picture of the specific student population under investigation.

To reduce errors in the field of tense and aspect, the findings of the study could be taken into account when teaching English in the years leading up to the Austrian A-levels. I concur with Schloter's (1992: 138) criticism of Dulay, Burt and Krashen's (1982: 269) rule "Do Not Refer to a Student's L1 When Teaching the L2" is outdated. Therefore, the issue of interference and transfer should be mentioned in the EFL classroom in order to make the students aware of and increase their "sensitivity" (Kruppa 1975: 98) to these phenomena and help them increase their knowledge of the English tense and aspect system. Predictable errors such as the 'false friendship' between the Present Perfect and the Perfekt due to morphological similarities, the overuse of the progressive or differences between the common use of Präsens in Austrian German for future meaning should be verbalized and discussed in order to reduce mistakes.

The explanation of 'aspect' as such could be helpful, even if done on a very basic and general level. The notion of aspect in English could be compared to other languages if available, for instance, if students are bilingual or speak other languages. Moreover, contrastive analysis between English and German appears to be useful for the acquisition of English at a certain level of proficiency. However, talking as much English as possible in the lessons should be emphasized. To explain the English tenses, a timeline or similar visualization of temporal relationships should be used as an aid to improve the students' understanding of the progressive and perfect forms in particular. Thus, the existence and relevance of a reference point R can be made more accessible to the language learners. I furthermore agree with Raabe (1974: 47) who suggests stimulating creative mistakes and including them in the learning process.

The most significant point, however, is to keep in mind that the acquisition of tense and aspect, and grammar in general, should also be taught intensively in the future 'Matura Neu'. Although I do think that rhetoric and communication skills should be improved and taught in the classroom, this can only happen if grammar knowledge is not neglected but continuously improved.

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Appendices

Appendix 1:

List of Figures

List of Tables

Appendix 2

1. Listen to the recording, and then write a summary which includes the answers to the following questions. (be sure you mark the answers in the margin)

    a) What is Straight Edge and what are their beliefs?
    b) What have the hardliners done?
    c) Holly´s been Straight Edge for two and a half years. Why did she start?
    d) How have things changed since Megan joined?

2. **A phone-in-programme:** "Super-Size Me" is the topic of today´s CNN Q&A program. Four to five people call in and make different statements on the film and in how far it shall influence people´s attitude towards eating healthy food, keeping fit and doing something against obesity.

3. **Inner monologue:** A personality of importance (writer, politician..) is about to reach his/her aim to have the possibility to influence other people and to exert power and thinks about his/her fears, problems that might arise and about the responsibility he/she has to these people.

min. 600 words. Good luck!

Traitors or Martyrs

I. Questions on the text

1. How did Al-Muhajiroun get famous all over Britain?

2. Give some information on the three young men who went to Afghanistan to join the jihad.

3. What are the different views of British Muslim leaders and the British authorities regarding the young fighters' involvement?

4. Give your personal opinion on what makes young British Muslims want to become martyrs.

II. Task beyond the text

A phone-in program

"Dying for Allah – insane or righteous?" is the topic of today's CNN Q&A program.
Four to five people call in and make different statements.

TRAITORS OR MARTYRS

What motivated three young British Muslims to die, allegedly while fighting for the Taliban?

By HELEN GIBSON LUTON

TO 40-YEAR-OLD BRITISH LAWYER Anjem Choudary, a British passport means very little. For a true Muslim, he says, "a British passport is no more than a travel document." Abu Yahya, a 26-year-old Londoner and veteran of military training camps in Kashmir and Afghanistan, agrees: "Our allegiance is solely to Allah and his Messenger, not to the Queen and country. Nationality ... means nothing."

Choudary and Yahya belong to the extremist Islamic group Al-Muhajiroun, and though they speak for only a tiny fraction of Britain's 2 million Muslims, their views received grim publicity last week with the news that three British-born Muslims had been killed in Kabul—allegedly in a U.S. bombing raid on a Taliban compound—after volunteering for the jihad.

The deaths of the three young men shocked their families. In Crawley, an industrial town 53 km south of London, the mother of Yasir Khan, 28, insisted her son had gone to Pakistan for humanitarian work. In Luton, 55 km north of London, the parents of computer engineering student Afzal Munir and taxi driver Aftab Manzoor, both 25, weren't aware the two had joined up. Both lived with their parents in modest, semidetached suburban houses in this quiet town that is home to 22,000 Muslims.

At Luton's Central Mosque, the talk was all about the deaths of the two unassuming young men. Retired shopkeeper Muhammad Sulaiman, president of the mosque, disapproved of their act— "I live in Britain. If we fight, we fight for Britain"—and said that his religion insisted on permission from a man's wife or parents before joining a jihad. But younger men like taxi driver Shoked Malik, 29, reserved their criticism for the Americans: "They didn't bomb Northern Ireland over the terrorists there, so why Afghanistan?"

