THIRD EDITION

MEANING AND THE ENGLISH VERB

GEOFFREY LEECH

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Contents

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful

Key to Symbols

ˈ*will*:
  The bar ˈ indicates that the following syllable is stressed.

**It has rained tomorrow*:
  The asterisk * indicates an unacceptable or 'non-English' piece of language.

?*He is being ill:
  The ?* indicates that an utterance is marginally unacceptable.

(*have*) *got to*:
  The brackets are sometimes used to mark elements that can be omitted.

Simple Present:
  The initial capitals indicate a grammatical category.

'possibility':
  The quotation marks indicate a semantic category or explanation of meaning.

AmE: American English

BrE: British English

Preface to Third Edition

It is now over thirty years since the first edition of this book was published in 1971. Like the second edition (1987), this new edition has been thoroughly revised and updated to take account of relevant new research, which has been plentiful in recent years. The book has been thoroughly revised, but those who are familiar with the second or even the first edition will find little difficulty, I believe, in adapting to the changes made in the third edition.

Another kind of updating needed is that of keeping up with a language undergoing change. It is easy to assume that major grammatical areas of the language such as tense, aspect and modality remain the same from one generation to another, or at least change only very slowly. In part, the contrary seems to be the case. In the period 1961 to 1991, from corpus studies undertaken by Nicholas Smith and myself as well as others,[1] it appears that modal auxiliaries and some other constructions have been gradually changing. The modals, except for *will* and *would,* decreased significantly in frequency between the 1960s and the 1990s – and part of this was apparently due to the decline or obsolescence of certain uses of modals – for example, the *must* of obligation and the *may* of permission. Conversely 'semi-modals' such as *be going to* and *need to* have been increasing in frequency. In spite of evolving usage, there are of course many aspects of the grammar and semantics of the verb which show little or no change since 1971.

It seems strange, but perhaps not unsurprising in view of the above paragraph, that the major changes in this edition are similar in scope and grouping to changes made for the second edition in 1987: they stem particularly from what has been newly learned about modal auxiliaries and comparable constructions. Thus Chapters 1–4 of the book are comparatively unchanged: there are hundreds of minor changes and additions, but very few major ones. Chapter 5, on the other hand, has been more extensively rewritten, taking account of new work on the modal auxiliaries, as well as corpus findings. Incidentally, this chapter, which was twice as long as the average chapter in the earlier editions, has now been subdivided into two separate chapters, to make this part of the book more manageable for the user. Chapter 7 (previously numbered 6) is, like Chapters 1–

4, relatively unchanged, but in Chapter 8 there have been many small revisions and some substantial revisions consequential on the new look at the modals. Exemplification has been improved. Hundreds of examples have been replaced or added, many new examples coming from electronic corpuses such as the Freiburg-Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus of written English (1991), the Freiburg-Brown Corpus of written American English (1992), the Longman Corpus of American Conversation (early 1990s) and the British National Corpus (mainly 1991 ± 3 years), as well as more recent Internet sources. (The dates refer to the years when the corpus data was produced.) Usually the examples from corpus data have been adapted to make them simpler and more suitable for illustrative purposes.

As for section numbering, the first half of the book (up to §90) has section numbers corresponding to those of the second edition. With the addition of new material, however, the section numbering has been augmented slightly from here on, so that by the end of the book, we have reached §186, as compared with §177 in the previous edition. The Further Reading section (pp. 133–7) has been thoroughly updated and expanded.

Re-reading the book after thirty years with a new critical awareness, I noticed a stodgy, overly academic flavour in many of its sentences, and have taken this opportunity to make the style simpler and more congenial. These stylistic adjustments reflect another way in which the English language has been changing over the generation's time-span since this book's original publication.

GNL
Lancaster University,
March 2004

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[1] See, for example, Leech (2003), Mair and Hundt (1995) and Smith (2001, 2003) in the Further Reading section at the end of the book.

Introduction

1

Every language has its peculiar problems of meaning for the foreign learner. Many people would agree that in the English language, some of the most troublesome yet fascinating problems are concentrated in the area of the finite verb phrase, including, in particular, tense, aspect, mood and modality. The goal of this book is to describe these fields of usage systematically and in some detail for teachers and advanced students of English as a foreign or second language.

Much has already been written over the years on the semantics of tense, aspect, mood and modality in modern English. But experience has suggested that there is still a need for a book like this, which co-ordinates and makes more accessible what can be learned about these crucial areas of meaning. My aim is to explain systematically the semantics of the English finite verb phrase, without invoking discussions of syntax and morphology, and without assuming any specialist interest in linguistics. For this purpose, I have tried to rethink the subject in the light of recent research. In this third edition, I have also made use not only of recent advances in English language description, but of the resources of corpus linguistics, a field which involves analysis of computer databases of textual material, and which has grown in significance enormously over the past 20 years.

While stressing what is new in this book, I should also acknowledge what is old – that is, the extent to which I have drawn (as anyone writing in this field cannot fail to draw) on the extensive literature on tense, aspect and modality in English. I have avoided placing bibliographical references in the chapters of description: they would merely distract attention from the task in hand. But this obliges me here to make clear my general indebtedness to others, and to point out that the guide to Further Reading (pp. 133–7) gives a more precise indication of how this study has drawn on the work of previous writers.

2

As this book is essentially concerned with a set of grammatical forms in relation

to a set of meanings, a reader might expect a presentation which works from the forms to the meanings like this:

CHAPTER 1 Meanings of the Present Tense
CHAPTER 2 Meanings of the Past Tense
CHAPTER 3 Meanings of the Perfect Aspect …

or else one that works from the meanings to the forms, like this:

CHAPTER 1 Ways of expressing past time
CHAPTER 2 Ways of expressing present time
CHAPTER 3 Ways of expressing future time …

In fact, I have found it best (since in any case there is continuing need for reference back and forward from one section to another) to adopt a combination of these two approaches, grouping topics now according to form and now according to meaning. For example, Chapter 1 'Simple Present and Past Tenses' takes grammatical forms as its point of departure, while Chapter 4 'The Expression of Future Time', starts from meaning. What is lost in consistency here is, I feel, redeemed by the flexibility which makes it possible to bring together contrasts and similarities in whatever seems to be the most illuminating way. At the same time, for convenience of reference, there are summaries at the beginning of all chapters, and a full index at the end of the book.

3

In discussing the relation between grammar and meaning, we are faced with problems of terminology. Most of the grammatical categories that have to be discussed (Present Tense, Perfect Aspect, etc.) have labels which are derived from a characteristic feature of meaning, but which can be very misleading if they are used both as semantic and as grammatical labels. It is a well known fact, for instance, that the English Present Tense, although it refers mainly to the present time zone (see §5 below), can also refer to past and future time as well. To overcome this difficulty, I have made use of a typographical convention whereby formal grammatical categories are marked by initial capitals (Present Tense, etc.) to distinguish them from corresponding categories of meaning or reference (present time, etc.). Where necessary, single quotation marks are used to indicate that I am talking about meaning rather than form. Thus the following arrangement:

Lightning can be dangerous. ('It is possible for lightning to be dangerous.')

shows a sentence together with its semantic gloss.

Grammatical terminology has been chosen with the goal of immediate intelligibility in mind. The term 'Tense' is used not only for the primary distinction of Present Tense and Past Tense, but also for the sub-categories Present Perfect Tense, Past Progressive Tense, etc. The term 'Aspect' is reserved for the primary categories of Perfect (*has eaten*) and Progressive (*is eating*) modification. In case terms are not found to be self-evident, the following table can be used as a guide to the grammatical terms of tense and aspect in the first three chapters. As the table shows, the expressions 'non-perfect', 'non-progressive' and 'ordinary' are used (wherever necessary) to denote forms unmarked for one aspect or the other. 'Simple' is used of forms unmarked for both aspects.

	(non-progressive)	Progressive Aspect
(non-perfect)	Simple Present Tense *they speak*	(ordinary) Present Progressive Tense *they are speaking*
	Simple Past Tense *they spoke*	(ordinary) Past Progressive Tense *they were speaking*
Perfect Aspect	(ordinary) Present Perfect Tense *they have spoken*	Present Perfect Progressive Tense *they have been speaking*
	(ordinary) Past Perfect Tense *they had spoken*	Past Perfect Progressive Tense *they had been speaking*

4

The type of English I will be describing can be called 'contemporary standard English'. But discrepancies between the most influential regional varieties – American and British English – as well as variations of style, are noted where they are important. Dialect variation in verb usage has not been widely investigated, but it appears that there are considerable differences, at least in terms of frequency, within the British Isles and the USA, and even between different age groups. This book therefore necessarily simplifies a rather more complex picture, and the labels 'BrE' (British English) and 'AmE' (American English) can at best be regarded as showing *typical* standard usage in their

respective countries. For information about the English language, I have relied to a considerable extent on my own interpretations of examples as observed in recent and current language use. At the same time, I have referred to many recent studies, and have also made my own analyses of corpus data. Some of the examples I use are invented rather than borrowed from texts and dialogues, as it is of great value in this kind of study to have simple, self-explanatory, economical illustrations. However, I have also made wide use of corpus examples, that is, real examples from spoken and written discourse. These have often been simplified, to avoid creating unnecessary difficulties. The fact that this study has been read in manuscript by other native speakers of English, and has made use of research carried out on real language data, has provided a check on my own observations.

5

In talking about time, tense and aspect it is often useful to use **time line** diagrams, showing progress in time as an arrow chain going from the left-hand side towards the right-hand side of the page:

$$\rightarrow$$
earlier   later
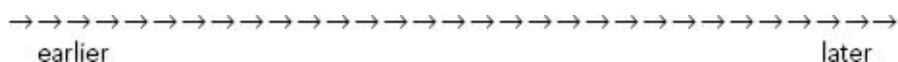
Events, states and habits (i.e. states consisting of a sequence of events) are shown as follows:

```
        •           event
———————————————     state
• • • • • • • • •   habit
```
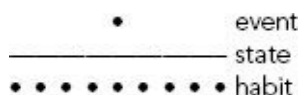
A happening or situation in progress, as signalled by the Progressive Aspect (e.g. *is waiting*), is shown by a wavy line as follows:

∿∿∿∿∿∿∿

The present moment of time or a past moment of time as a point of reference is shown as a vertical line intersecting the time line as follows:

$$\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\!|\!\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\!|\!\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow\rightarrow$$
        then   now

When thinking about 'present time' we can think of a period including the present time and extending indefinitely into the past and into the future. In this

sense, 'present time' is potentially all-inclusive. On the other hand, 'past time' is limited by the fact that it cannot extend up to the present moment. Similarly, 'future time' is limited by the fact that it cannot extend back as far as the present moment:
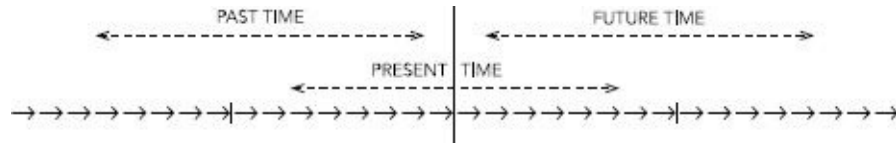
However, in English the major formal distinction of Present and Past Tenses can be associated with two major time zones, 'past' and 'non-past', so that future time is subsumed under 'non-past'. This helps to explain why English, which does not have a Future Tense as such, uses Present Tense (or Present Tense auxiliaries such as *will* and *is going to*) to express future time (see further §§113, 139*c*, 150, 174).
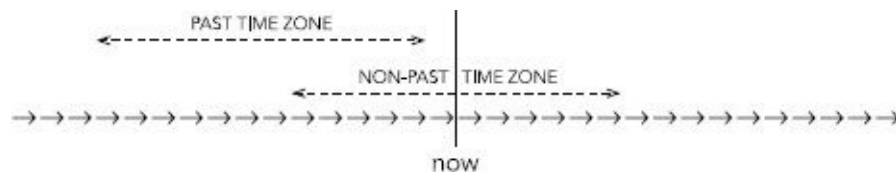
Simple Present and Past Tenses

6 introduction. SIMPLE PRESENT – STATE USE: *7* state present; *8* 'eternal truths'. SIMPLE PRESENT – EVENT USE: *9* event present; *10* comparison between event present and Progressive Present; *11* performatives. STATES AND EVENTS: *12* 'state verbs' and 'event verbs'. SIMPLE PRESENT – HABITUAL USE: *13* habitual or iterative present. SIMPLE PRESENT REFERRING TO PAST AND FUTURE: *14* referring to future; *15–17* historic present. SIMPLE PAST – NORMAL USE IN REFERENCE TO PAST TIME: *18* the happening takes place before the present moment, the speaker has a definite time in mind; *19* there is no clear 'state'/'event' contrast in the past; *20* simultaneous and sequential use of Past. OTHER USES OF THE SIMPLE PAST: *21* hypothetical use; *22* narrative past; *23* Past Tense referring to present. SIMPLE PRESENT – IMAGINARY USES: *24* imaginary present; *25* fictional use; *26* travelogues and instructions.

6

The distinction between the Present Tense and Past Tense in English is a prime example of how grammatical labels can both help and mislead us. It is true that there is a rough and partial correspondence between 'Present Tense' and present time, and between 'Past Tense' and past time. But the ways in which these labels fail to correspond with reality are also notable, as this chapter aims to show. In many ways, it would be better to call the Present Tense the 'Non-past Tense', as it can be used for future as well as present time (this will become clearer in Chapters 4 and 5). The parallelisms between what can be expressed by the Present Tense and by the Past Tense divide the sphere of temporal reference into two broad semantic time zones – the past and the non-past, as already suggested in our discussion in the Introduction. But in exploring the relation between grammar and meaning, as in other areas of specialist knowledge, it is generally better to stick with the familiar terms – knowing their deficiencies – rather than to seek out unfamiliar ones. This means sticking with Present and Past, rather than the less familiar terms such as 'non-past' and 'preterite'.

In all uses of the Present Tense, after all, there is a basic association with the present moment of time (the moment of speech). This association can be expressed as follows: 'The state or event has *psychological* being at the present moment'. It does not (as we see in §§14–17) exclude the possibility of the Present Tense having *actual* reference to a time other than the present. The Present Tense in special circumstances can refer to past and to future time exclusive of present time. In the 'historic present', it represents past events *as if* they were happening now. In the 'futurate present', it refers to future events regarded as *already planned or predetermined*.

We can start, however, with the more usual application of the Present Tense to present time – limiting discussion in this chapter to the Simple Present and Past Tenses.

Simple Present: 'state' use

7

The 'STATE' use of the Simple Present is found with verbs expressing a temporally stable state of affairs. It is also called 'unrestrictive' because it places no limitation on the extension of the state into past and future time:

> Honesty *is* the best policy. | War *solves* no problems. | How many languages *does* he *know*? | They *live* in Washington. | I *don't have* a TV.

However, limits to the duration of the state may be implied by an adverbial expression which underlines the 'presentness' of the period in question, so indicating a contrast with some other period:

> Crime is the best policy *these days*. | War *no longer* solves any problems. | *At present* they live in Washington. | *Just now* I don't have a TV.

The limits of the duration can also be implied by other factors, such as common sense or practical knowledge. For example, the length of time applicable to *Bambi* SUFFERS FROM *shortness of breath* is bound to be restricted to Bambi's life-span, and probably to a shorter period than that.

*a. *I have these shoes since I was in eighth grade* and *I have these shoes for years* are unacceptable because these expressions beginning with *since* and *for* identify a period of time leading up to the present moment. The Present Perfect tense is used in these cases: *I've had these shoes for years* (see §55).

8

The Simple Present is suitable for use in expressing 'eternal truths', and so is found in scientific, mathematical and other statements made 'for all time':

Hydrogen *is* the lightest element. | Two and three *make* five. | Basmati rice *has* a sweet flavour.

Not surprisingly, it is also characteristic of proverbs:

It *takes* two to tango. | No news *is* good news. | Time *flies*.

Geographical statements are likewise, for practical purposes, without time limit:

Rome stands on the River Tiber. | The Atlantic Ocean separates the New World from the Old.

These usages all follow from the definition of the state use of the Present in §7.

Simple Present: 'event' use

9

The EVENT use of the Simple Present contrasts with the state use in that it occurs with verbs expressing events, not states. It signifies an event REFERRED TO AS A WHOLE and viewed as simultaneous with the present act of speaking. Thus it typically refers to something which happens over a very short time: another name for it is the 'instantaneous present'. It normally occurs only in a few easily definable contexts – for example:

In sports commentaries: Larry O'Connell *calls* them together. The first bell *goes* … and they *get* into an untidy maul straight away. (Boxing) | Adams *intercepts, plays* it up-field. (Football)

In the patter or 'running commentary' of conjurors and demonstrators: Look, I take this card from the pack and place it under the handkerchief – like this. | Now I *put* the cake-mixture into this bowl and *add* a drop of vanilla essence.

The event present is particularly suitable for commentaries in real time, as there is a tendency for references to events to form part of a sequence: Event 1, then Event 2, then Event 3, etc. In most cases, the event probably does not take place *exactly* at the instant when it is mentioned: it is a question of subjective rather than objective simultaneity.

10

When there is no event sequence, the event present generally sounds inappropriately 'stagey' or theatrical. We can compare the following as two ways

of describing the same action:

I *open* the cage. | I *am opening* the cage.

The second sentence, which contains a Progressive verb form, is a natural description in answer to the question *What are you doing*? But the first sentence is rather dramatic, because it implies the total enactment of the event just at the moment of speaking. If spoken, one would expect it to be accompanied by a gesture or flourish; in writing, it seems incomplete without an exclamation mark. The event use of the Present is generally the 'marked' or abnormal alternative to the Progressive Present, because there are few circumstances in which it is reasonable to regard an action as begun and completed at the very moment of speech.

a. However, the event present does occur exceptionally in ordinary speech in exclamations such as *Here* COMES *my bus!* and *Up we* GO*!*

b. The stagey quality of the event present is evident in its employment in old-fashioned theatrical language (not used in present-day English except in fun): *The bell tolls! He yields! The spectre vanishes!* etc.

c. It is significant that there is no event present question form *What do you do*? compared with the frequently heard question *What are you doing*? This is perhaps because by the time an instantaneous action has been observed and queried it is already in the past, whereas the Progressive allows for a time lag. (However, *What do you do*? can be used in a habitual sense, meaning 'What is your job?' – see §13 below.)

