UNIT 12 : USES OF TENSES II

UNIT STRUCTURE

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12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- use the different tense forms to perform different language functions
- learn the different ways of expressing future time

12.2 PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS

Form : have/has + (be + en)+(V+ ing)

have been reading

has been playing

1. We use the present perfect continuous tense to describe or to relate a situation or activity that started in the past and has been in progress for a period til now. Sometimes we use this tense with expressions that indicate the time period e.g. with since and for

e.g. (a) I have been working in this office for two years.

(b) She has been learning French for six months.

2. We often use the present perfect continuous tense when we ask question with “How long.....? We also use this tense when we say how long - something has been in progress. e.g.

(a) How long have you been watching television?

(b) I have been watching television since 7 o’clock in the evening.

3. We use both the present perfect continuous tense and the present perfect tense to refer to something that had started in the past and which affects the situation that exists now. Look at these examples.

(a) I’ve been reading his column with great interest.

(b) I’ve read his column with great interest.

While the first sentence focuses on the activity (i.e. reading) which may not have been finished, the second sentence focuses on the activity (i.e. reading) which has been finished.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1. Fill in the blanks with the right forms (present perfect or present perfect continuous tense) of the verb given in brackets.

(a) Meena ..... (do) very well in her music classes. She hopes to keep it up.

(b) He ..... (take) away the novel. I ..... (read) it since morning.

(c) She ..... (paint) for three years now.

(d) She ..... (learn) a lot about painting from the teacher.

(e) The children ..... (watch) the cricket match since morning, they ..... (not come) home for lunch.

(f) It ..... (rain) heavily since morning.

12.3 PAST PERFECT AND PAST PERFECT CONTINUOUS

Past Perfect :

Forms : had + V + ed for regular verbs.

had + change of vowels as in past tense form for some irregular verbs while for a few others there is no change of form.

e.g. (i) had played

(ii) had begun, had cut

Past Perfect Continuous Tense :

Forms : had + been + V + ing

e.g. had been doing

1. We use the past perfect to talk about a past situation or an activity that took place before another past situation or activity or before a particular time in the past.

e.g. (a) When I reached the station, the train had left.

(b) I had gone to bed when the phone rang.

Note that the past situation that took place before another past situation takes the past perfect tense while the one that followed takes the simple past tense.

2. We use the past perfect when we say what we wanted or hoped to do.

e.g. (a) I had wanted to see him but I couldn't make time.

(b) He had hoped to buy a flat in the city but he settled for a house instead.

3. We use the past perfect tense to refer to certain actions that took place at certain points of time in the past.

e.g. (a) By ten o'clock the business establishments had opened nearly all their shops.

(b) At twelve years of age he had written his first poem.

4. We use the past perfect continuous tense to refer to actions or happenings which lasted for a period of time in the past and were completed at a point of time in the past, e.g.

e.g. (a) I had been ringing the bell for two minutes, but no one opened the door.

(b) The boy had been studying in a village school until his twelfth year.

Note that in the first sentence 'for two minutes' indicates a point of time when the action of ringing the bell was completed. The action lasted for a period of time, notably two minutes.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.2. Fill in the blanks with the correct forms of the verbs in brackets (use simple past, past perfect or past perfect continuous tense)

(a) We ..... (wait) for the bus for an hour when we ..... (decide) to take a taxi.

(b) Mr. Goswami ..... (act) in films for thirty years when he decided to join Awahan Theatre.

(c) I ..... (read) for half an hour when the lights suddenly ..... (go off)

(d) The employees ..... (demand) bonus at revised rates, but the company ..... (not pay) any attention to the demand.

(e) Until last year, our college team ..... (win) the Inter College Football Tournament.

12.4 FUTURE TIME EXPRESSIONS

Forms:

1. (a) First person : shall + V
   (b) Second and third persons : will + V
2. Simple present form
3. Present continuous tense form
4. be + going to + V

5. be + about to + V
6. am + to + V
7. will + be + V-ing

1. Generally shall and will are used with the bare forms of verbs to make predictions about the future.

(a) I shall play chess tomorrow.