Al-Muhajiroun is capitalizing on this anger. The organization's leaders claim it is not a recruiting agency, but they don't discourage anyone from joining the jihad. True Muslims "love death [for the cause] more than we love our life," says Yahya.

British authorities speculated that volunteers probably amounted to a few dozen. Conservative peer Norman Tebbit suggested that it would be treason for British citizens to take up arms against Anglo-American forces. Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon warned that those who did fight for the Taliban might face prosecution should they return.

What could motivate these young men—born and bred in Britain—to leave their comfortable lives to become "martyrs," as Al-Muhajiroun describes them? The jihad volunteers are part of a generation who feel "they are not fully accepted by wider society," says Haifaa Jawad, lecturer in Islamic studies at Birmingham University. "They feel vulnerable and insecure." Disaffection among young British Muslims is nothing new. Last summer racial tensions exploded into rioting in some northern cities, such as Oldham, where there is high unemployment.

The jihad volunteers are mostly from first-generation British families and feel oppressed by the stresses of biculturalism, suggests Mounir Daymi, executive director of Britain's Muslim Students Society. This alienation is felt most deeply in the poorer communities. That's where you'll find "some people who want the clash of civilizations to happen," Daymi says. But Al-Muhajiroun's Choudary insists that it's not just the unemployed who are rallying to the Taliban cause. "Poverty or housing problems are not going to motivate you to give your life in Afghanistan," he says. Only a strong belief in Islam will do that.

560 words

2. Explain the following terms:

1. AIH
2. Donor insemination
3. IVF

3. Genetic engineering and cloning experiments (and their commercial use) are a very serious threat to the welfare of farm animals. Discuss.

Abstract

The acquisition of the English tense and aspect system is a severe problem for German learners of English, even at an advanced level. This fact can also be observed in the test papers of 12[th] grade Austrian students, which served as the empirical data for my thesis. Generally speaking, the reasons for these difficulties might be the lack of grammatical aspect marking in German and the fact that aspect forms as such are not mentioned in the English classroom but are taught as tense forms.

As the theoretical basis of my empirical analysis, I discuss both traditional (Reichenbach 1947, Vendler 1974) and current perspectives (Comrie 1976, 1985, DeClerck 1991, 1995, Binnick 1991, Klein 1994) on the English tense and aspect system and draw a comparison between the English and German tense and aspect system. Reichenbach's three parameters of temporal reference - event time (E), speech time (S) and reference time (R) -, which are related to each other on a timeline and can be used to identify all tense and aspect distinctions, continue to be influential in research on tense and aspect. Criticisms and suggestions, however, are also taken into consideration.

Relevant research on the acquisition of English aspect in second language acquisition in general and for German-speaking learners in particular is also reviewed. The still limited research on the acquisition of English aspect by native speakers of Austrian German was explored with respect to possible consequences of the differences and similarities between the different standard variants of German as a pluricentric language. To account for the effect of morphological similarities between German and English, the phenomena of transfer and interference are discussed and integrated in the analysis.

The aim of my empirical study was to determine, on the one hand, the distribution and frequency of tense and aspect errors and, on the other hand, identify recurring error clusters or patterns. The data consisted of 30 test papers written by students in their final year before their A-levels. Corder's (1974) five step error analysis served as the method for analysing the errors in the test papers and three main error categories were distinguished (tense, aspect and tense-aspect combination

errors), while each error was also categorized according to the specific tense and aspect forms used and not-used. Consequently, the errors were analyzed from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective.

The results from previous studies were mainly corroborated by my study, but some new insights could also be gained. A key finding was that interference between the learners' first language German and the second language English was the main source of error in the students' tests. Other errors occurred due to the lack of knowledge of specific rules of English grammar, and some errors were the result of oversight or pressure in the test situation. Building the individual tense and aspect forms, however, did not present any difficulties for the learners.

In more detail, the analysis showed an overuse of the progressive apparently resulting from the non-existence of a progressive form in German. The opposite situation was observed with the perfective aspect, which was more frequently not used than used in the errors analyzed. The use of the Present Perfect Tense in particular proved a highly problematic issue, as well as the non-use of the Present Simple for facts and the use of the Future Tense due to the use of Präsens for future meaning in German. Moreover the non-use of the Present Simple for facts was a common error in the data.

These results further support already existing recommendations for how to reduce errors in the field of tense and aspect: Second language teaching should explain the concepts of *aspect* and *interference*, and use contrastive analysis between English and German to facilitate the acquisition of English tense and aspect.