11

Another special use of the event present is in PERFORMATIVE utterances, normally with *I* or *we* as subject: e.g. *I beg your pardon*. Here the present event and the act of speech are simultaneous simply because they are identical; that is, the thing announced and the act of announcement are the same. Other examples are:

We *accept* your offer. | I *dare* you to say it! | I *deny* your charge. | I *say* the whole thing was kind of weird. | I *give* you my word. | I *refuse* to pay for that meal.

These PERFORMATIVE speech-act VERBS often express formal acts of declaration, in contrast to the Progressive forms *We are accepting your offer*, etc., which may merely report the speaker's present activity or future intentions. Performative verbs are also characteristic of more ceremonial contexts, such as

ship-launching: 'I *name* this ship Aurora.'

judge passing sentence: 'I *sentence* you to …'

card and board games: 'I *bid* two clubs.' | 'I *resign*.' | 'I *pass*.'

wills: 'I *revoke* all former wills …' | 'I *give* to Warwick College all my books …'

In these examples the word *hereby* could be inserted before the verb, to emphasise that the verb refers to the current act of speech or writing.

a. The performative acts discussed here can be extended to include expressions of wishes and condolences such as *We wish you every success* and *I send you my deepest sympathy*. Also, in very formal letters the verb *write* is sometimes used as a performative: *I write to inform you that …* (But in a more informal style *I am writing …* is preferred.).

b. Performatives rarely occur in the passive, but one example is *You're fired!* (used by a boss to dismiss an employee from his/her job): an utterance more likely to be found in comic-strip dialogue than in real life.

States and events

12

The contrast between STATES and EVENTS has already appeared in the distinction between the state and event uses of the Simple Present. It is time now to consider this contrast more carefully.

The choice between 'state' and 'event' is inherent in all verbal usage in English. A state is undifferentiated and lacking in defined limits. An event, on the other hand, has a beginning and an end; it can be viewed as a whole entity. It can also make up one member of a sequence or plurality of happenings: a HABIT.

The difference between events and states is parallel to that between countable nouns and mass or uncountable nouns. Countable nouns can be made plural, as in *house/houses*, while mass nouns, such as *milk*, cannot. The distinction in nouns, however, is more clear-cut, because it is grammatically indicated by the plural ending. There are no such indicators of 'event' status in the verbal phrase. What is more, nouns (with the exception of words like *cake*) must normally be placed in one class or the other; whereas verbs are often neutral, and capable of switching from 'state' to 'event' or vice versa.

Putting it more plainly, 'state' and 'event' are semantic rather than grammatical terms. Strictly, we should not talk of 'state verbs' and 'event verbs', but rather of 'state' and 'event' meanings or uses of verbs. It would be inconvenient, however, to avoid the expressions 'state verb' and 'event verb' altogether. These useful labels are retained here, but it must always be remembered that they are *convenient labels,* for what would be more precisely designated 'verb being used to refer to an event' and 'verb being used to refer to a state'. Take the verb *remember* as an example:

I suddenly *remembered* her name was Jane. | Oh, I *remember* the good old days.

In the first sentence *remember*, because it refers to the act of recall, is an 'event

verb'; in the second it is a 'state verb', representing the notion of having something in one's memory. (Quotation marks will always be used with these two labels, as a reminder of their provisional status.)

The following are among the most frequent verbs typically used as 'STATE VERBS', listed in order of frequency:

be, have, know, want, mean, need, seem, like, include, believe, live, stand, consider, expect, require, continue, remain, understand, involve, hope, support, stay, contain.

The following are among the most frequent verbs typically acting as 'EVENT VERBS', again listed in order of frequency:

do, say, get, make, go, take, come, give, find, tell, put, become, leave, ask, show, call, provide, turn, begin, bring, start, write, set, pay, meet, happen, offer, lose, open, reach, build, return.

Verbs such as *keep, hold, think* and *feel* do not fit easily into either category, as they can easily switch between 'event' and 'state' according to the context. Also, it should not be supposed that these are the only two categories: 'event verb' and 'state verb' are the most general categories, but subtypes of verbal function ('activity verbs', 'process verbs', etc.) can be distinguished – see §§35–8.

Simple Present: habitual use

13

A third use of the Simple Present, that of the HABITUAL (or ITERATIVE) USE, typically occurs with 'event verbs'. In fact, its relation to the event present is analogous to the relation of a plural to a singular noun. The habitual present represents a series of individual *events* which as a whole make up a *state* stretching back into the past and forward into the future. It thus combines aspects of the event and state uses:
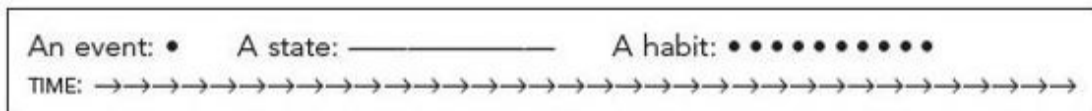
We *don't go* out much (in the evenings). | I *buy* everything I *wear* from Marks & Spencer. | There's a lady down the road who *walks* with a stick. | I *take* lessons in self-defence. | Actions *speak* louder than words (a proverb). | If the temperature *falls* below 22°C, the yield of grain *decreases* sharply.

As the last two examples show, the habitual present resembles the state present

in its suitability for 'eternal truths' of a scientific or proverbial nature. To emphasise the element of repetition and universality in the last two examples, we can paraphrase them: *Every time someone performs an action, it speaks louder than words do* and *On every occasion the temperature falls … the yield of grain decreases …*

As a way of interpreting 'event verbs', the habitual present is more common than the event present, which, as we saw in §9, is rarely found outside a few special contexts. Many verbs more or less have to be taken in an iterative sense, because the event they describe takes far too long to be envisaged as happening singly, once-and-for-all, at the moment of speech. *She walks to work*, for example, makes us think of an established habit (a series of repeated events), not just of a single event. In fact, few sentences are ambiguous in this respect. Sometimes a plural object helps to single out the habitual meaning:

> He scores a *goal*. (event use)   single event: •
> He scores *goals*. (habitual use)   repeated event: ••••••••

On other occasions, an adverbial expression of frequency reinforces the notion of repetition:

> I *generally/often/sometimes* get to bed very late. | She lectures here *most days / twice a week / every day*.

Hence, even when the verb permits both event and habitual interpretations, often some other linguistic indication of repetition is there.

a. Despite the close link between 'event verbs' and the habitual use of the Present, the habitual present can also occur with 'state verbs' where the states have a limited time-span: *Many women* FEEL *fitter and healthier when they* ARE *pregnant*. The verbs *feel* and *be* here are 'state verbs', but in a general statement of this kind, they refer to a multiplicity of happenings at different places and times.

Simple Present referring to past and future

14

In addition to these three uses with reference to present time (i.e. time including the present moment), the Simple Present may refer to events or states realised in future time:

> I *retire* from work next month. | The train *leaves* at eight o'clock tomorrow. | Goalkeeper Stephen Pears *goes* into hospital tomorrow. | Racing on Saturday *starts* at 11 a.m. | See you there! We *begin* at 3.30. | Athena *inherits* the fabulous riches when she *reaches* 18.

This use is called the FUTURATE PRESENT, and will be discussed in relation to other means of indicating future time in §§103–5.

15

Also the Present Tense may be used in reference to the past. The use traditionally known by the term HISTORIC PRESENT is best treated as a storyteller's licence, whereby past happenings are portrayed or imagined *as if* happening at the present time. It is most evident where the Present Tense, with apparent incongruity, goes with an expression indicating past time:

> At that moment in *comes* a message from the Head Office, telling me the boss *wants* to see me in a hurry. | She *says*, 'I'm gonna smack you, right, come here', and she *gets* him and she *whacks* him in front of everybody, didn't she Robert?

The second example is typical of a highly coloured popular style of oral narrative, a style one would be more likely to overhear in a bar or a pub than in the lounge of an expensive hotel.

There is a close similarity between the strict historic present, described here, and the use of the Present to narrate fictional events, considered later (see §25).

a. In popular conversation, the verb *say*(*s*) and its synonym *go*(*es*) are very commonly used to report dialogue in the historic present. E.g.:

> *So to shut the parents up – he* SAYS, *'I'm going to marry you'*.

> *So I told her about the party – and she* GOES, *'Are you going?' And I go, 'Yeah'. And she said, 'I'll probably come.'*

The verb *goes/go* meaning 'say(s)' is particularly common in the speech of young people. The past form *went* ('said') occurs much less frequently.

16

A different kind of historic present is found with 'verbs of communication' in such sentences as:

> Francesca *tells* me you're a champion skier. | (in an academic book) In 1888 Durkheim already *writes* that … | The editor says her newspaper has undergone considerable change. | The intellectuals in the nightclubs, we *learn*, can be spotted because they don't dance. | I *hear* the highway's flooded.

The verbs *tell*, *write* and *say* here refer to a message that seems to have taken place in the past, so we have reason to expect the Past or Perfect Tenses: *Francesca has told me …* ; *The editor said …* ; etc. However, it appears that the

timing has been transferred from the initiating end to the receiving end of the message. The communication is still in force for those who have received it, and so the Present Tense is allowed. In a sense, what Durkheim wrote in 1888 'speaks' at the present time: its message is still there for whoever wants to read it. The verbs *learn* and *hear,* which refer to the receiving of the message, here refer rather to the state of *having received* the message. Thus *I hear the highway's flooded* can be replaced, with little change of effect, by *I understand* (= 'I have the information') *the highway's flooded*.

17

The following sentences illustrate a similar extension of the Present Tense to cover information which in strict historical terms belongs to the past:

> In The *Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky *draws* his characters from sources deep in the Russian soil, not from fashionable types of his day. | Like Rubens, Watteau *is able* to convey an impression of warm, living flesh by the merest whiff of colour.

When discussing an artist's work, we feel justified in using the Present, because the work, and through it (in a sense) the artist, are still 'alive'. The whole career of a painter, writer or musician may, in fact, be viewed as a timeless reconstruction from the works themselves. Here there is almost free variation of Past and Present Tenses. The sole difference between *Brahms* is *the last great representative of German classicism* and *Brahms* was *the last great representative of German classicism* is a difference of point of view: i.e. whether we prefer to think of Brahms as a composer still living through his compositions, or as a man who died in the nineteenth century. Subject to §17*c*, however, we do not have this choice in dealing with the purely biographical details of an artist's life: the Present Tense cannot be substituted for the Past Tense in *Brahms* was BORN *in Hamburg; Brahms* COMPLETED *his first symphony in 1876*; *Brahms* SPENT *the last 35 years of his life in Vienna.*

a. Free variation between Past and Present Tenses occurs also in cross-references from one part of a book to another: *The problem* was/is *discussed in Chapter Two above*. For cross-references to a later part of a book, a similar free variation exists between Present and Future: *Later chapters* (*will*) *explore this topic in greater detail*. The author has the choice of whether to see his/her book as a whole, existing at the present moment (so that what is written on page 2 is just as much in present time as what is written on page 300); or to see it on a shifting time-scale, from the point of view of a reader who reads page 2 before reading page 300.

b. In newspapers, especially in headlines, the Simple Present is preferred (no doubt because of its brevity and vividness) to the Past Tense or Perfect Tenses as a way of announcing recent events: *Doctor attacked as he walks dogs*. As a further example, *Ex-champ dies,* a headline reporting the death of a former boxer, contrasts with the Past Tense found in the corresponding prose account: *Bill Turton, one-time holder of the*

British welterweight championship, DIED *at his home in Chesterfield yesterday*. This 'headlinese' use of the Present Tense has something of the dramatic quality of the 'event present' (see §9).

c. Two minor extensions of the 'historic present' are (1) in captions accompanying illustrations (*Father O'Brien gives his first blessing*); and (2) in historical summaries, tables of dates, etc.: *1558 – The English lose Calais. Ferdinand I assumes the title of Holy Roman Emperor. Mary, Queen of Scots, marries the Dauphin, future Francis II of France*. Once again, the effect of the Simple Present here is to present a past event as if on a stage or TV screen in front of a present audience.

Simple Past: normal use in reference to past time

18

There are two elements of meaning involved in the commonest use of the Past Tense.

One basic element of meaning is: 'the happening takes place before the present moment'. This means that the present moment is excluded: *She worked as an executive secretary for five years* makes it clear that she no longer has that job (as contrasted with the Perfect: *She has worked as an executive secretary for five years*).

Normally another element of meaning is: 'the speaker has a definite time in mind'. This definite time in the past is often made explicit by an adverbial expression accompanying the Past Tense verb:

> She won the Pulitzer Prize *in 1988*. | *Once* this town was a beauty spot – now it's an industrial wasteland. | We visited Selfridges *last week*.

Both these aspects of Past Tense meaning are more fully discussed in connection with the Perfect Tenses in §§61, 63–4.

19

With the Past Tense, the difference between 'state' and 'event' is less important than it is with the Present Tense. In fact, as the Past Tense normally applies only to completed happenings, everything it refers to is in a sense an 'event', an episode seen as a complete entity. There is nothing in the past corresponding to an indefinitely extensive present state: whole lifetimes or even whole eras of civilisation may, in historical retrospect, appear as complete, unitary happenings:

> William Barnes *was born*, *lived*, and *died* in his beloved county of Dorset. | The water of the Nile *sustained* the prosperity of the Pharaohs for thousands of years.

Thus for the Simple Past Tense, there is no clear-cut contrast between 'event'

and 'state' uses, corresponding to that between the event and state presents. There is, however, a distinction to be drawn between the unitary past above and the HABITUAL PAST, describing a repeated event (or state – cf. §13); an example of this is: *In those days the ghosts enjoyed Hallowe'en, and little children stayed indoors* (= '… used to enjoy … used to stay …'; see §85).

20

There is also a contrast between past events happening SIMULTANEOUSLY and past events happening IN SEQUENCE.

> Her mother *loved* and *worshipped* her. | She *addressed* and *sealed* the envelope.

The first sentence does not alter its meaning if the order of verbs is reversed (*worshipped and loved* …). But an alteration of the order of verbs in the second sentence suggests an alteration of the order in which the actions took place: *She sealed and addressed the envelope* usually means something different from *She addressed and sealed the envelope*. Sometimes, as in *She kissed and hugged us all*, it is not clear whether the happenings are meant to be at the same time or one after the other. When the happenings each last only a short time, however, it is more natural to regard them as stages in a sequence, especially in narrative contexts.

a. Other temporal relations between two neighbouring Past Tense forms are possible. For example, the first verb can refer to a later time than the second verb, if this is overtly signalled by a conjunction or adverbial expression, or made clear by our knowledge of history: *A stranger* CAME *to the house just after our son* WAS BORN; similarly (comparing the maritime achievements of Phoenicia and Portugal) *The Portuguese* LIVED *on the fringes of Mediterranean civilisation; the Phoenicians* HAD *the advantage of being in its midst*. The English language does not forbid this arrangement, although good style more frequently dictates the opposite ordering, or the use of the Past Perfect (see §§73–4).

Other uses of the Simple Past

21

The Past Tense can be used in certain dependent or subordinate clauses to express HYPOTHETICAL meaning:

> It's time we *took* a holiday. | If I *had* children, I would teach them good manners.

Discussion of this use, which is not concerned with past time, is postponed until §§169–74.

22

Two extensions of the normal past meaning have to be mentioned. First, because the Past Tense deals with past events, it is the natural form of the verb to use in narrative, whether the events narrated are true historical events or the fictional events of a novel. There has grown up a convention of using the Past for narrative even when the events described are supposed to take place in the future, as in science fiction:

> In the year AD 2201, the interplanetary transit vehicle Zeno VII *made* a routine journey to the moon with thirty people on board.

We are invited, by this convention, to look at future events as if from a viewpoint even further in the future. Narrative typically assumes, in the imagination, such a retrospective view.

23

A second special extension of the normal past meaning is the use of the Past Tense, in some contexts of everyday conversation, TO REFER TO THE PRESENT; in particular, to the present feelings or thoughts of the speaker or hearer:

> A: *Did* you *want* me?
> B: Yes, I *hoped* you would give me a hand with the painting.

The subject of this exchange would probably be the *present* wishes of Speaker *B*, despite the use of the Past Tense. In fact the Present and Past Tenses are broadly interchangeable in this context, but there is quite a noticeable difference of tone. The effect of the Past Tense is to make the request indirect, and therefore more polite. We can explain the politer tone here as a hint that the intending or hoping were formulated in the past, and that the speaker is not necessarily committed to them in the present. The Present Tense (*I hope you will …*) in this situation would seem rather brusque and demanding – it would make the request difficult to refuse without impoliteness. The Past Tense, on the other hand, avoids a confrontation of wills. Politeness also extends to the original question *Did you want me*? The logically expected Present Tense (*Do you want me*?) might have peremptory overtones, and seem to say: 'Oh, it's you, is it? You always want something'.

Other verbs similarly used are *wonder* and *think*:

> I just *wondered* if you had any little pieces of furniture you'd like to sell. | I *thought* I might come

and see you later this evening.

Notice the verb following the main verb is also often in the Past Tense (*wondered … had …*), although its meaning applies to the present. As before, the speaker seems to be testing the listener's reaction to a past attitude, whereas in reality a present attitude is implied.

a. In this kind of context, the Progressive Past is frequently preferred, as it adds a further overtone of indirectness and politeness to that of the Simple Past: *I was wondering …* etc. (see §43*a*).

b. The indirect and polite connotation of the Past here might suggest that the origin of the usage lies in the hypothetical use of the Past, rather than in the 'past time' use. This is unlikely, however, since hypothetical meaning is expressed by the ordinary Past Tense only in dependent clauses. In main clauses, it is normally expressed by *would* + Infinitive (see §§166–9).

c. The above usage can be compared with the use of the Past to point a contrast with an unspoken present alternative: *I* THOUGHT *you were leaving* ('… but now I see you're not'). In both cases the 'non-present' element of Past Tense meaning is emphasised, and the 'definite time' element is not evident: there is nothing in such sentences to say precisely *when* the speaker had the attitude or opinion mentioned (see §64).

Simple Present: imaginary uses

24

Before closing this examination of Simple Present and Past Tenses, we have to look at one or two less important uses of the Simple Present with reference not to real time, but to IMAGINARY PRESENT time.