(b) He will receive the prize on Teachers' Day

Note that shall is used only with the First Person (I / We). In second and third persons we use will. However, when shall is used with second or third person, it does not express 'pure' future. It expresses various other meanings, e.g.

(i) He shall be rewarded. (promise)

(ii) He shall be punished. (warning)

(iii) You shall carry out my instructions. (order)

Like wise, will in the first person expresses other meaning e.g.

(iv) I will return your money on Monday. (promise)

(v) From Jorhat we'll go to Dibrugarh. (intention)

(vi) I will not resign. (determination)

2. We can use the simple present tense form of the verb to express future time.

(a) Our classes begin next Monday.

(b) The meeting starts at 2 O'clock.

Two things should be noted about the use of this tense:

(i) a word or a phrase indicating future time is almost invariably used e.g. next Monday in sentence (a) above.

(ii) the action or events are pre-planned e.g. the date when classes will begin.

3. We can use the present continuous tense form of the verb to express future time.

(a) The boys are going for a picnic tomorrow.

(b) She is making a speech at the conference next week. In these sentences we find that

(i) a word or a phrase indicating future time is invariably used e.g. tomorrow in sentence (a) above.

(ii) the phrase indicating future may however be omitted if the context makes the time reference clear.

4. We can use the be + going to + verb form to express future time as in

(a) I am going to buy a car

(b) It is going to rain today

In these sentences, the future is expressed by the phrase am/is/are + going to + bare form of the verb. This form is used to express intention; for example, the first sentence above or some action that is most likely to occur as in the second sentence.

5. We can use the be + about to + verb form to express future time as–

(a) The film is about to begin

(b) I am about to leave

This form expresses an action or event which is on the point of taking place, that is, which is likely to happen almost immediately.

6. We can use the be + to + verb form to express future time as in

(a) I am to leave for Delhi on Monday

(b) You are to come again tomorrow

In these sentences the phrase be (am / is / are) + to + verb is used to express an action or an event in future time which has been fixed or arranged for by someone other than the subject of the sentence or an action which is required to be done.

7. Future Progressive is used:

(i) to say about actions that will continue for a period of time in future.
E.g. I will be wearing a blue jacket.

(ii) to ask someone about their plans or intentions.
E.g. How long will you be staying here?



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.3. Fill in the blanks with suitable verb phrases that express future time. The main verbs to be used in the phrases are given in brackets.

(a) He ..... (come) again tomorrow.

(b) The school ..... (close) for the summer holiday on 1st July.

(c) John ..... (meet) us at the station.

(d) It was so hot, I thought I ..... (faint)

(e) I think it ..... (rain) tonight

(f) Let me knew if he ..... (say) anything

(g) She ..... (help) us to organise the party.

(h) I ..... (speak) more on this topic.



12.5 LET US SUM UP

After having read through the unit, you will be able to gain a detailed idea on the use of the various tense forms that perform different language functions. Also, you will gain a better idea on the various ways of expressing future time. Therefore, the two units on the 'Uses of Tenses' will provide the learner a thorough idea on the function of time, tense and aspect in English grammar.



12.6 FURTHER READING

1) Dowerah, Sawpon. *A Students' Grammar of English. Guwahati : Students' Stores*

2) Eastwood, John. (1994). *Oxford Guide to English Grammar.* Oxford University Press.

3) Eckersley & Ekersley. (ed). *A Comprehensive English Guide. Harlow : Person Education Limited.*

4) Palmer, R. F. (1988). *The English Verb.* Longman. Linguistics Library.



12.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: (a) has been doing, (b) has taken, have been reading, (c) has been painting, (d) had learnt, (e) have been waiting, have not come, (f) has been raining

Ans to Q No 2: (a) had been waiting, decided, (b) had been acting, (c) had been reading, went off, (d) had been demanding, has not paid, (e) had been winning

Ans to Q No 3: (a) will come/is coming, (b) will close/closes, (c) will meet, (d) was going to faint, (e) is going to, (f) says, (g) is going to help, (f) am going to speak



12.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Explain with an example each of how Present Perfect Continuous, Past Perfect and Past Perfect Continuous Tenses are formed.

Q2. Discuss future time expressions with relevant examples.

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