Kurzfassung

Im Zweitspracherwerb ist der Fehlgebrauch von Zeit- und Aspektformen des Englischen für Lernende mit deutscher Muttersprache oft ein gravierendes Problem und das selbst bei fortgeschrittenem Niveau. So auch bei Englischschularbeiten einer Maturaklasse, dem Gegenstand der empirischen Untersuchung in dieser Diplomarbeit. Auch in der Forschungsliteratur dokumentierte Gründe dafür sind unter anderem der nicht vorhandene grammatikalisch markierte Aspekt im Deutschen und der daraus resultierende Umstand, dass die Verbalkategorie *Aspekt* als solches im Englischunterricht weder erwähnt noch erklärt, sondern fälschlicherweise als Zeitform besprochen wird.

Grundlegende (Reichenbach 1947, Vendler 1974) und aktuelle theoretische Perspektiven (Comrie 1976, 1985, DeClerck 1991, 1995, Binnick 1991, Klein 1994) auf Zeitformen und Aspekt der englischen Sprache dienen als Grundlage der empirischen Untersuchung, ebenso wie der Vergleich mit dem Zeit- und Aspektsystem der deutschen Sprache. Das von Reichenbach eingeführte Tempusmodell mit den drei Zeitpunkten Ereigniszeit (E), Sprechzeit (S) und Referenzeit (R), mit dessen Hilfe sich alle Tempora näher bestimmen in Relation setzen lassen, ist nach wie vor sehr einflussreich in dem Forschungsgebiet der Zeit- und Aspektanalyse; dennoch wurden für die vorliegende Diplomarbeit auch Kritikpunkte, Ergänzungs- und Änderungsvorschlage berücksichtigt.

Als weitere Grundlage für die Analyse dient die Forschung zum Zweitspracherwerb des Englischen im Allgemeinen und durch Lerner mit Erstsprache Deutsch im Besonderen. Da es sich beim Datenmaterial um Texte von SprecherInnen der österreichischen Standardvariante des Deutschen handelt, wird auch auf etwaige Unterschied zu anderen Varianten des Deutschen als plurizentrische Sprache eingegangen, gerade weil der Forschungsstand zum Erwerb des englischen Zeit- und Aspektsystems durch diese spezielle Gruppe noch überschaubar ist. Aufgrund der zahlreichen morphologischen Ähnlichkeiten zwischen Deutsch und Englisch werden die Zweitspracherwerbsphänomene des zwischensprachlichen Transfers und der Interferenz besprochen und in der Analyse mit einbezogen.

Die empirische Studie verfolgte das Ziel, einerseits die Verteilung und Häufigkeiten der Zeit- und Aspektfehler zu bestimmen, andererseits auch sich wiederholende Muster und Fehlerquellen zu identifizieren. Als Datenmaterial dienten 30 Schularbeiten einer 8. Klasse AHS. Die Fehleranalyse wurde mittels der fünf Schritte von Corder (1974) durchgeführt und drei Fehlergruppen unterschieden: Zeit, Aspekt und Zeit-Aspekt-Kombinationsfehler, wobei jeder Fehler für sich nach der verwendeten und nichtverwendeten korrekten Form kategorisiert wurde. Die so kategorisierten Fehler wurden quantitativ und qualitativ analysiert.

Die Ergebnisse decken sich zum Großteil mit bereits vorhandenen Studien, es zeichneten sich jedoch auch neue Ergebnisse ab. Es wurde bestätigt, dass vor allem Interferenz als Hauptfehlerquelle für Zeit und Aspektfehler gesehen werden kann. Ebenso wurden die unvollständige Beherrschung der Grammatikregeln – und zwar nicht in Hinblick auf die Bildung sondern die Bedeutung von Zeit- und Aspektformen –, aber auch Flüchtigkeitsfehler aufgrund der Stresssituation während der Schularbeit festgestellt.

Es zeigte sich, dass der progressive Aspekt weit häufiger falsch verwendet wird als falsch nicht-verwendet, was auf das Fehlens des Aspekts im Deutschen zurückzuführen war. Beim perfektiven Aspekt hingegen zeigt sich das gegenteilige Bild, er wird häufiger falsch nicht-verwendet als falsch verwendet. Insbesondere der Gebrauch der Present Perfect Tense erwies sich als problematisch, ebenso wie der der Future Tense aufgrund der Verwendung des Präsens für Zukünftiges im Deutschen. Die Nichtverwendung der Present Simple für Fakten war schließlich auch ein häufiger Fehler im Datenmaterial.

Diese Ergebnisse untermauern die in der Literatur bereits skizzierte Empfehlung, dass, um Zeit- und Aspektfehler zu reduzieren, Aspekt und Interferenz im Englischunterricht erklärt und eine kontrastive Analyse zwischen Deutsch und Englisch durchgeführt werden sollten.

PERSÖNLICHE DATEN

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