25

Technically, a distinction can be made between the historic use of the Present (illustrated in §15), and its FICTIONAL use. It is usual for novelists and story-writers to use the Past Tense to describe imaginary happenings (whether past, present or future with respect to real time), so that the employment of the Simple Present in fiction (except in direct speech) strikes one as a departure from normal practice. Some writers use the Present in imitation of the popular historic present of spoken narrative. For more serious writing, transposition into the fictional present is a device of dramatic heightening – it puts the reader in the place of someone actually witnessing or experiencing the events as they are described:

Mr. Tulkinghorn *takes* out his papers, *asks* permission to place them on a golden talisman of a table at my Lady's elbow, *puts* on his spectacles, and *begins* to read by the light of a shaded lamp.

(Dickens, *Bleak House*, Chapter 2)

As with the Simple Past, the above succession of Simple Present forms represents a sequence, rather than a coincidence, of events.

a. In some other narrative contexts, it is not the Past Tense, but the Present Tense that is conventional. For example, stage directions: *Petey enters from the door on the left with a paper and sits at the table* (from the beginning of Harold Pinter's play *The Birthday Party*). Whatever the imagined time of the play's action, in the make-believe of the theatre anything that happens on the stage is 'in the present' as it comes before the audience's eyes. Also in the spirit of the stage direction are narrative summaries in the popular media. For example, here is the beginning of a movie plot summary from the magazine *Radio Times* (11 January, 2004, p. 65): *Batman responds when Gotham City is threatened by the vengeful Penguin and his gang.*

b. Similar summaries of stories (whether in books, on the radio, on television or in magazines, for example recapitulations of previous instalments of the same narrative) tend to occur in the Present Tense. Here is part of a summary of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*: *Jean Valjean, a simple peasant,* STEALS *a loaf of bread to feed his sister's starving children. Condemned to five years of hard labour, he* TRIES *to escape,* IS *caught, and* HAS *to serve nineteen years in the galleys.* This convention dates back to the habit adopted by novelists such as Smollett and Dickens, of giving chapter summaries in the Present Tense in place of simple chapter titles: *Chapter XXI. Madame Mantalini* FINDS *Herself in a Situation of some Difficulty, and Miss Nickleby* FINDS *Herself in no Situation at all. (Nicholas Nickleby.)*

c. A further example of summary narrative in the Simple Present is the following example from Frank Cook, a British Member of Parliament, objecting to bed shortages in a local hospital:

> You can picture the scene: a consultant *walks* into a care unit with five or six patients struggling, fighting for their lives and *says*: 'Hands up those who have 15 breaths left in them to make it round the corner'.

26

Two special uses of the Present Tense hard to classify are (a) that of the travel itinerary:

> Across a stile *begins* the descent to the river. At first the way *is* between confining trees. Then, suddenly, they *are* behind us and we *find* ourselves held enraptured by a vista of exquisite beauty. The hillside *falls* away to a tree-lined meadow which *spreads* flatly to the River Eden. (Adapted from Charlie Emett, *The Eden Way*.)

and (b) that of the instruction manual:

> You test an air-leak by disconnecting the delivery pipe at the carburettor and pumping petrol into a container.

The second of these has a spoken counterpart in such verbal directions as:

> You *take* the first turning on the left past the roundabout, then you *cross* a bridge and *bear* right until you reach the public library.

In each of these cases, it is possible to interpret the sequence of events as habitual present. For instance, one could preface the set of street directions with:

Every time you want to get to the library … (understanding *you* as an impersonal pronoun equivalent to *one*). On the other hand, perhaps a more plausible interpretation is that of the 'imaginary present': the person describing the set of events imagines them as happening now, before the mind's eye, at the time of utterance.

a. Notice that there is a difference between the *you* + Present Tense construction illustrated above and the *you* + Imperative construction of *You leave this to me, You mind your own business, etc. You* preceding an Imperative receives sentence stress, (ˈ*You* ˈ*mind*) whereas normally as subject of a statement it does not.

Progressive Aspect

27 Progressive Aspect. PROGRESSIVE ASPECT REFERRING TO TEMPORARY HAPPENINGS: *28* temporariness; *29* duration; *30* limited duration; *31* not necessarily complete; *32* 'temporal frame' effect; *33* there is not always a 'temporal frame'. CLASSES OF VERB WITH THE PROGRESSIVE ASPECT: *34*; *35* A 'Momentary Verbs', *35* B 'Transitional Event Verbs'; *36* C 'Activity Verbs', *36* D 'Process Verbs'; *37* verbs normally incompatible with the Progressive; *37* E 'Verbs of Inert Perception', *37* F 'Verbs of Inert Cognition', *37* G 'Verbs of Attitude', *37* H 'State Verbs of Having and Being'; *38* J 'Verbs of Bodily Sensation'. special cases: *39*; *40–1* verbs in class E; *42–3* verbs in classes F & G; *44–5* verbs in class H; *46* further exceptions. PROGRESSIVE ASPECT – OTHER USES: *47*; *48–50* habitual uses of Progressive; *51* future use; *52* 'persistent' or 'continuous' use.

27

The term PROGRESSIVE has frequently been used, and is used here, to designate those verb constructions in which the *-ing* form of the verb follows a form of the verb *to be*: (*i*)*s working,* (*wi*)*ll be working,* (*ha*)*s been working,* etc. The term is widely used because it suggests a happening 'in progress,' and because it avoids some misleading associations which belong to other terms commonly used by grammarians: 'durative', 'temporary', 'continuous', etc. In the most general terms, the Progressive ASPECT (as it is called) is said to give us an 'inside view' of a happening, rather than an 'outside view', seeing the happening as a single whole. Examples such as *I was spending the day at home* and *I spent the day at home* illustrate this contrast. But this description does not account for all cases of the use of the Progressive, which has been gradually extending its range of use in English for centuries. The Progressive is increasing in frequency in English, especially in the spoken language. But it is worth noting that the Progressive construction is still much less frequent than the non-progressive Simple Present and Simple Past.

This chapter complements Chapter 1: it compares the Progressive Present and Past Tenses with the Simple Present and Past. Consideration of other Progressive forms (Perfect Progressive, *will* + Progressive, etc.) will come later (see §§75–82, 106–9).

Progressive Aspect referring to temporary happenings

28

First, let's consider the most salient function of the Progressive Aspect, which is to refer to TEMPORARY situations, activities, or goings-on:

'Where's Joan?' 'She's *cooking* the dinner.'

'What on earth *are* you *doing*?' 'I'm *trying* to play the violin.'

'What's *happening*?' 'The river's *overflowing* its banks.'

These examples illustrate the Progressive Present: the temporary situation includes the present moment in its time-span, stretching for a limited period into the past and into the future. To distinguish the Progressive Present as used here from the Simple Present, we need to stress three separate aspects of meaning:

1. The Progressive Form indicates *duration* (and is thus distinguished from the non-durative 'event present').

   Event Present: •   Progressive: 〰〰〰

2. The Progressive Form indicates *limited duration* (and is thus distinguished from the 'state present').

   State Present: ——————   Progressive: 〰〰〰

3. The Progressive Form indicates that the *happening need not be complete* (and is again thereby distinguished from the 'event present').

Points 1 and 2 show that the Progressive *stretches* the time-span of an 'event verb', but *compresses* the time-span of a 'state verb'. It should be emphasised again, though, that this is a matter of psychological rather than real time: it is possible for the same incident to be described by either the Simple or the Progressive Present, depending upon a speaker's point of view: *You look tired* / *You're looking tired*.

Let's now examine each of the three features of meaning separately.

29

The durative element of meaning is seen in the contrast of *I raise my arm!* or *The house falls down!* with *I am raising my arm* or *The house is falling down*. The first two sentences (which seem unusual and overdramatic – see §10) suggest a sudden movement, the second a more gradual one. With the Progressive, the event is no longer instantaneous: it stretches some way into the past and into the future.

a. Radio and TV sports commentators tend to use the Simple Present for single brief events in the progress of the game: *Seagram* WINS *the Grand National!* (horse racing); *He* LOOKS *around the field – and in* COMES *Roberts to bowl* (cricket) – see §9. The Progressive tends to be used for sports happenings which take a longer time or are more gradual – especially those that are not part of the main action: *Seagram*'s CLOSING *on him* (horse racing); *And Joe Bloggs* is *just* PACING *around in the pits waiting for Fabi to bring that car in* (car racing).

30

The difference between unlimited and LIMITED DURATION is evident from the following sentences, in which the Simple Present, in its unrestrictive state meaning, contrasts with the Progressive Present:

My watch *works* perfectly (permanent state – 'my watch is generally a reliable one').

| My watch is *working* perfectly (temporary state).

Which team *do* you *support*? (in general).

| Which team *are* you *supporting*? (at this particular match).

I *live* in Wimbledon (permanent residence).

| I *am living* in Wimbledon (temporary residence).

I *enjoy* the seaside ('I like holidays by the sea in general').

| I *am enjoying* the seaside ('I am enjoying this particular holiday').

The notion of 'limited duration', seen from a slightly different point of view, means that the situation is 'subject to change'. For example, the Present Progressive brings with it the concept that the current happening or state of affairs does not have the prospect of continuing indefinitely. This connotation is important for some extended uses of the Progressive (see §§43, 104).

a. Along with the 'temporary' meaning of the Progressive there is often a notion that the situation is 'actually in progress now'. *I am enjoying the seaside* would be spoken when the speaker is actually at the seaside; this is not necessarily true of *I enjoy the seaside*. Notice a similar difference between *This basin is leaking* (actual: even now water is escaping) and *This basin leaks* (potential: this is a permanent problem

with the basin); similarly *These shirts wash nicely* and *These shirts are washing nicely*.

31

That the action expressed by the Progressive is NOT NECESSARILY COMPLETE is best illustrated in the Past Tense, by 'event verbs' which signal a transition from one state to another (e.g. *become, die, fall, get, go, stop, take off*). Using the event past, one might say *The bus stopped*, so indicating the vehicle's arrival at a state of rest. But *The bus was stopping* means only that the bus is slowing down towards a stop: cessation of movement is not described. Similarly:

The dog was *drowning* in the sea. | The dog *drowned* in the sea.

To the first sentence one could add … *but someone jumped into the water and saved her*; but not to the second, which implies that she actually died.

The following sentences illustrate lack of certainty about completeness in another context:

I was *reading* from 10 p.m. to 11 p.m. | I *read* from 10 p.m. to 11 p.m.

The Simple Past tells us that the speaker started to read at 10 o'clock and finished at 11 o'clock. The Progressive, however, does not specify either the time of beginning or the time of completing the activity: all we know is that reading was in progress for that hour. Hence it would be a fitting answer from a suspect being interrogated by a detective. The detective would ask *What* WERE *you* DOING *between* 10 p.m. and 11 p.m.? – being uninterested in whether the activity continued after that period or not; and the suspect would reply in a similar way.

Notice a further difference between *Meg was reading a book that evening* and *Meg read a book that evening*. The Simple Past here suggests that Meg reached the end of her book before the end of the evening, but completion in this sense is not implied by *was reading*.

a. Typically events are BOUNDED – that is, they have built into them the idea of completion. An activity verb such as *rain, read, walk* or *write*, however, is not bounded in itself: it needs some kind of following word or phrase to 'complete' it and turn it into a proper event. Compare:

1a. They *walked for* a couple of hours.   1b. ?*They *walked home for* a couple of hours.

2a. *They *walked in* a couple of hours.   2b. They *walked home in* a couple of hours.

Walked in 1a and 2a is unbounded: it is an activity that could go on and on. But *walked home* in 1b and 2b is BOUNDED: it has a built-in destination. Once you have walked home, you have completed your walk. The difference is clear from the unacceptability of 1b and 2a: an *in*-phrase of duration is acceptable only when the happening is bounded, while a *for*-phrase of duration is acceptable only when the happening is unbounded. The Progressive, because of its idea of non-completion, cannot be combined with an *in*-phrase, but only with a *for*-phrase:

3a. They *were walking for* a couple of hours.

3b. They *were walking home for* a couple of hours.

4a. *They *were walking in* a couple of hours.

(4b. ?*They *were walking home in* a couple of hours.)

The interesting thing is that both 3a and 3b are acceptable, while the non-progressive in 1b is not acceptable with *for*. The explanation is that the Progressive, with its built-in non-completion, turns the bounded happening in 1b into an unbounded one. Sentence 3b implies they had not reached the end of their journey: *They were walking home for a couple of hours, when the storm interrupted their journey*. (Example 4b is placed in parentheses for the following reason. Although it is acceptable in a future-in-the-past sense – see §83 – it cannot be interpreted in the sense relevant here, because the boundedness of the *in*-phrase conflicts with the unboundedness of the Progressive.)

b. Note this feature of Progressive meaning is termed not INCOMPLETE, but NOT NECESSARILY COMPLETE. This cautiously negative label is justified, since the Progressive allows the possibility that the activity continues up to the end of a named period, and FINISHES AT THAT POINT. For example, the above example *I was reading between ten and eleven* allows the possibility that the speaker continued reading up to the stroke of 11 o'clock, and stopped reading at that point.

32

The Progressive Aspect generally has the effect of surrounding a particular event or moment by a 'temporal frame', which can be diagrammed:

That is, within the flow of time, there is some reference point ▲ from which the temporary happening indicated by the verb can be seen as stretching into the future and into the past. With the Progressive Present, the reference point is normally identical with 'now', the present moment of time. But in the Progressive Past, some other definite reference point must be found to 'anchor' the situation. Often this point is made explicit by an adverbial phrase or clause:

This time last year I was travelling round the world. | *Five minutes later* he was sleeping like a baby. | Don was looking very ill *when I last saw him*.

In both Past and Present Tense narrative, the Progressive often forms a 'temporal frame' around an action denoted by a non-progressive form. Hence, whereas the

relationship of meaning between two neighbouring Simple Past forms is usually one of *time-sequence*, the relationship between a Progressive and a Simple Past form is one of *time-inclusion*. The contrast can be seen in these two sentences:

> When we *arrived* she *made* some fresh coffee. ●●
> When we *arrived* she was *making* some fresh coffee. 〰〰〰
>   ●
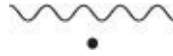
The first example tells us that the coffee-making immediately *followed* the arrival; the second, that the arrival took place *during* the coffee-making.

a. A Simple Tense verb in a main clause is often 'framed' in this manner by a Progressive Tense verb in a subordinate clause: *I* ASKED *him what he* was THINKING *about* (i.e. '… at the time when I asked him').

b. Verbs referring to utterances or other meaningful acts can be 'framed' by a Progressive verb form referring to the mental attitude or communicative intention lying behind the utterance: *'Were you lying when you* SAID *that?' 'No, I was telling the truth.'* This is sometimes called the 'interpretive' use of the Progressive: it is as if we are seeing the speech act 'from the inside', not in a temporal sense, but in the sense of discovering its underlying interpretation. There is no temporal-frame effect here, as the 'lying' and the 'saying' are apparently coextensive in time.

33

The 'temporal frame' effect is not an independent feature of the Progressive form's meaning; it follows, rather, from the notion of 'limited duration'. Whenever a point of time or a brief event is in a contemporaneous relation with a happening that has duration, it is natural that that happening should extend beyond the event-without-duration or point-of-time in both backward and forward directions – in short, that a 'temporal frame' should be set up.

   When no event or point of time is in question, however, the framing effect does not occur. For example:

> Throughout the Prime Minister's speech, the Foreign Secretary was *listening* in the gallery. | We were *watching* a football match on Saturday afternoon.

Here a temporary activity is related to a period. There is no point around which the 'listening' or 'watching' forms a frame. In the second example, we would be more inclined to say, in fact, that the afternoon forms a 'temporal frame' round the 'watching', since we know that normally football matches begin and end within the duration of an afternoon.

   Another case where there is no 'frame' is that where two Progressive Past verbs are put near to one another.

> While she was *muttering* to herself, she was throwing things into a suitcase.

All we know here is that the two happenings were *at some time or other* simultaneous. We know nothing about the relation between their starting-points or finishing-points: whether she started muttering before or after she began throwing things is an irrelevance. The four main possibilities (excluding exact coextensivity) may therefore be diagrammed thus (where *a* = 'muttering to herself', and *b* = 'throwing things'):
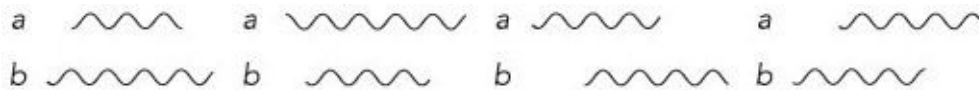
The framing effect is, incidentally, rarely found with the Perfect Progressive Tenses (see §§75–81).

a. The framing effect is used in a special way in fiction writing. For example, the point of time or the brief event to be 'framed' may be implied rather than stated. Consider this example:

And then the funeral was over, and they were *coming* out into the grey, windy day.

It would be more natural to present the two events as in sequence, using the Simple Past: … *and they came out into the grey, windy day.* But the Progressive Present is more immediate: it seems to give us *an inside view of* a vivid experience of the mourners coming out into the open air. Even more dramatic are examples such as: *Like a dam bursting, suddenly she was diving across the room.*

Classes of verb with the Progressive Aspect

34

The Progressive Aspect varies its effect according to the type of meaning conveyed. We have already noted this with 'event verbs' and 'state verbs'; but now it is convenient to distinguish further classes of verb (or more correctly, of verbal meaning).

a. It is worth bearing in mind that in talking of states, events, activities, etc. we are really talking about the meaning of the verb with its associated complements, such as Objects and Adverbials (as in *They ran* THE MARATHON; *It lasted* FOR A MONTH. But for convenience, a 'default' classification is adopted for each verb.

35

We begin with two classes of 'event verb'.

35 A. 'MOMENTARY VERBS' (*hiccough, hit, jump, kick, knock, nod, tap, wink,* etc.). These verbs refer to happenings so momentary that it is difficult to think of them as having duration. Consequently, the Progressive form, in giving them duration,

forces us to think of a series of events, rather than of a single event. Compare *He nodded* (a single movement) with *He was nodding* (a repeated movement); *He jumped up and down* with *He was jumping up and down; Someone fired a gun at me* with *Someone was firing a gun at me*.

35 B. 'TRANSITIONAL EVENT VERBS' (*arrive, die, fall, land, leave, lose, stop,* etc.). As exemplified earlier with *The bus was stopping* (§31), 'event verbs' denoting transition into a new state are used with the Progressive to indicate the *approach* to a transition, rather than the transition itself:

> David Campbell was *arriving* when the bomb exploded. | Suddenly a helicopter was *landing* on the beach. | Mother was *dying* in hospital.

It might even be argued that a different meaning of the verb comes into play in the switch from Simple Past to Progressive Past: *die* in *she was dying* indicates a process which ends in death; *die* in *She died* pinpoints the actual moment of death, the completion of the process.

a. In the plural these verbs can refer to a multiplicity of events. *The guests were arriving,* for example, can either mean a single arrival, or (more likely) a set of arrivals, in progress. In the latter case the notion of 'approach to a transition' applies differently: it signifies progression towards the final state when all guests will have arrived.

36

Next, here are two classes of verb typically accompanying the Progressive form.

36 C. 'ACTIVITY VERBS' (*drink, eat, play, rain, read, run, talk, watch, work, write,* etc.). Although these verbs can be used with the Simple Tenses in an 'event' sense, they more usually occur with the Progressive, as they refer to a continuing, though time-limited, activity:

> 'What are you *doing*? ' 'I'm *writing* a letter.' | They're *eating* their dinner. | It's still *raining*.

'Activity' is not altogether a satisfactory term for this class: not all the verbs included refer to human occupations. The important point is that the verb in the Progressive tells us something is 'going on'.

a. Note that activity or 'going on' can include gaps: e.g. *They're working on the car* is fine even if they have paused for a break or a rest.

36 D. 'PROCESS VERBS' (*change, develop, grow, increase, learn, mature, slow down, widen,* etc.). As a process of change ordinarily has duration, but not indefinite duration, these verbs also tend to go with the Progressive Aspect: *The*

weather is changing for the better; *They're widening the road*; etc. To these we should add verbs like *become, get* and *go* which frequently have a 'process' meaning when combined with a following word or phrase: *It's getting late*.

37

Most difficulties over the use of the Progressive Aspect arise with classes of verbs which are normally incompatible with the Progressive: these can be called anti-progressive verbs, because of their 'unfriendliness' to the Progressive. The most important of these verbs is the main verb *to be*: it is possible to say *He is ill* (state present) but not normally *?*He is being ill*, even though the illness referred to here is presumably a temporary rather than permanent one. Verbs unfriendly to the Progressive can be placed in certain rough semantic categories. Meaning, unfortunately, is not the sole determining factor, since virtually synonymous sentences can be found, one in which the Progressive is allowable, and one in which it is not:

> She's *suffering* from influenza = She *is* ill with influenza.

It seems as if usage in this area is not always logical and systematic, because the language itself is gradually extending the use of the Progressive. There are also dialect differences.

   A further point is that many of these anti-progressive verbs can occur with the Progressive Aspect in special contexts. Such special uses can usually be explained by supposing that the verb (perhaps through a special transfer of meaning) can become a member of a different verbal category. First, however, let's consider the straightforward cases of verbs unfavourable to the Progressive Aspect.

37 E. 'VERBS OF INERT PERCEPTION' (*feel, hear, see, smell, taste* – see §§40–1 for exceptions). The term 'inert' can be used for these common verbs, to distinguish perception of the kind denoted by *see*, where the perceiver is merely passively receptive, from that of (say) *look at,* where one is actively directing one's attention towards some object.

> I *could feel* / *felt* something hard under my foot.   (NOT ?*I *was feeling* …)
> I *could hear* / *heard* a knocking at the door.   (NOT ?*I *was hearing* …)
> I *could see* / *saw* someone through the window.   (NOT ?*I *was seeing* …)
> I *could smell* / *smelt* onions cooking.   (NOT ?*I *was smelling* …)
> I *could taste* / *tasted* sugar in the tea.   (NOT ?*I *was tasting* …)

The difference between the constructions with and without *could* is that the *could* form denotes a state, whereas the Simple Past form denotes an event. Thus *I could hear a door slamming* (*all night*) indicates a continuing and repeated noise; (*At that moment*) *I heard a door slam* indicates a single moment of impact. (?*I could hear a door slam* seems odd because of the clash between duration in *could hear* and the momentariness in *slam*.) There is a parallel contrast in the Present Tense: *I see a bird of paradise!* is a case of the event use of the Present (where *see* means much the same as *catch sight of*). Here, as elsewhere, the event or 'instantaneous' use is rather unusual and melodramatic. The more natural *can* construction (*I can see a bird of paradise*) stands in place of the state use of the Present.

37 F. 'VERBS OF INERT COGNITION' (*believe, forget, guess, think, imagine, know, suppose, understand,* etc. – see §§42–3 for special uses). These, like the verbs of perception above, are inert, in the sense that they do not involve conscious effort or intention. The Simple Present in this case refers to a mental state, and so belongs to the category 'state', even though a limitation on the duration of the state may be implied:

I *think* she's getting upset.   (RATHER THAN: I *am thinking* she's getting upset.)
I *believe* in fair play.   (RATHER THAN: *I *am believing* in fair play.)
I *guess* you're right.   (RATHER THAN ?*I *am guessing* you're right.)

As the examples suggest, verbs with this type of meaning are frequently followed by a noun clause. Other examples:

I *forget* what I paid for the house. | He *imagines* everything to be easy. | We *understand* your difficulty.

37 G. 'VERBS OF ATTITUDE' (including volition and feeling) such as *hate, hope, intend, like, love, prefer, regret, want* and *wish* are similar to 'verbs of inert cognition': *She loves working on a farm.* However, some of these can more easily occur in the Progressive – *enjoy, hope, like, love,* for example – if the emphasis is on temporariness or tentativeness. Compare:

What do you *want* me to wear tonight? | Tim, are you *wanting* any fruit?

The second example sounds like a tentative offer – although it would also be perfectly normal to use the Simple Present here: *Tim, do you want any fruit*?

a. Feel, see and *hear*, in addition to being 'verbs of perception' (Class E), can be used as verbs of cognition (Class F): *We* FEEL (i.e. it is our feeling or opinion) *that you have so much to offer* (not **We are feeling …*,

etc.). *I* SEE *your point. I* HEAR *Kate Jones is engaged to someone called Jack.*

b. Verbs such as *read, tell* and *find,* when they refer to the result of communication (see §16) can also be placed in this class. For example, *John tells me …* means 'I *understand* as a result of John's having told me …'.

c. It is significant that *know* is characteristically followed by the Progressive with another verb in sentences like *John* KNOWS *he* IS TALKING *nonsense*; *I like a woman who* knows *what she's* DOING. The state of knowledge and the activities of 'talking' and 'doing' are here concurrent; the time-spans are comparable, and therefore, but for the inclusion of *know* in Class F, we would expect matching verbal constructions – the Progressive Present in both cases. Similarly, in a sentence like *I think I'm catching a cold,* the temporariness of the situation calls for a Progressive form *I'm catching,* but this does not apply to *think,* which is equally temporary in its reference, but belongs to Class F.

37 H. 'STATE VERBS OF HAVING AND BEING' (*be, belong to, contain, consist of, cost, depend on, deserve, have, matter, own, resemble,* etc. – see §44 for exceptions). In this class, along with the key verbs *be* and *have,* we put verbs which include, as part of their meaning, the notion of 'being' or 'having'. Often a paraphrase with *be* or *have* is possible: *matter = be important*; *own = have in one's possession*; *resemble = be like*; etc. (Incidentally, some verbs of Class F can also be paraphrased in a similar way: *I think = My opinion is …* ; *I believe = My belief is …* ; etc. But in Class H we place only non-psychological verbs.)

> This carpet *belongs* to me. (NOT *This carpet *is belonging* to me.)
>
> I *own* this carpet. (NOT *I *am owning* this carpet.)
>
> Your age *doesn't matter*. (NOT *Your age *isn't mattering*.)

Similarly:

> This bread *contains* too much yeast. | Mangoes *cost* a lot just now. | Whether the play is a success *depends* on you, the audience.

a. The forms of the verb *be* do not always refer to a state. An exception is the past participle *been,* used as past participle of the verb *go*: *Where have you been*? Here *been* is an event verb – see §59*b.*

b. The use of *have* we are considering here is the 'state' *have* of *She has several sisters*; *I have a bad backache,* etc. (This use of *have* can easily be replaced by *have got* in colloquial BrE, but not by the Progressive *be having*: **She is having several sisters*.) Note there is also an 'activity' *have* which occurs freely with the Progressive Aspect, and which can often answer the question *What are you doing*?: *I'm having lunch / a barbecue / a shower / a singing lesson / some friends to dinner,* etc. In other cases, the Progressive of *have* is used to describe a good or bad experience: *We're having fun / problems / a great time / a hard time.*

38

Finally, there is a small class of verbs which, when referring to a temporary state, can occur either with or without the Progressive:

38 J. 'VERBS OF BODILY SENSATION' (*ache, feel, hurt, itch, tingle,* etc.). There is a choice, without any noticeable change of meaning, between *I feel great* and *I'm feeling great*, between My *knee hurts* and *My knee is hurting,* etc. Notice, here, a difference between this meaning of *feel,* which is a question of INTERNAL sensation, and the meaning of *feel* as a 'verb of perception' (Class E above), denoting EXTERNAL sensation: *I can feel a stone in my shoe,* etc.

a. Notice, however, that a verb like *hurt* can also occur as an event verb. Imagine a doctor examining a patient with a leg injury. Bending the knee, the doctor might say *Does that hurt*? and the patient would probably respond *Ouch! That hurts!* on feeling a sudden jab of pain. In this case, it would be unlikely that either speaker would use the Progressive *is hurting.*

Special cases

39

There are many apparent exceptions to the rule that verbs of Classes E, F, G and H do not go with the Progressive Aspect. Many of these exceptions can be explained by noting that one verb can belong to more than one of the Classes A–J. Such multiple membership has already been noted with the verb *feel,* with its different meanings belonging to Classes E, F and J. Some further examples of multiple membership follow.

40

VERBS IN CLASS E. *Feel, taste* and *smell* can be used to indicate not only 'inert perception', but also 'active perception'. In the second case, they belong to the 'activity' category (Class C) and so may freely take the Progressive form:

Inert	Active
I (*can*) *smell* the gas.	I'*m smelling* the perfume. It's splendid!
I (*can*) *feel* the heat here.	I'*m feeling* the ground (with my foot).
I (*can*) *taste* the spices in it.	I'*m tasting* the broth (to see if it's spicy enough).

In the first sentence of each pair, the sensation is an experience that simply 'happens' to me; but in the second, I go out of my way, physically, to focus my attention on some object. The second sentence answers the question *What are you doing*? and for clarity, as the examples show, can be supplemented by an adverbial expression of instrument or purpose.

However, the remaining two verbs in Class E, *see* and *hear,* are not used in the active sense, because the separate verbs *look at* and *listen to* are available for that function:

Inert	Agentive
I *can see* a bus in the distance.	I'*m looking at* a bus in the distance.
I *can't hear* what he's saying.	You'*re not listening* to what he's saying.

'Inert perception' is a more appropriate term than 'passive perception', since it is merely the absence of agency that is signified by the verb in the left-hand column. Likewise 'agentive verb' or 'doing verb' is a more suitable term for the type represented by *look at* and *listen to*: these verbs are not merely 'activity verbs' in the wide sense of Class C, but in the more precise sense of 'involving animate agency'.

41

A third class of perception verbs can more fittingly be called 'passive', as it consists of those verbs for which the grammatical subject is the object of perception: *That* SOUNDS *like Martha's voice*; *You* LOOK *tired*. Here again, although *see* and *hear* are matched by separate verbs (*look* and *sound*), the three verbs *smell*, *taste* and *feel* are used for the additional meaning. These three verbs are used in the 'passive' sense in: *This mango feels / smells / tastes good*. As the type of perception expressed is 'inert' rather than 'active', the Progressive is generally avoided:

That sounds like Martha's voice.   RATHER THAN: ?*That is sounding like Martha's voice.

Strangely, *look* is an exception to this rule: it is possible to say both *You look well* and *You're looking well* without any appreciable difference of meaning, perhaps because of an analogy with *I feel / am feeling well* (see Class J, §38).
  Before leaving Class E, we have to reckon with an acceptable use of the Progressive in sentences like *I am hearing you clearly* (spoken, say, by a radio or telephone operator). The meaning here is 'I am receiving your message', and the effect of the Progressive is to place emphasis on the ACTIVATION or AROUSAL of the processes of perception. We can argue, therefore, that in this context *hear* becomes, exceptionally, an activity verb (Class C). A rather different case is *see* in: *I need glasses – I'm not seeing so clearly these days*. Here *see* is more like a 'process verb' describing the speaker's deteriorating eyesight.

a. Also *sound, smell* and *taste* could occur with the Progressive in describing a process developing towards completion. A chef, supervising the progress of cooking might say: *That's tasting pretty good*. A technician adjusting the sound quality of a test recording might say: *That's sounding more like it*. These are special usages, comparable to the 'process verb' usage discussed in §45 below.

42

VERBS IN CLASS F are also sometimes found with the Progressive form:

> I'*m thinking* for the moment in plain economic terms. | Surely you'*re imagining* things! | We'*re supposing* the butler did it.

These examples are comparable to those of §41 in showing the ACTIVATION or AROUSAL of thought processes. In the first example, 'thinking' is felt to be a kind of work or mental exertion, equivalent to 'considering' or 'ruminating'. In the second example, *imagining things* means 'entertaining or indulging yourself with illusions'. In the third, *I'm supposing that …* means 'I am making the temporary assumption that …' Each sentence, that is, suggests some positive mental activity. In other words, in sentences of this kind, verbs normally of Class F seem to function, unusually, as 'activity verbs'.

43

The explanation above in §42 does not meet cases of a special polite use of the Progressive with certain verbs of Classes F and G:

> I'm *hoping* you'll give us some advice. | What *were* you *wanting*? | You *are forgetting* the moral arguments. | We'*re wondering* if you have any suggestions.

In idiomatic colloquial speech, this apparently unaccountable usage is often preferred to the regular Simple Present form *I hope … You forget*, etc. One reason for this preference seems to be that the Progressive is a more tentative, and hence a more polite method of expressing a mental attitude. As we have seen (§30), the Progressive form is associated with 'susceptibility to change' and, in the present context, it is only a small step further to associate the Progressive with 'lack of commitment or confidence in what will happen'. *I hope you'll give us some advice* leaves the addressee little room for polite refusal; but *I'm hoping …* adds a pessimistic note: it implies that the speaker has not made a final commitment to the hope – there is still scope for a change of mind should the listener's reaction be discouraging.

a. The Progressive fulfils in this case a function similar to that of the Past Tense described in §23: *I just wondered if you could give us some advice*. In fact, the two forms can be combined in a Past Progressive construction with doubly self-deprecatory connotations: *I was just wondering if you could give us some advice*; *I was hoping you'd look after the children for us*. The form of verb, for politeness, must be matched against the size of favour requested. The Past Progressive (most tentative) is more appropriate to a request which will put the listener to considerable risk or inconvenience. The Simple Present (most direct) is more appropriate when the listener is invited to do something to his/her own advantage: *I hope you'll come and have dinner with us when you're in London next*.

VERBS IN CLASS H ('state verbs of having and being') can, like those of Classes E and F, combine with the Progressive Aspect where an 'activity' meaning can be supplied. The verb *to be* itself furnishes many examples. While it is virtually impossible to make sense of *He is being tall or **The trees are being green*, there is no difficulty with *She is being kind*, because we are able to understand 'kindness' here as a mode of behaviour over which the person has control, rather than as an inherent trait of character. *She is being kind* means 'She is acting kindly towards someone', whereas *She is kind* means 'She is constitutionally good-natured'. Similar differences of meaning are seen in:

He's a fool	(i.e. 'He can't help it – it's his nature').
He's being a fool	(i.e. 'He's acting foolishly').
She's awkward	(i.e. 'She's clumsy, gauche').
She's being awkward	(i.e. 'She's being deliberately obstructive').
The car is difficult to drive	(i.e. 'It's made that way').
The car is being difficult	(i.e. 'It's going out of its way to cause trouble' – the car here is almost personified).

The Progressive also makes sense in *She's being good / useful / helpful / a nuisance / an angel*. But even if no obvious 'activity' meaning is available, we can frequently interpret a sentence *X is being Y*, however improbable the context, by reading into it the idea of someone acting a part. *Today, my uncle is being Napoleon* could be said of an actor or a megalomaniac or – ironically – someone behaving in an imperious manner. *He is being sorry / afraid / happy*, etc. could conceivably mean 'He is pretending to be sorry / afraid / happy'. A parallel though less likely example with the verb *have* is *Deirdre is having a headache*, meaning 'Deirdre is pretending to have a headache'. (On the other hand, no element of showmanship is likely to be present in *Deirdre is having a good time / her hair done / another baby* – these are normal instances of the 'activity' or 'process' use of *have* – see §37H*b*.)

a. A more precise analysis should make clear that the contrast between *She is awkward* and *She is being awkward* is more complicated than suggested above. Whereas the Progressive Present here restricts the adjective to the meaning 'obstructionist', the Simple Present is ambiguous, allowing both 'state' and 'activity' interpretations. Two separate conditions of meaning are involved in the Progressive of *be* as main verb: (1) the time-span is temporary rather than permanent; and (2) the verb may be construed as referring to an activity with human agency. The first of these conditions is fulfilled in *She is hungry*, and the second in *She is an angel* (meaning 'She goes out of her way to be kind, helpful, considerate, etc.'). Only when both conditions are present together, as in *She is being an angel*, does one expect the Progressive Aspect with the main verb *to be*.

b. Notice the equivalence of the following sentences with and without the Progressive:

The child *is* asleep = The child *is sleeping*.

The train *is* in motion = The train *is moving*.

The train *is* stationary = The train *is standing* still.

In each case, a sentence containing the Simple Present form *is* is matched in meaning with a sentence (on the right) containing the Present Progressive form of some other verb. In the sentences on the left, the Simple Present *is* counts as an example of the state use of the Simple Present (§§7–8), even though it clearly refers to a temporary state of affairs. As was said in §7, the state present may, for common sense reasons, refer to a limited time-span – in this case the sleeping child will wake up after a few hours. But the interest of these examples is that, with anti-progressive verbs, the Simple Present invades (so to speak) the semantic territory of the Progressive.

45

Certain other verbs of Class H can take the Progressive when accompanied by an expression like *more and more*:

He is *resembling* his father more and more as the years go by. | The income of one's parents *is mattering* less in education these days. | Good food *is costing* more since devaluation.

The meaning of all these sentences (which are felt to be rather unnatural by some speakers) could be vaguely formulated 'This is the way things are going', and the explanation of the Progressive here seems to be that the verbs are no longer 'state verbs', but have transferred to the class of 'process verbs'. *Resemble,* for example here means 'to become like' rather than 'to be like'.

46

Unavoidably, there are some special cases which have not been dealt with here. Some instances that one may hear in colloquial English today seem difficult to fit into any system of rules and classes. It seems likely that some aspects of Progressive usage are unstable at the present time, and are undergoing continuing though gradual change.

For instance, it is difficult to find an explanation for one common application of the Past Progressive in conversation:

I was recently *reading* about an invention which may turn garbage into soil. | Paula *was saying* that Eddie was going to be promoted.

The Progressive Past refers here to fairly recent communicative happenings (*the other day* is a typical adverbial collocation). There is no feeling of a 'temporal frame' round a specific past moment of time; nor does there appear to be any

suggestion of the tentativeness of *I was wondering* or *I was hoping* (see §43*a*). The only parts of the Progressive meaning relevant are 'duration' and 'lack of completeness'. In answer to the question *Did you hear about what happened to Matthew on the tour*? you might reply, *Yes, my daughter Liz* was TELLING *me about it*. This would not imply total knowledge, and so would politely leave the way open for a continuation of the story. But the talebearer might be silenced by a similar reply with the Simple Past Tense (*Yes, Liz* told *me about it*), as this would assume: 'Yes, I know the whole story, so don't bother to tell me'.

A further peculiarity of this usage is that the Past Tense does not have to be anchored to a specific earlier point of time reference (cf. §§63–4). One could say *Yes, Liz was telling me about it* without mentioning or implying some definite point of time at which the telling happened. The factor of Past Tense meaning that is relevant here, apart from past time, is that there is a time gap between the communication and the present moment. If the Perfect Progressive were used, as in *I have been reading about …* the gap would be assumed to disappear – i.e., the reading would be assumed to continue up to the present moment.

Progressive Aspect: other uses

47

Apart from the major use of the Progressive Aspect to refer to single temporary happenings, there are four other less important uses to be considered.

48

First, there are two separate HABITUAL (or iterative) uses of the Progressive, corresponding to the habitual use of Simple Present and Past illustrated in §§13 and 19.

49

Consider the following sentences:

I'*m taking* dancing lessons this winter. | This season she *is appearing* in the popular musical *Guys and Dolls*. | At the moment Glyn *is cycling* almost twenty miles a day.

In these cases, the Progressive concept of 'temporariness' applies not to the individual events that make up the series, but to the series as a whole. The meaning is 'HABIT IN EXISTENCE OVER A LIMITED PERIOD' – the period often being specified by an adverbial expression, as in the examples above. On the other

hand, there may be no adverbial, as in *I*'M TAKING *dancing lessons*. It is the temporariness of the habit that is important: *I*'M TAKING *dancing lessons* suggests a shorter period than *I* TAKE *dancing lessons*. Cf. also: *They are giving him steroids*.

The iterative element of meaning may well be made clear by an adverbial expression of frequency: *I*'M GOING *to the gym* EVERY AFTERNOON *this week*.

a. Adverbs of indefinite frequency may not be so used, however: **I am* SOMETIMES *walking to work until my car is repaired*.

50

The second habitual meaning is REPETITION OF EVENTS OF LIMITED DURATION:

> Whenever I pass that house the dog's *barking*. | Don't call on them at 7.30 – they*'re* normally *having* dinner. | Usually the cramp starts just as I'*m going* to sleep. | You only seem to come alive when you're *discussing* your work.

Here the notion of limited duration applies not to the habit as a whole, but to the individual events of which the habit is composed. The effect of substituting the Progressive for the Simple Present is thus to *stretch* the time-span of the event so that it forms a frame around the recurrent event or time-point: compare the first sentence above with *Whenever I pass that house the dog barks*. Normally, this meaning of the Progressive is accompanied by adverbial modification naming the event or point of time around which the temporary activity is seen as a 'frame'. When no adverbial of time is present, there must nevertheless be a point of time implied by the context. Thus to the second example above we could add the words … *at that time* (viz. 7.30), making explicit what is otherwise implicit.

An adverbial phrase of frequency may also be added: OFTEN *when I pass she is sitting there on the doorstep, watching the world go by*. Sometimes, absence of frequency modification leads to ambiguity as to habitual or non-habitual meaning. This is evident in the second example above, which, if *normally* were omitted, could refer either to a single event of having dinner, or to an event regularly repeated on each work day.

a. The point of reference 'framed' by the Progressive in this iterative sense is often indicated by a verb introducing a clause within which the Progressive form occurs: *He rarely* LETS *us* KNOW *what he* IS DOING; *You never* LISTEN *to what people* ARE SAYING; *You can always* TELL *what he*'s THINKING.

51

The Progressive Present may, like the Simple Present, refer to anticipated

happenings in the future:

> Martin is *coming* over for lunch on Sunday. | She'*s staying* over in London next Wednesday night. | I hear you'*re moving* to a new job.

Also happenings anticipated in the past may be expressed by the Progressive Past Tense:

> As we WERE VISITING *them the next day*, *there was no point in sending the parcel by post*.

More will be said of this FUTURATE PROGRESSIVE in §§83, 98–99.

52

Finally, there is a special extended meaning of the Progressive, marked by the absence of the 'temporary' element of the normal Progressive meaning:

> The western land mass is always moving towards the water.

The sense here is one of PERSISTENT or CONTINUOUS activity; it is as if, in the 'process' use of the Progressive, the durational element of meaning overrides in this instance the temporary element. The uninterrupted nature of the activity is usually underlined by the presence of adverbs or adverbial phrases such as *always*, *continually*, *constantly* and *for ever* (this less common adverb can be written as one word: *forever*):

> I'm continually *forgetting* people's names. | His mother is always *telling* him the things he is not allowed to do. | They'*re* always *cracking* jokes. | We *were* continually *mending* punctures – It was really rough going. | He'*s* always *giving* her expensive presents.

Notice that *always* in this context is a synonym for *continually*. It does not mean what *always* means in the corresponding Simple Present construction: *He always* GIVES *her expensive presents*. The sense of this last sentence is 'He gives her an expensive present on every occasion' (i.e. on every occasion when people normally give presents). But with the Progressive, the rough sense is 'There is never a time at which he is not giving her expensive presents'.

   Obviously there is an element of colloquial exaggeration in such sentences. Their tone is often one of irritation or amused disparagement. Anyone who talked about *a man who is always giving people lifts* would tend to have a critical attitude towards the man, even though his habit of giving lifts might generally be considered laudable by other people.

The Expression of Past Time

53 introduction. PRESENT PERFECT TENSE: *54* involvement with the present; *55* state-up-to-the-present; *56* indefinite past; *57* 'at-least-once-in-the-period-leading-up-to-the-present'; recent indefinite past; *58* 'habit-in-a-period-leading-up-to-the-present'; *59* resultative past. PRESENT PERFECT AND SIMPLE past: *60* frequency of occurrence; distinguishing characteristics of the Present Perfect; *61* continuation up to the present time; *62* present result; *63* indefinite time. DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE PAST MEANING: *64* what is meant by 'definiteness'. MISCELLANEOUS POINTS: *65* interchangeability of Simple Past and Present Perfect; *66* imaginary Present Perfect; *67* Perfect Aspect with non-finite verbs. ADVERBIALS IN RELATION TO PERFECT AND PAST: *68* primary and secondary points of reference; *69* adverbials associated with Past Tenses; *70* adverbials associated with Present Perfect; *71* adverbials combining with either; *72* adverbials combining with either, but with difference of meaning. PAST PERFECT: *73*; *74* Simple Past interchangeable with Past Perfect. PERFECT PROGRESSIVE: *75*; *76* duration, limitation of duration and possible incompleteness; *77* Perfect Progressive requires no adverbial, and can be used with a wider range of verbs than the Simple Perfect; *78* potential incompleteness; *79* effects of the activity are still apparent; *80* summary; *81* temporary habit up to the present. PAST PERFECT PROGRESSIVE: *82*. FUTURE IN THE PAST: *83* Past Progressive and *was/were going to*; *84 would* + Infin, *was/were to*. USED TO: *85*.

53

It is well known that English has two chief ways of indicating past time by means of verbs: the Past Tense (*I worked, he wrote*, etc.) and the Perfect Aspect (*I have worked, he has written*, etc.); also that these two can be combined to form the Past Perfect (or 'Pluperfect') (*I had worked, he had written*, etc.) signifying 'past in the past'. My main goal, in this chapter, is to show how the Perfect is distinguished in meaning from the Past, first of all concentrating on the Present Perfect Tense. To begin with, it is worth making the point that Present

Perfect and Simple Past are not mutually exclusive choices: there are many situations where either of these tenses would be suitable.

At its most general, the Perfect Aspect is used for an earlier happening which is seen in relation to a later event or time as a reference point: in one word, the Perfect represents 'beforeness', or ANTERIORITY. Thus the Present Perfect means 'past-time-related-to-present-time'.
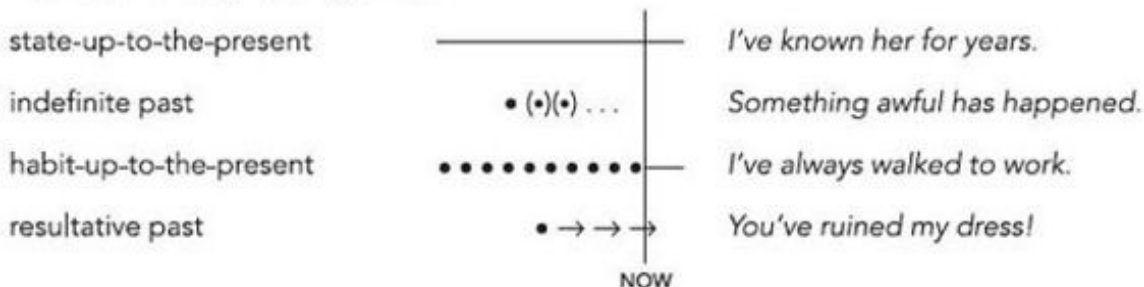
Present perfect tense

54

The Present Perfect, as distinct from the Simple Past Tense, is often described as referring to 'past with present relevance', or 'past involving the present'. There is a great deal of truth in this description, but on its own it is too vague to tell us exactly when and when not to use the Present Perfect. There are actually two distinct ways in which a past event may be related to the present by means of the Perfect: (a) it may involve a time period lasting up to the Present, and (b) it may have results persisting at the present time. Moreover, we can distinguish not just two, but four different uses of the Present Perfect, one of them occurring with 'state verbs' and three with 'event verbs'. We begin with the 'state' use, which is conceptually the best starting point, although it will turn out that the fourth use (resultative) is the most common (see §§59, 60).

a. The construction *have got* appears to be the Perfect form of the main verb *get*. Although it is possible to use it in this way (as in *Sam's got meaner in the last couple of years*), it is more likely that *have got* is interpreted as a 'state present' equivalent to *have* (*We've got plenty of fruit = We have plenty of fruit*). In any case, the usual AmE Perfect of *get* is *have gotten* (*Sam's gotten meaner … *). The semi-modal *have got to* (§148) is also non-perfect in its interpretation. In general, then, *have got* is not Perfect.

Four uses of the present perfect

state-up-to-the-present	——————————⊢——————	*I've known her for years.*
indefinite past	• (•)(•) …	*Something awful has happened.*
habit-up-to-the-present	• • • • • • • • • •⊢—	*I've always walked to work.*
resultative past	• → → →⊢	*You've ruined my dress!*

NOW

— indicates possible continuation after the present moment.
(•) (•) … indicates that there may be more than one event.
→ → → indicates that results persist in the present time.

55

STATE-UP-TO-THE-PRESENT. With 'state verbs', present involvement means that the state extends over a period lasting up to the present moment:

> I've *lived* in this neighbourhood since I was a kid ('and this is where I'm living now'). | We've *known* each other for years. | That house *has been* empty for ages.

The *period* mentioned extends up to the present moment, but since 'state verbs' are of undefined time-span, the *state itself* may possibly extend into the future: e.g. *We've kept healthy all our lives, and we mean to stay healthy in the future.*

The Past Tense would be unacceptable in BrE, though not in AmE, in the first of the three examples above (being incompatible with *since* here). In the other two examples the Past Tense would mean that the period is already complete and in the past: *That house was empty for ages* ('… but now it's been sold and occupied').

This 'state' use of the Present Perfect is generally accompanied by an adverbial of duration: the absence of an adverbial (e.g. *We have lived in London*) usually indicates not a state at all, but a completed happening in the indefinite past (see §56 below). There are exceptions, however, where a period leading up to the present, although not actually mentioned, is implied by context or the meaning of the clause. In *He's lived a life of luxury*, duration up to the present is understood, because there is an implicit period 'during his life'; in *You've outstayed your welcome*, the word *outstay* likewise incorporates the durational meaning 'for too long'.

a. A further special case has to be made for verbs used in one of the 'anti-progressive' categories (see §§37–8). With these verbs, the ordinary Present Perfect can also identify a period of 'limited duration' normally expressed with other verbs by the Present Perfect Progressive (see §§76–7), for which the requirement of an accompanying adverbial does not apply. In answer to *Why haven't you been writing to me*? one might reply *I've been too angry to write*, or *I've been ill*. Here the verb *to be* (of Class 37G) describes a temporary situation, for which the Progressive form would elsewhere be appropriate.

56

INDEFINITE PAST. With 'event verbs', the Present Perfect can refer to some indefinite happening (or happenings) in the past:

> *Have* you been to Brazil? | He's a man who has *experienced* suffering. | I've *known* love, but not true love. | All my family *have* had injections against measles.

Often the indefinite meaning is reinforced adverbially, especially by *ever, never* or *before* (*now*): e.g. *Have you ever been to Brazil*?

Two things are meant by 'indefiniteness' here: first, the number of events is unspecified – there may have been one or more than one occurrence; second, the time is also left unspecified. To put it more carefully, therefore, the meaning of the Present Perfect here is 'at-least-once-before-now'. The number of events, it is true, can be mentioned adverbially: *I've been to America three times*. But if there is an adverbial of time-when to specify the exact time in the past, the Present Perfect becomes inappropriate, and is normally replaced by the Simple Past: not **I'VE BEEN to America last summer*, but *I WENT to America last summer*.

a. Especially in BrE, there can be cases where the Present Perfect co-occurs with an adverbial specifying a past time. E.g.: '*Have you ever been to Austria*?' '*Yes, I've been to Vienna in 1980*.' Many people would consider such usages as mistakes, even though they sometimes occur in the speech of native speakers.

b. The indefinite past meaning of the Perfect, like the state-up-to-the-present meaning, does not often occur without adverbial reinforcement. On the infrequent occasions when it does so occur, the verb *have* tends to be stressed, and the whole clause tends to imply some kind of reservation:

I *have* eaten lobster (with a fall of intonation on *have* and a rise on *lobster*) ('… but I can't say I enjoyed it'). | *I have* played tennis ('… but not very often').

57

At first glance, it looks as if there is no element of 'present involvement' in this use of the Present Perfect, any more than there is in the Simple Past. But in fact, a more precise definition of the indefinite past use should indicate that a period of time leading up to the present is involved here, just as in the state use of the Present Perfect. Once again, our 'indefinite past' definition must be revised, and more exactly formulated as: 'at-least-once-in-a-period-leading-up-to-the-present'. This longer wording, when applied to the preceding examples, adds nothing material to the more concise label 'indefinite past'. But consider these other examples:

Have you visited the Gauguin exhibition? (i.e. 'while it has been on'). | The postman hasn't called at our house (i.e. 'today').

The first of these sentences implies that the Gauguin exhibition is still running, whereas the Simple Past *Did you visit the Gauguin exhibition*? would have suggested that the exhibition is over (or more precisely, that your chance to visit it is over). In the same way, the second sentence is spoken with a special time period (probably a day) in mind: it does not mean that the postman failed to call at least once in the past; it means rather that the postman has not called during a period in which his regular visit is expected. There is a general tendency of self-centredness in human speech, whereby, unless otherwise specified, we

understand a word or phrase to refer to something close at hand rather than distant. It is this principle that is at work in these sentences. If we recognise that the indefinite past meaning always involves a period leading up to the present, it is easy to see how this period can become reduced, by subjective assumption, from 'always' to 'within the last few days', or even 'within the last few minutes'. In other sentences, the restricted period is made explicit:

> Have you installed any new software *in the last week*? | Have you taken him to the vet *since the trouble started*?

The assumption of proximity is noticed in a vaguer way in utterances like *Have you seen my car keys (recently)*? or *The electrician has (just) called* (where AmE would be more likely to use the Simple Past). If the adverbs *recently* and *just* are omitted from these sentences, there is scarcely any change of meaning, as they simply make the implicit 'nearness' of the event explicit.

  The sense of 'nearness' is quite common, so that it is worth recognising a sub-category of the indefinite past meaning, that of the RECENT INDEFINITE PAST. This is partly separated from the more general indefinite past meaning by its association with the adverbs *just, already, recently, still* and *yet. Always, never, ever* and *before*, on the other hand, single out the more general meaning. Compare, for instance, *Have you* EVER *been to America*? with *Has the electrician called* YET?

a. In AmE, the recent indefinite past is frequently expressed by the Simple Past Tense: *Did your sister phone yet*? (which would be unusual for a British speaker in this context). But the Present Perfect is also used here in AmE – and British speakers show signs of beginning to follow the American use of the Simple Past.

58

HABIT-IN-A-PERIOD-LEADING-UP-TO-THE-PRESENT. The habitual or iterative use of the Present Perfect with 'event verbs' is illustrated by:

> Mr Phipps *has sung* in this choir for fifty years. | I'*ve* always *walked* to work. | The news *has been broadcast* at 10 o'clock for as long as I can remember.

Since a habit (as that term has been understood here) is a state consisting of repeated events, this use is similar to the 'state' use of the Present Perfect described in §55 above. As we saw there, the habit or state may continue through the present moment into the future, and an adverbial of duration is usually required: *Mr Phipps has sung in this choir* without the adverbial phrase becomes an example of the indefinite past meaning. Often, the habit element is

emphasised by an adverbial of frequency: *The machine has been serviced* EVERY YEAR *since we bought it.*

59

RESULTATIVE PAST. The Present Perfect is also used in reference to a past event to imply that the result of that event is still operative at the present time. This meaning is clearest with 'transitional event verbs' (§35B), describing the switch from one state to another. The resultant (and present) state implied by the Perfect is indicated in brackets in these typical examples:

> The taxi *has arrived* (i.e. 'The taxi is now here').
> She *has been given* a camera ('She now has the camera').
> I'*ve recovered* from my illness ('I'm now well again').
> Someone *has broken* her doll ('The doll is now broken').

In other examples, the resultative implication is still there, even though it is not quite so obvious from the verb's meaning:

> I'*ve had / taken* a shower ('So I'm now clean').
> He's *cut* his hand with a knife ('The cut is still there, i.e. has not yet healed').

The resultative meaning needs no support from adverbials. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish from the recent indefinite past use (§57): in fact, it is arguably a special case of the recent indefinite past, in which there is the additional resultative inference. One may argue, for instance, that the question *Have you seen my trainers*? is really a question about the present consequences of seeing the trainers; i.e. 'Do you know where they are?'

a. There is a comparable resultative use of past participles: *a broken doll, a painted ceiling, an injured arm*. For example, *a broken doll* means a doll that has been broken, and is still in the resulting state of being 'broken'. These examples contrast with past participles of 'state verbs', where the meaning is purely stative: *an honoured colleague*; *a known gambler*; *a feared opponent*. These cannot be paraphrased by a clause with a Present Perfect verb form; *Hewitt is a feared opponent* means that the opponent *is* feared now, not that he *has been* feared in the past.

b. There are two Perfect forms of the verb *go*: *have ++ gone* and *have ++ been*. The difference in meaning between them is that the first is resultative, indicating transition into a current state of absence, whereas the second is indefinite past (or habitual). *He has gone to America* implies he is still there; *He has been to America* implies that he has since returned (or at least that he has since left America).

c. As the notions of completeness and result are clearly connected, we note at this point the completive emphasis of the Present Perfect in some rather oracular utterances in elevated style: *What I have written, I have written*. Here the effect of the Perfect is 'What I have written must stay there – it cannot be altered or added to'.

Present Perfect and Simple Past

60

Having noted the four principal meanings of the Present Perfect, let's briefly consider factors of frequency. First, it is worth noting that the Present Perfect is much less frequent than the Simple Past tense. Second, the four senses of the Present Perfect are of very different frequency – by far the most common sense is the last of the four: the resultative. The indefinite past sense (without the resultative implication) is next most common. The remaining senses (state-up-to-the-present and habit-up-to-the-present) are considerably less frequent than the other two.

Now let's review the contrasts and points of overlap between these meanings and that of the Simple Past. As a means of referring to the past, the Present Perfect differs from the Simple Past on three counts, viz. continuation up to the present, present result, and indefinite time.

61

CONTINUATION UP TO THE PRESENT TIME. This element of meaning is found in the state-up-to-the-present, in the habit-up-to-the-present and (to a degree – see §57) in the indefinite past meaning. The contrast of the 'state' Perfect with the Past is evident in:

> His sister *has been* an invalid all her life (i.e. 'She is still alive').
>
> His sister *was* an invalid all her life (i.e. 'She is now dead').

The same contrast is made with the habitual use in:

> For generations, Nepal *has produced* the world's greatest soldiers ('The nation of Nepal still exists').
>
> For generations, Sparta *produced* Greece's greatest warriors (This permits, but does not compel, us to infer that 'The state of Sparta no longer exists').

Again, here is the same point illustrated with the indefinite past use:

> *Has* Tom Stoppard *written* any novels? ('Stoppard is still alive – or at least he's still an active writer').
>
> *Did* Anton Chekhov *write* any novels? ('Chekhov is now dead – or at least he's no longer active').

In all these examples, the period in question is assumed rather than named: it is

most likely the lifetime of the person or institution denoted by the subject of the sentence.

a. We do find occasional examples which contradict the rule about continuation up to the present, e.g.:

> *Over the past six months statistics have been gathered by a new Europe-wide service, but* HAVE NOT BEEN PUBLISHED *until yesterday.*

Perhaps the best way to explain such cases as this is to assume that speakers use only an approximate notion of 'up to the present moment', which can stretch to accommodate 'up to the recent past'. (This is more evident with cases of the Present Perfect Progressive such as *It's been raining* – see §79).

62

PRESENT RESULT. The resultative use of the Present Perfect (in BrE) is shown in contrast to the Simple Past in:

> Peter *has injured* his ankle ('His ankle is still bad').
> Peter *injured* his ankle ('… but now it's better').

The second allows us to conclude that the result of the injury has disappeared.

a. On the other hand, the Simple Past is used for unique historical events, even when their results are still there: *This house was built by Inigo Jones. Tobacco was brought to England by Sir Walter Raleigh.*

b. For present result as for recent indefinite past, the Present Perfect can often be replaced by the Simple Past: *Why are you limping? Did you hurt your foot*? In AmE, in fact, the Simple Past is more natural here.

63

INDEFINITE TIME. Whereas the Present Perfect, in its indefinite past sense, does not name a specific point of time, a definite POINT OF REFERENCE (or anchor point) in the past ('then') is normally required (in BrE) for the appropriate use of the Simple Past Tense. The point of reference may be specified in one of three ways:

(a) By an adverbial expression of time-when:

> I *saw him Tuesday*.

(b) By a preceding use of a Past or Perfect Tense:

> I *saw / have seen* him this morning – he *came* to borrow a hammer.

(c) By implicit definition; i.e., by mentally assuming a particular reference point from the context:

> *Did you hear* that *noise*?

(Here the speaker has in mind a particular time when the noise occurred. From the speaker's viewpoint – though not necessarily from the hearer's – the time is definite.)

Definite and indefinite past meaning

64

A little more needs to be said on the concept of definiteness.

The 'definite'/'indefinite' contrast between Simple Past and Present Perfect is exactly parallel to the contrast in meaning between the definite article *the* and the indefinite article *a* or *an*. We say *the cat* rather than *a cat* whenever a particular animal has already been mentioned, or else whenever, even though no cat has been mentioned, we know simply from familiarity with the context, what particular cat is under discussion. If a husband says to his wife *Did you feed the cat*? it is clear to them both (unless they have more than one cat) which cat is meant.

These two conditions of previous mention and uniqueness within the context correspond to conditions (b) and (c) in §63 above.

A further resemblance is this. It is natural to introduce a new topic *indefinitely*, then to progress to *definite* reference (using Past Tense, definite article, personal pronouns, etc.) once a frame of reference has been established:

> Two teenagers and a *10-year-old girl* were caught in the crossfire. *The girl* was taken to hospital for emergency treatment, but fortunately *her* wounds were not serious.

Similarly, Past follows Perfect:

> There *have been* times when I *wished* you were here.

> Where *have* you *been*? I was *looking* for you everywhere.

> *A*: I*'ve* only *been* to Switzerland once. *B*: How *did* you like it? *A*: It was glorious – we *had* beautiful weather all the time.

As the last example shows, after the definite time has been established, the Past Tense can be repeatedly used to denote events happening simultaneously or in succession, just as one may continue to refer to the same person as *the woman* or *she*. A preceding indefinite reference 'licenses' a definite reference.

a. Implicit definiteness can often be clarified by taking the corresponding indefinite statement, and by mentally adding a *when* clause. *Who gave you this tie*? for instance, can be expanded into the following train of thought: 'This tie has been given to you by someone – that much I know already; but *when it was given to you*, who gave it to you?' Other examples are: *Did you have a good journey*? ('… when you came here'); *Did you enjoy your meal*? ('… when you ate it'); *I went to school with Tony Blair* ('… when I was a

schoolboy').

b. When the topic of a sentence is unique (e.g. often when its subject or object is a proper name) the definiteness extends to the verb form, so that Past Tense is selected: in *Philadelphia was founded by William Penn,* the Past Tense is only natural, since we know that Philadelphia is a definite place, and was founded at a unique point in history. In this connection, it is interesting to contrast the indefinite *John has painted* A *picture* (*of his sister*) with the definite *John painted* THIS *picture.*

c. The Past Tense, indicating a definite point of reference in the past, is to be expected in temporal clauses introduced by *when, while, since,* etc., because the time specified in such clauses is normally assumed to be already given: *You made a mistake* WHEN YOU BOUGHT THAT DOG; *She hasn't spoken to us* SINCE WE QUARRELLED ABOUT THE WILL. (*When* followed by the Present Perfect is not frequent, and must be understood in a past-in-the-future or habit-up-to-the-present sense.) If the *when* clause contains a Past Tense verb, the main clause must also be in the Past Tense: the *when* clause is classed as an adverbial expression of time-when, just like *last week, three years ago,* etc. (see §69).

d. There is an idiomatic exception to the rule that the Simple Past Tense indicates definite meaning: this is the construction with *always* illustrated by *I always said he would end up in jail*; *Timothy always was a man of peace.* It is simply a colloquial variant of the Present Perfect with 'state verbs', and can always be replaced by the equivalent Present Perfect form. There are equivalent question and negative forms with *ever* and *never*: *Did you ever see such* a *mess? I never met such an important person before.*

e. Present Perfect is used less frequently in AmE than in BrE, and in particular, it is quite common to hear in North America the Simple Past where in Great Britain the Present Perfect in its recent-indefinite-past sense would be standard: *Did you sell your bicycle* (*yet*)?

f. Simple Past is sometimes used in comparative sentences where *used to* + Infinitive would be more generally appropriate (see §85): *I'm not so young as I* WAS =*I'm not so young as I* USED TO BE.

Miscellaneous points

65

Although the meanings of the Simple Past and Present Perfect are different in the ways stated, it is worth noting that either of them can be acceptable in the same utterance, with little difference of effect. For example, a person who has mislaid his/her spectacles might exclaim either *Now where did I put my glasses*? or *Now where have I put my glasses*? The difference between these two is merely a slight difference of viewpoint. In the first sentence, the speaker's attention is fixed on the moment when the glasses were lost, in an effort to remember what happened at that time; in the second, the speaker focuses on the present result of this action, and the question uppermost is: 'Where are they now?'

66

Like the ordinary Present Tense, the Present Perfect can be used with reference to an imaginary 'present moment' (see §25*a* where the first part of the following example was quoted):

> Batman responds when Gotham City is threatened by the vengeful Penguin and his gang of crooked circus performers, who HAVE TEAMED up with a corrupt tycoon, Max Schreck.

In this way a writer of a narrative summary gives a retrospective account of previous happenings, using the Present Perfect for events which are 'in the past' from the point of view of the stage of the story now reached.

67

The non-finite verb is strictly outside the subject matter of this book, but one important point has to be made about it. As the Past Tense belongs to finite verb constructions only, the Perfect form does duty, in non-finite constructions, for both Past Tense and Perfect Aspect. Thus it can have both definite and indefinite reference: *Having seen a doctor yesterday* shows the Perfect form of the present participle co-occurring with *yesterday* – something not allowable with a finite verb. Similarly with a *to* + Infinitive construction: *She is believed to* HAVE LEFT *last Monday* means practically the same as *It is believed that she* LEFT *last Monday*. The same point can be made, more relevantly, about the Infinitive in finite verb constructions with modal auxiliary verbs (see §142): *She may* have left *last Monday* is equivalent in meaning to *It is possible that she* LEFT *last Monday*.

Adverbials in relation to Perfect and Past

68

All tenses of the English verb map time by means of points of reference (or 'points of orientation' – also called 'anchor points') which indicate the relation of one time to another.

The primary point of reference is the present moment – the moment 'now' when the speaker is actually speaking, or (sometimes) the moment at which the speaker imagines he/she is speaking. But with the Past Tense, there is a secondary point of reference as well: as we have seen, it is an important difference between the Simple Past and Present Perfect that the Past evokes a past point of reference 'then', whereas the Present Perfect relates past time more directly to the present point of reference 'now'.

It is a consequence of this difference that the range of time adverbials (i.e., adverbs, adverbial phrases and adverbial clauses) combining with the Past Tense is by no means the same as the range of time adverbials combining with the Present Perfect. We have already noticed some of the differences, but it will be

useful at this point to summarise usage with regard to adverbials. A rough general rule is that with the Present Perfect, as with Present Tenses in general, adverbials must relate, in one way or another, to the present point of reference 'now', while with the Past Tenses they must refer to some point or period of time in the past.

69

Adverbials associated with the Past Tenses include *a week ago, earlier this year, last Monday, the other day, yesterday morning* and similar phrases. These, like the single adverb *yesterday*, refer to a specific time in the past, and so cannot normally occur with the Present Perfect.

At four o'clock, in the morning, on Tuesday, then, soon, next, after breakfast, etc. Members of this group, although they refer to a definite time, do not refer explicitly to the past. But when they have past reference they are likely to be found with the Past Tense. With the Present Perfect, they can have only a habitual sense, as in *We've always watched the TV news at 10 o'clock.*

70

In contrast, the following are adverbials associated with the Present Perfect rather than the Past: *So far, up to now, hitherto, since Thursday, since I met you,* etc. Such phrases and clauses normally refer to a time period stretching up to 'now', and so go with the Present Perfect in its state, indefinite past, or habitual sense.

Lately and *latterly* (BrE) go with the recent indefinite past interpretation of the Present Perfect.

For the present, for now, for the time being, etc. indicating present duration can accompany the Present Perfect, but not the Past.

a. Present time-when adverbials such as *nowadays* and *these days* cannot accompany either the Present Perfect or the Past – they require the Simple Present or Present Progressive. (But *now* can be used with the Present Perfect, marking the end point of the period of time during which a particular happening has taken place: *We have now finished the whole project.*)

71

The next group is composed of adverbials combining with either the Present Perfect or the Past.

Today, this month, this year, this century, etc. refer to a period including the present moment: with them, the Present Perfect and Past Tense are virtually

interchangeable. If there is a difference of meaning between *I went to the dentist today* and *I have been to the dentist today*, it is that the second focuses on the result aspect of the verb.

This morning, tonight, this March, this Christmas, etc. refer to a period which is part of a larger period including the present moment (as 'this morning', for instance, is part of 'today'). With *this morning / afternoon / evening,* it is sometimes said that the Present Perfect indicates that the period referred to is not yet over – that, for example, it is possible to say *I have been to the dentist this morning* at 11 a.m., but not at 3 p.m. This distinction, if made, accords with the principle that the Present Perfect has to involve a period extending up to the present. But other speakers of English find it is possible to say *I've been to the dentist this morning* in the afternoon or evening: for them, it seems, we can interpret *this morning* as 'today in the morning'.

Phrases of calendar time such as *this March* conform to the general rule that a period that is gone requires the Past Tense. The most natural inference from *I saw him this March* is that March is over, while *I have seen him this March* suggests that March is still with us.

Recently and *just,* as adverbs of the near past, can take either the Present Perfect or the Past: *I've just seen your boyfriend* or *I just saw your boyfriend.* Other adverbials with 'recent' meaning are somewhat varied in their behaviour: *lately* and *latterly* (as we saw in §70 above) normally collocate with the Present Perfect in BrE; *just now,* on the other hand, is like *a moment / second / minute ago*: it goes with the Past Tense.

With *always, ever* and *never,* Past and Present Perfect are largely interchangeable when describing a period up to the present (see §64*d*). Here is an exceptional use of the Past Tense.

72

Finally, we turn to adverbials combining with either Perfect or Past but with a clear difference of meaning.

Now, as we would expect, is principally associated with the Present Tenses: *Now my ambition is / has been fulfilled.* With Past Tense, it is a narrative substitute for *then* (= 'at this point in the story'): *Now my ambition was fulfilled.*

Once with the meaning 'on a certain occasion, at one time', accompanies the Past Tense, despite its indefinite meaning. It can refer to a long period of time in the past: *I was once an honest man.* With the Present Perfect, it is a numerical adverb contrasting with *twice, three times,* etc.: *I have visited the Highlands only once.*

Already, still, yet and *before* occur with the Present Perfect in the sense '[surprisingly,] as early as now', '[surprisingly,] as late as now', etc.: *I've seen him already*; *I still haven't seen him*. With the Past, they must have a meaning involving a past point of reference: *I was already* (= 'as early as then') *very hungry*.
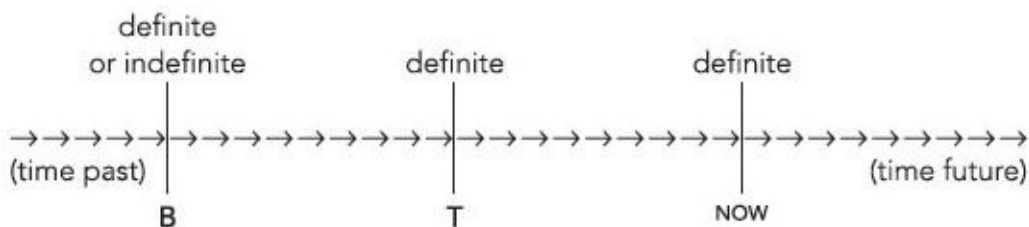
Past Perfect

73

The Past Perfect Tense (*I had written,* etc.) has the meaning of past-inthe-past, or more accurately, 'a time further in the past, seen from the viewpoint of a definite point of time already in the past'. That is, like the Simple Past Tense, the Past Perfect demands an already established past point of reference. This is why it is difficult to begin a conversation with the Past Perfect Tense.

We would hardly need to give separate attention of the Past Perfect if it were merely a question of adding the Perfect Aspect meaning to Past Tense meaning. But in fact the Past Perfect covers an area of meaning (further in the past) equivalent to both the Past and Perfect. It is like the Perfect Aspect of non-finite verbs (see §67) in being capable of referring to both indefinite and definite time: contrast *The parcel had already arrived* (indefinite) with *The parcel had arrived on April 15th* (definite).

In discussing the Past Perfect, it is useful to distinguish between the ordinary past point of reference 'then' (T) and the previous point of time 'before then' (B):

Whereas T (by its very nature as a point of reference) is definite, B is either definite or indefinite. The following examples show the Past Perfect paralleling the four uses of the Present Perfect as discussed in §§55–9:

The house had been empty for ages. (state-up-to-then, cf. §55)

Had they visited Brazil before? (indefinite past-in-past, cf. §56)

Mr Phipps had sung in that choir for fifty years. (habit-up-to-then, cf. §58)

The goalkeeper had injured his leg, and couldn't play. (resultative past-in-past, cf. §59)

For *The parcel had arrived on April 15th,* however, there is no corresponding Present Perfect sentence, because a definite time B ('before then') is mentioned.

It is worth noting that an adverbial of time-when with the Past Perfect can refer to either T ('then') or B ('before then'):

When the police arrived, the thieves *had run away.* ('By the time the police arrived, the thieves had run away.')

The thieves *had run away* when the police arrived. ('The thieves had run away at the time when the police had arrived.')

In the first of these sentences, the *when* clause is likely to identify T, whereas in the second sentence it is likely to identify B.

74

In some contexts, particularly following the conjunction *after,* the Simple Past and Past Perfect are interchangeable. These two sentences could well be describing the same sequence of events:

1. I ate my lunch after my wife *had come* back from town.
2. I ate my lunch after my wife *came* back from town.

After itself places the wife's arrival before the eating, so the Past Perfect in (1) is, in a way, redundant. What difference there is between these two statements can be represented as follows:
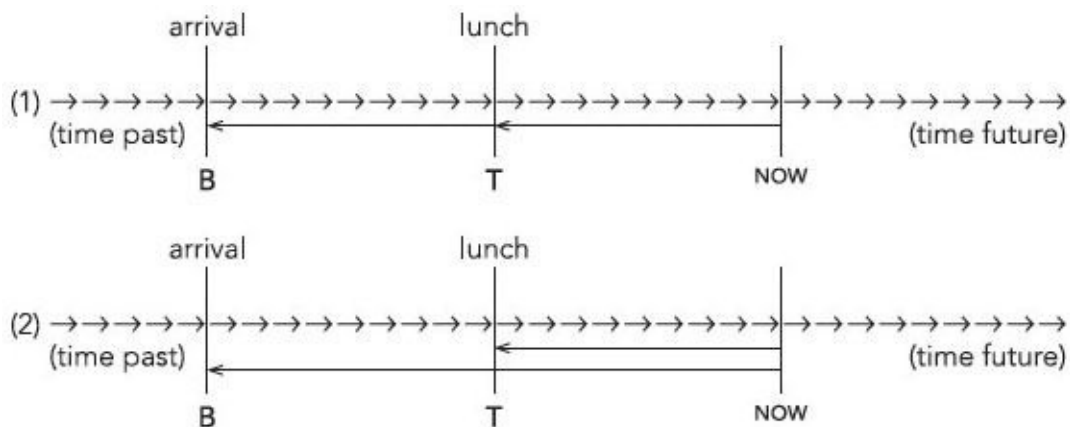
Statement (1) measures the 'beforeness' of the arrival from the event of eating lunch; statement (2) measures it directly from the present moment, treating it as

another 'then', not as a 'before then'. Statement (1) is the more explicit choice.

From this illustration, we see that the fact that one happening is further in the past than another happening already mentioned makes the use of the Past Perfect appropriate, but not necessary. (BrE favours this use of the Past Perfect more than AmE.)

Perfect Progressive

75

Like the Past Perfect, the Perfect Progressive (*I have been working*, etc.) has a range of meaning that is not entirely predictable from the meanings of its components. However, all features of meaning associated with the Perfect Aspect and the Progressive Aspect considered separately come into play in one way or another.

76

The main features associated with the Progressive in §§28–31 were DURATION, LIMITATION OF DURATION and POSSIBLE INCOMPLETENESS. The second of these gives the Perfect Progressive its meaning of 'temporariness', seen in these examples:

> I'*ve been writing* a letter to my nephew. | How *have* you *been getting* on? | It's *been snowing* again.

The verbs here are 'activity verbs' which typically go with the Progressive Aspect. The meaning of the Present Perfect Progressive is roughly that of a TEMPORARY SITUATION LEADING UP TO THE PRESENT MOMENT, and is comparable to the state-up-to-the-present meaning of the non-progressive Present Perfect. There is, however, a difference between a temporary and a permanent time-scale:

> Lynn and Josh *have lived* in that house since their marriage.

> Lynn and Josh *have been living* in that house since their marriage.

The second statement describes a situation which the speaker regards as temporary; it is therefore more appropriate when Lynn and Josh have not been married very long. It also hints that the situation is liable to change.

Because of the semantic element of duration, the Perfect Progressive is difficult to use with verbs which normally refer to momentary events:

> He has been starting his car.

?*He has been starting his book.

The first of these makes sense, but reflects badly on the car's reliability. The second sentence, on the other hand, seems nonsensical because it gives duration to something which cannot have duration: the only way to make sense of it is to construe it as an ironical remark with the interpretation 'He has been meaning / trying / pretending to start his book'.

77

Two further differences between the Present Perfect Progressive and the Present Perfect meaning state-up-to-the-present are:

A As examples above show, the Progressive does not have to be accompanied by an adverbial of duration. The sentence ?*It has snowed without any adverbial qualification sounds very odd, while It has been snowing is perfectly acceptable.

B The Progressive can be used with many verbs which cannot be used with the non-progressive Present Perfect in this sense, because they cannot act as 'state verbs': You've been reading that book for ages is allowable, but not *You've read that book for ages.

Once again, however, there is virtually a free choice between the two forms in many contexts: Jack has been looking after the business for several years and Jack has looked after the business for several years are both acceptable.

a. There seems to be a tendency to avoid the ordinary Present Perfect with verbs such as *sit, lie, wait* and *stay,* which generally refer to temporary states. Thus *I've been sitting here all afternoon* is more idiomatic than *I've sat here all afternoon.* The same preference is exercised even with very long periods of time: *The inscription has presumably been lying here for thousands of years* is more likely to be used than *The inscription has presumably lain here for thousands of years.*

b. The Perfect Progressive, however, is almost never found with the Passive Voice: *Volunteers have been running the organisation* could scarcely be turned into the Passive form of *The organisation has been being run by volunteers.* (The Perfect Progressive Passive, although not impossible in present-day English, is extremely rare.)

c. Naturally enough the anti-progressive verb classes listed in §37 do not normally appear with the Perfect Progressive: **I've been knowing Dr Mason for some time* is unacceptable (see §55*a*).

d. Although as a general rule a *since* clause requires the Present Perfect instead of the Simple Present (see §7*a*), we not infrequently find *since* with the non-perfect Present Progressive in sentences such as *I'm cycling to work since my car broke down.* The usual construction is, however, the Present Perfect Progressive: *I have been cycling to work since my car broke down.*

78

The element of POTENTIAL INCOMPLETENESS in the meaning of the Perfect Progressive becomes important when one thinks about the possibility of adding a statement predicting the continuation of the activity into the future:

> The business *has been losing* money for years ('… and will probably continue to lose money').

With 'bounded' verbs ('event verbs', including some 'activity verb' or 'process verbs', whose meaning entails eventual fulfilment or completion – see boundedness, §31*a*), the 'incompleteness' option in the Present Perfect Progressive contrasts crucially with the ordinary Present Perfect, which specifies that the conclusion has already been reached:

> Who's *been eating* my dinner? (This usually implies 'Some of it is left').
> Who's *eaten* my dinner? (This usually implies 'It's all gone').
> They'*ve been widening* the road (?'They're still at it').
> They'*ve widened* the road ('The job's finished').

Where finality is not likely to be an issue, the two can be equally acceptable in similar situations. There is little to choose between *I've taken the dog for a walk* and *I've been taking the dog for a walk*, except that the former places emphasis on the present result, the latter on the recent activity, as suggested by these two snatches of dialogue:

> 'I've taken the dog for a walk.' 'Oh thanks, that means I can take a rest.'
> 'Where have you been?' 'I've been taking the dog for a walk.'

79

Although 'present result' is not a noticeable part of the meaning of the Perfect Progressive in the examples above, in other circumstances there is a trace of it in the implication that THE EFFECTS OF THE ACTIVITY ARE STILL APPARENT:

> You've been fighting again ('I can tell that from your black eye').
> It's been snowing ('Look, the ground is white').
> She's been crying again ('Look, her eyes are red').

In these cases, as in general with the Perfect Progressive, it is not necessary for the activity to continue right up to the present moment. In fact, we frequently understand that THE ACTIVITY HAS RECENTLY STOPPED. The meaning-components 'effects still apparent' and 'recently finished' are closely connected, and it is very difficult to tell whether one of them is dependent on the other. Recentness is

sometimes stressed by the adverb *just*: *I've just been listening to a programme on Vietnam*.

a. The 'recently stopped' component of meaning need not be in conflict with the element of 'non-completion'. *I've just been painting the house* implies 'I have recently stopped painting the house', but it may also mean that the job as a whole is incomplete and will be resumed later.

80

In summary, we may say that the main use of the Present Perfect Progressive combines elements 'continuation up to the present', 'recent indefinite past', and 'resultative past' found in the use of the non-progressive Present Perfect; and that, in addition, it combines these with the concepts of temporariness and possible non-completion associated with the Progressive Aspect. Let us list these elements as follows:
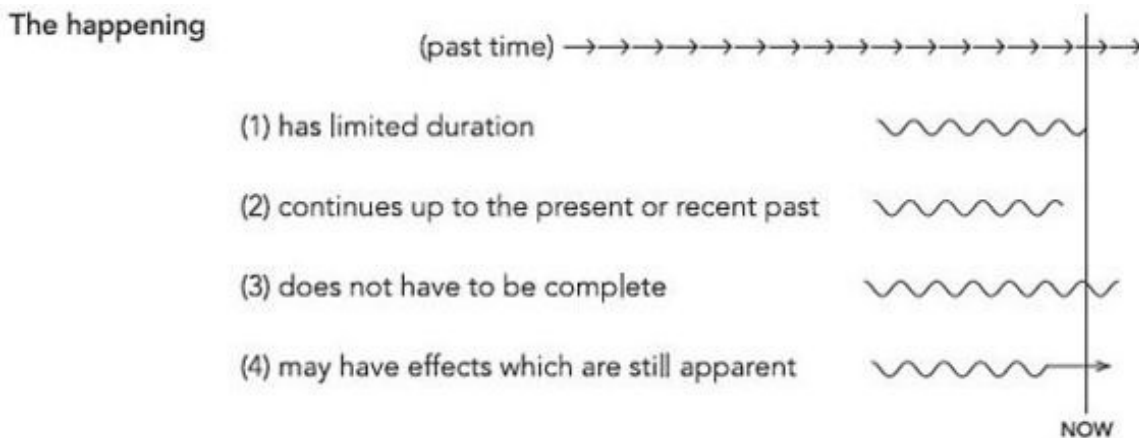
81

The above description applies to the Present Perfect Progressive referring to a single unbroken activity or situation. Less commonly, this tense is also used in the habitual sense of TEMPORARY HABIT UP TO THE PRESENT:

He's been scoring plenty of goals so far this season. | I've been going to hospital every week for tests.
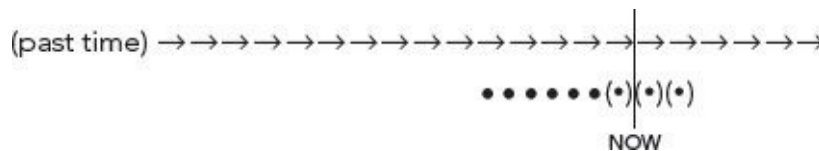
Examples can also be found of the second habitual meaning of the Progressive, that which involves stretching the time-span of each event rather than

compressing the time-span of the habit as a whole (see §50): *Whenever I've seen her, she's been wearing that preposterous old hat.*
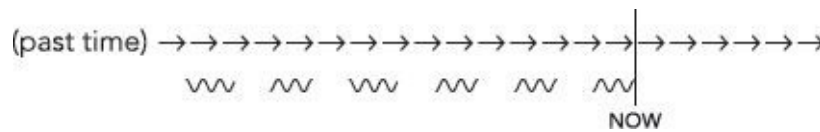
Past Perfect Progressive

82

The rare Past Perfect Progressive (*Sam had been drinking,* etc.) can be used in all the ways illustrated above with the Present Perfect Progressive and, what is more, may have the definite past-in-the-past meaning discussed in §73; that is, it may be a shift further into the past than the meaning of the ordinary Past Progressive *was dancing,* etc. Hence it is possible to join the Past Perfect Progressive, like the non-progressive Past Perfect, with an adverbial of time-when: *I had been speaking to her at 4 o'clock.* (The corresponding example with the Present Perfect Progressive would be unacceptable: **I have been speaking to her at 4 o'clock.*) Hence, also, there is an ambiguity in the sentence:

> The inscription had been lying there for a thousand years.

This can mean (a) that the thousand years led up to 'then', the point of reference (a use corresponding to the Present Perfect Progressive, as in *The inscription has been lying there for a thousand years*); or (b) that there was a gap between the thousand years and 'then' (a use corresponding to the ordinary Past Progressive, as in *The inscription was lying there for a thousand years*).

a. Although I described the example as 'ambiguous' above, it is probably better to think of the Past Perfect Progressive as simply more general in its meaning than either the Present Perfect Progressive or the ordinary Past Perfect. It combines the temporariness of the Progressive with the past-in-the-past meaning of the Past Perfect. This is all that needs to be said about this tense of infrequent occurrence.

Future in the past

83

To balance the Past Perfect, we might expect the English language to possess a 'future in the past' tense for describing happenings which are in the future from some vantage point in the past. But there is no regular verbal construction with

this meaning in everyday use.

Past Progressive forms or *was / were going to* + Infinitive with future-inthe-past reference are coloured by the notion of 'intention' or 'imminence' (see §§92–100), and so do not guarantee that the event foreseen in the past actually did take place:

> The beauty contest *was taking place* on the next day.
>
> The beauty contest *was going to take place* on the next day.

To both of these one could add: 'This was the plan – but in fact it had to be cancelled because of bad weather'. These are therefore not true future-in-the-past tenses.

84

The language comes nearest to possessing a future-in-the-past tense in the constructions *would* + Infinitive and *was / were to* + Infinitive, when these are interpreted 'was / were destined to':

> Twenty years later, Dick Whittington *would be* the richest man in London.
>
> This strange, nervous individual *was later to* be defendant in one of the most notorious murder trials of all time.

Both these usages are uncommon, and are largely restricted to a rather literary style of historical narrative. In neither case can the events foretold be in the future from the *present* point of view of the narrator: they must take place between the 'then' of the narrative and the 'now' of the narration.

The use of these constructions in the sense 'was / were destined to' is so limited that in practice English speakers manage without a future-inthe-past construction, and use the ordinary Past Tense when they wish to anticipate some later event in past narrative:

> Pitt, who later *became* Britain's youngest Prime Minister, was at this time Chancellor of the Exchequer.

a. Both *would* + Infinitive and *was / were to* + Infinitive are more commonly used in senses other than 'was destined to'. *Would* + Infinitive can be used as the equivalent of *will* + Infinitive in indirect speech (see §157), and indeed, the sentence about Dick Whittington above is ambiguous. It can be interpreted not only in the 'was destined to' sense, but as free indirect speech, as if a parenthetic 'he said to himself' were added (see §160). Likewise, *was to* can be the Past of *is to* in the sense of 'is due / intended to'. Hence *Pitt was to be the next Prime Minister*, read in one way, is a prophecy with the benefit of historical hindsight, but read in another way, reports a plan which perhaps was never fulfilled (see §149).

Used to

85

Before we leave the subject of past time, there is the auxiliary *used to* (pronounced /ju:stu:/ or /ju:stə/) + Infinitive construction to consider. This construction is not to be confused with the adjectival idiom (*be*) *used to* meaning '(*be*) *accustomed to*'. It indicates:

1 A PAST STATE (with 'state verbs'):

> Cigarettes *used to cost* fifty pence a packet – now they cost nearly ten times as much. | Before they built the hotel, this place *used to be* a Chinese garden.

2 A PAST HABIT (with 'event verbs'):

> I *used to go* for a swim every day. | When I was young, my grandfather *used to tell* me frightful stories of the war.

Three points are to be noted about this construction.

(a) *Used to* has no equivalent present construction **uses to,* and can only have durative past meaning. Because of its state or habit meaning, it typically implies a contrast with a present state or habit, which can be expressed by a verb in the Simple Present: *I used to be rich* ('… but now I am poor').

(b) *Used to* is not normally accompanied by an adverbial of time-when. Instead, it seems to have its own 'built-in' adverbial *once* (= 'at one time'), in that the *used to* construction can be paraphrased by *once* with the Simple Past Tense:

> the man who *used to be* organist of St Paul's = the man who *was once* organist of St Paul's.

Thus an element of 'indefinite past' is normally present in the meaning of *used to*. Nevertheless, the combination of *used to* with an adverbial of time-when, though unusual, is not unacceptable: *He used to live here during the war years*.

(c) The 'indefinite past' meaning of *used to* discourages combination with an adverbial naming the actual duration of the state or habit:

> ?*She used to live in the green house for ten years, and then moved to the one on Mill Street.

a. On the other hand, an adverbial of duration can be employed if it specifies the period of each event making up a habit: *He used to go home for several weeks during the summer* is permissible, because *for*

several weeks here refers to each of the series of occasions.

b. *Used to* does not occur with the Perfect Aspect: **I used to have worked all afternoon*. With the Progressive Aspect, too, it is rare, but can be used in a habitual sense corresponding to that of §50 'repetition of events of limited duration': *Often when I passed she used to be sitting there on the doorstep.*

c. On the use of *would* (= 'predictability') with habitual past meaning similar to that of *used to,* see §140.

The Expression of Future Time

86 five ways of expressing future. *WILL* (ALSO *'LL* AND *SHALL*): *87* prediction; *88* *will*, *'ll* and *shall*; *89* forecasting use; *90* past in future; *91* future use of *shall*. *BE GOING TO*: *92* future outcome of the present; *93* future of present intention; *94* future of present cause; *95 be going to* less appropriate in future conditional sentences; *96* 'soonness' not a necessary element of meaning; *97* does not guarantee fulfilment of the event. FUTURATE PRESENT PROGRESSIVE: *98–9* future of present plan, programme or arrangement; *100* 'soonness' frequently implied; *101* mainly restricted to 'doing' verbs. SIMPLE PRESENT WITH FUTURE MEANING: *102* Simple Present with conditional, temporal and manner conjunctions; *103* futurate Simple Present: future as 'fact'; *104* plan or arrangement regarded as unalterable; *105* sequential use. *WILL* (ALSO 'LL AND SHALL) + PROGRESSIVE INFINITIVE: *106* normal use; *107* 'future-as-a-matter-of-course'; *108* tactful use; *109* interchangeability with *will* + Simple Infinitive. CONCLUDING REMARKS: *110* list in order of importance; *111* list in order of certainty; *112* other methods of referring to the future: *am / is / are to*; *be about to*; *113* meaning differences can be overemphasised.

86

There are a number of ways of expressing future time in English. The most important of them are:

- *Will* (or *shall*) + Infinitive: The parcel will arrive tomorrow.
- *Be going to* + Infinitive: The parcel is going to arrive tomorrow.
- Present Progressive: The parcel is arriving tomorrow.
- Simple Present: The parcel arrives tomorrow.
- *Will* (or *shall*) + Progressive Infinitive: The parcel will be arriving tomorrow.

These verb forms all have their subtle nuances of meaning, and cannot be

regarded as simply interchangeable. The task of this chapter is to explain the differences, beginning with the most common construction, that of *will* (or *shall*) followed by the infinitive.

   Shall as an alternative to *will* is becoming uncommon, especially in AmE. Since *will* is at least 10 times more frequent than *shall*, I treat *will* as the normal auxiliary for the future, and deal with future *shall* more briefly in a separate section. The contracted form *'ll* (see §88 below), like the negative contraction *won't*, will also be treated as a variant form of *will*.

Will (also *'ll* and *shall*)

87

Will (with *'ll* and *shall*) has the function of a modal auxiliary as well as an auxiliary of the future. In fact, these two functions are so closely intermingled that it is difficult to separate them. This chapter, however, will deal with only the main future use of *will*, leaving its volitional and other modal uses to the next chapter (§§125, 126).

   A good reason for putting together the future and modal uses of *will* lies in the very nature of futurity. We cannot be as certain of future happenings as we are of events in the past and present, and even the most confident prediction about the future must reflect something of the speaker's uncertainty and so be tinged with modality. *Will* is no exception. The word which most usefully characterises the future meaning of *will* is PREDICTION – something involving the speaker's judgement. Thus, although the *will* construction provides English with its nearest approximation to a neutral or colourless future, we should not describe it as a 'future tense' on a par with the Past and Present Tenses.

88

The full auxiliary form *will* is frequently contracted in speech (especially after pronoun subjects) to the form written *'ll*, which can combine with subjects of all three persons to express future meaning:

   I'll see you soon. | *You'll* have to work quickly. | *She'll* be at home when you get there.

Shall, however, can express this predictive meaning only with a first-person pronoun as subject:

   I shall have to tell the truth at last. | *We shall* explore this topic in the next chapter.

With a second-person or third-person subject, *shall* has a modal meaning, which we discuss later (§127). *You shall receive what you deserve* is a threat or promise rather than a prediction in present-day English, but in fact this usage is rare and old-fashioned.

Will, like its contracted form *'ll*, is used with all three persons to express futurity:

I will be here until five. | *You will* be here until five. | *He/she will* be here until five.

With the first-person pronouns, however, according to tradition English-speaking people feel that *shall* is the correct form, and so *I will* and *we will* are sometimes avoided by more 'grammatically conscious' writers, particularly in situations (such as in writing business letters) where people are on their best linguistic behaviour.

89

The *will* future is used in a wide range of contexts in which it is appropriate to make predictions:

Tomorrow's weather *will be* cold and cloudy. | You'*ll feel* better after this medicine. | The next budget *will need to be* a severe one. | Perhaps I'*ll change* my mind after I've spoken to my wife.

Will is particularly common in the main clause of conditional sentences:

If you press this button, the roof *will slide* back.

(In the *if-clause*, however, the future condition is usually expressed by the ordinary Present Tense – see §102 – as the verb *press* illustrates above.)

Will is suitable for both long-range and short-range forecasts about the future:

In twenty years' time, no one will work more than a thirty-hour week.
| There *will be* a fire-alarm drill at 3 o'clock this afternoon.

a. Will can refer to either an indefinite or a definite time in the future. In *Sarah will keep her promise, will keep* is the future counterpart of the Present Perfect Tense (*Sarah has kept her promise*); in *Next year we'll have a good harvest, 'll have* is the counterpart of the Simple Past (*Last year we had a good harvest*).

b. Frequently, however, a sentence with *will* describing a future event feels incomplete without an adverbial of definite time: ?*It will rain*; ?*The room will be cleaned*. These sentences are relatively unacceptable on their own, because of their factual emptiness. We all feel certain that 'it will rain' at some time in the future, so there is no point in saying *It will rain* unless an actual time can be forecast. ?*It has rained* is slightly odd for a similar reason. (On the other hand *It is going to rain* is fine without the adverbial – see §94*a*.)

c. It can be taken for granted in the rest of this chapter that *will,* as well as other methods of referring to future time, can be employed in reference to a narrative future: *Will John Jennings escape from the clutches*

of Red Reagan's gang? Find out in next week's Conquest. (Compare similar uses of Present and Present Perfect Tenses, §§25*b* and 66.) Here time is seen in terms of the 'virtual reality' of imaginary narrative sequence. *Will* also often denotes a 'virtual' future in referring forward to a later part of a book or article: *The sensory apparatus of bats will be examined later, in Chapter 25*. (However, the Simple Present can also be used here: … *is examined* . …)

c. A special adapted use of *will* (= 'prediction') occurs in military or quasi-military orders: *Officers will report for duty at 0300 hours. You will not move a muscle until I say so* (see §126D*a*).

90

Will followed by the Perfect Infinitive, though not common, is the usual means of expressing PAST IN FUTURE in English; i.e., of referring to a state or event seen in the past from a viewpoint in the future: *By the age of 20, as a typical American child you will have watched 700,000 TV commercials*. The time looked at retrospectively can either precede or follow the present moment, as is shown by the adverbials in this imaginary speech of a disgruntled student:

By next weekend I'll be sick of exams; I'*ll have had* eight exams in two weeks.

There is a similar construction with *will* + Perfect Progressive Infinitive:

When she moves out in August, she'*ll have been staying* here in my house for six months.

The 'future progressive' form is another possible construction with *will*: *Who will be driving? I'll be waiting for you*. This is discussed in §§106–9 below.

91

SHALL is an alternative to *will* with first person subjects in more formal styles of speaking and (especially) writing:

We *shall* see. | I hope we *shall* meet again quite soon. | I *shall* ask my lawyer to be present at the hearing.

a. *Shall* is very occasionally used for future reference with second- and third-person subjects: *The earth shall be filled with God's glory. The time shall come when the poor and the oppressed shall rise against the oppressor*. This is the old-fashioned language of prophecy. (See also §127.)

b. In AmE, *I shall* and *we shall* are largely confined to very formal situations, as in the orator's *We shall never surrender*.

Be going to

92

After *will,* the next most important way of expressing future time is the construction *be going to* + Infinitive, which is especially common in informal spoken English. (In fact informally *going to* is reduced to /ˈɡənə/, a pronunciation reflected in the non-standard spelling *gonna*.) If there is one general meaning that can be attached to this construction, it is FUTURE AS OUTCOME OF PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES. In fact, though, it is useful to distinguish between two meanings, the FUTURE OUTCOME OF PRESENT INTENTION and the FUTURE OUTCOME OF PRESENT CAUSE.

a. Be going to + Infinitive here is a single construction, not to be confused with a combination of the verb of motion *go* with the infinitive of purpose. *I am going to see my grandmother* can mean either 'I intend to see …' or 'I am going [there] in order to see …' The first alternative is our present concern: it can be reduced to the pronunciation represented *gonna*, where the second cannot.

93

The FUTURE OF PRESENT INTENTION is illustrated in these sentences:

> 'What *are you going to do* today?' 'I'*m going to stay* at home and write letters.' | My ex *is going to vote* for Pat Buchanan. | They'*re going to get* married in a registry office.

This is found chiefly with human subjects, and with 'doing' (or agentive) verbs which imply conscious exercise of the will.

a. There is a slight difference of meaning, however, between *I am going to leave tomorrow* and *I intend to leave tomorrow*. The latter does not tell us whether the departure will take place or not; but *be going to* brings with it a strong expectation (if not quite a prediction) that the intention will be carried out. *I'm going to cut down on junk food* is stronger than *I intend to cut down on junk food* – it implies confidence in my power to put the resolution into effect – and sooner rather than later.

b. The intention communicated by *be going to* is usually ascribed to the subject of the sentence – but not invariably. In passive sentences, it is often the intention of the implied agent that is in question: *This wall is going to be repainted* (= 'We or somebody else intend to repaint it').

94

THE FUTURE OF PRESENT CAUSE is found with animals and inanimate subjects, as well as with human subjects; it is also common to both 'agentive' and 'non-agentive' verbs. It thus covers a wider range of contexts than the intentional meaning of *be going to*:

She's going to have twins.	(i.e. 'She's already pregnant')
I think I'm going to faint.	(i.e. 'I'm already starting to feel ill')
There's going to be a storm in a minute.	(i.e. 'I can see the black clouds gathering')

In each of these there is the feeling that factors giving rise to the future event are already present; or (to be more exact) it is as if THE TRAIN OF EVENTS LEADING TO THE FUTURE HAPPENING IS ALREADY UNDER WAY. The first sentence may be contrasted with *She will have twins,* which is the pronouncement of a fortune-teller, rather than a piece of news.

From this, it is easy to see why *be going to* is often used in reference to the immediate future:

> Watch it! That pile of boxes is going to fall! ('I can see it already tottering')
>
> Just look! She's definitely going to win the race! ('She's starting to overtake the other runners')

Is going to win here is almost equivalent to *is about to win* or *is on the point of winning*.

a. When the clause with *be going to* contains no time adverbial, immediate future is almost certainly implied. *We're going to buy a house in the country* implies 'soon', unless some adverbial indicates otherwise: *We're going to buy a house in the country when we retire.*

b. It is generally clear which of the two variant meanings of *be going to* applies to a given context, but ambiguities can arise: *He's going to arrive late at the concert* can mean either 'That is his intention' or 'That is what will happen, if he goes on like this'.

95

Be going to is less appropriate than *will* in most future conditional sentences:

> If you pay by cash you *will* normally *obtain* a receipt as proof of payment.
>
> ?*If you pay by cash you are normally *going to* obtain a receipt as proof of payment.

The second of these sentences is less likely because the eventuality described in the main clause in such sentences depends on future rather than present circumstances. *Be going to* is suitable, however, if present circumstances are mentioned in the *if-clause*; i.e., if the condition is a present one rather than a future one:

> We'*re going to find* ourselves in difficulty if we go on like this.
>
> If you're expecting Wales to win, you'*re going to be* disappointed.

Be going to implies that the conditions for the future event already exist. However, *will* could replace *be going to* in these two examples with little difference of meaning.

96

Imminence ('soonness') is not a NECESSARY semantic accompaniment of *be going to*, as we see from the remote periods mentioned in these statements:

Present intention: I'*m going to do* what I like when I retire.

Present cause or train of events: If Winterbottom's calculations are correct, this planet *is going to burn itself out* 200,000,000 years from now.

If we take a fatalistic view of the future, of course, any coming event, however remote, can be thought to have its seeds in the present. In any case, there is often in people's speech a sense of destiny vague enough to bring *be going to* almost as close to a neutral 'future tense' as *will*. The two constructions can often be substituted for one another with little change of effect:

The whole idea of the digital computer *will be* obsolete in fifty years.

The whole idea of the digital computer *is going to be* obsolete in fifty years.

Will can be replaced by *be going to* even more generally if the nearness of the event is signalled by an adverb, or is made clear by the situation:

What *will happen* now? = What *is going to happen* now?

Will you *be away* long? = Are you *going to be away* long?

Following these trends, it seems that in more informal styles of English (particularly in speech) *be going to* is beginning to rival *will* as a fairly neutral future auxiliary. The following two examples show *be going to* being used in contexts where there is no particular reason to feel that the 'future is an outcome of the present':

I wonder if she *is going to* recognise us? (Anticipating a meeting with a long-lost cousin)

But closing seven excellent schools *is* not *going to save* anything. (Arguing against a proposal to save money)

97

Be going to does not guarantee that the anticipated happening will actually come to pass. This is illustrated most clearly in Past Tense examples:

He *was going to sue* me, but I persuaded him it would be pointless.
| The car *was going to crash*, but with the last wrench of the wheel I brought it to safety.

With the Past Tense, indeed, a frequent interpretation is that fulfilment did not take place, or at least was not evident. Non-fulfilment is also characteristic of the

Present Perfect form of *be going to*: *He's been going to fix that window-catch for months* ('… but he hasn't got around to it').

a. This Perfect form *He's been going to …* is unusual, and is likely to be accompanied by a strong stress on ˈ*go-*. More usual would be: *He has been meaning to fix …*

b. *Be going to* has no non-progressive variant **go*(*es*) *to*, and so it cannot really be considered a Progressive form, nor can it follow a Progressive: **I'm being going to*. But it can follow a Perfect: *I've been going to finish that job for ages*. In principle it can also precede a full range of grammatically permissible tenses and aspects: *Are you sure you're going to have finished the job by the time they arrive? I guess they're going to be watching the World Cup all week*. With a preceding *will*, *going to* can even express 'future in the future': *Call on me at lunchtime on Monday – I'll be going to speak to the boss about it that afternoon*. These complex constructions are rare.

Futurate Present Progressive

98

Like *be going to* + Infinitive, the Present Progressive can refer to a future happening anticipated in the present. (This use is termed FUTURATE – see also §103). But there is a subtle difference from *be going to*: it is not a present intention or cause, but rather a PRESENT ARRANGEMENT that is signalled by the Progressive.

99

A reasonably precise definition of the Present Progressive futurate is: FUTURE EVENT ANTICIPATED BY VIRTUE OF A PRESENT PLAN, PROGRAMME OR ARRANGEMENT. Here are examples:

> She'*s getting married* this spring. | The Chelsea–Arsenal match *is being played* next Saturday. | We'*re having* fish for dinner. | I'*m inviting* several people to a party. | When *are* we *going* back to France?

In each there is the implication of an arrangement already made: the marriage has been arranged, the football match has been fixed, the menu has been chosen, the party has already been decided on.

The difference between 'arrangement' and 'intention' is a very slight one; so *be going to* + Infinitive could be substituted for the Present Progressive in all these examples. There is, however, a small change of emphasis, as is illustrated in this pair of sentences:

> I'*m going to take Mary out* for dinner this evening.
> I'*m taking Mary out* for dinner this evening.

An intention is part of one's present state of mind, while an arrangement is something socially predetermined in the past, regardless of how the speaker feels now. So the second sentence, but not the first, could conceivably be uttered with some reluctance by someone who now regrets the arrangement. It could very readily be used as an excuse: *I'm sorry, I'd love to have a game of billiards with you, but I'm taking Mary out for dinner*. The social nature of an arrangement also means that it is somewhat strange to use the Progressive to refer to an activity which the speaker will perform alone: *I'm watching TV this evening* (unlike *I'm going to watch TV this evening*) is a little odd, and seems to suggest that watching TV is an arrangement that has been made by the speaker with others. For example, several football fans may have arranged to meet and watch their favourite team on the television.

100

It is understandable that the notion of 'fixed arrangement' comes to be associated with the near rather than distant future. The element of imminence ('soonness') often accompanying the future use of the Present Progressive is illustrated in the examples just given. As with *be going to*, however, the possibility remains of referring to the more remote future if it is seen as determined in advance: *When I grow up, I'm joining the police force*.

Another resemblance between the Present Progressive future and the *be going to* future is that time adverbials can be omitted. The following sentences without adverbial modification are in fact ambiguous out of context, as they can be given either a present (in progress) or future (imminent) interpretation:

> I'*m taking* Mary out for a meal. | We'*re starting* a bridge club. | Buffy and Rex *are leaving*. | My aunt's *coming* to stay with us. | They'*re being* made redundant.

(To get the present in-progress meaning, it helps to imagine the speaker talking into a mobile phone in the middle of the mentioned activity!) Without an adverbial, a time in the near future rather than remoter future is generally intended: one could insert the adverb *just* or *soon* in these sentences to make the imminence explicit.

The future use of the Present Progressive without a time adverbial seems to be chiefly limited to verbs of motion and some other verbs signifying single events. It is difficult, for example, to see any ambiguity in *I'm attending evening classes in Spanish*. Because of its habitual meaning, this sentence must almost certainly refer to the present rather than the future, unless we add a future adverbial such as *next year*.

a. 'Transitional event verbs' such as *arrive, die, land* and *stop* in any case have an anticipatory element in their meaning when used with the Progressive Aspect (see §35B). *The aeroplane is landing, Our team is winning,* etc. referring to an event already under way, are probably best regarded as exemplifying the in-progress present rather than the future use of the Present Progressive. But *The aeroplane is landing at Amsterdam* could easily be interpreted as 'future by arrangement'.

101

The factor of 'plan' or 'arrangement' in the future meaning of the Present Progressive restricts its use in the main to 'doing' verbs involving conscious human agency:

> John's *getting up* at 5 o'clock tomorrow. | *The sun *is rising* at 5 o'clock tomorrow.

The second sentence is absurd because it suggests that the rising of the sun could be deliberately planned, instead of being determined by natural law. In this respect, the *be going to* future has wider application than the Present Progressive future: we can say *It is going to rain tomorrow* (a forecast on the basis of present circumstances), but not **It is raining tomorrow*.

a. This does not mean, however, that the Present Progressive is entirely limited to 'doing verbs'. In *I'm getting a present tomorrow,* the verb *get* is ambiguous – it can have either the active, agentive meaning 'acquire', or the passive, inert meaning 'receive'. The inert meaning is possible because in this case the plan is understood to have been made and carried out by someone other than the subject of the sentence: the meaning is approximately 'Someone has arranged to give me a present tomorrow'.

b. A further, unsurprising restriction on the future use of the Present Progressive is that it does not occur with verbs (such as *to be,* see §37H) that are normally incompatible with the Progressive Aspect: we can very well ask *Who is captaining the team next Saturday*? but not ?**Who is being captain of the team next Saturday*?

Simple Present with future meaning

102

A SUBORDINATE FUTURE use of the Simple Present occurs in DEPENDENT CLAUSES introduced by conditional, temporal and manner conjunctions *if, unless, when, as soon as, as,* etc.:

> I'll tell you if it *hurts*. | When you *wake up*, you'll remember nothing. | Jeeves will announce the guests as they *arrive*. | Phone me as soon as you *get* there. | Next time do as she *tells* you.

Here the future is indicated by the ordinary Present Tense, instead of the construction with *will* that might be expected. Apparently this is because the situation indicated in the dependent clause is not a prediction in its own right,

but something given or assumed to be the case, a contingency of the future reference in the main clause. It can be said that in *I'll tell you if it hurts,* there are not two future references, but one – signalled by the *'ll* in the main clause. In this sense, the Simple Present in the dependent clause is a 'subordinate future', depending on the future reference in the main clause.

The Simple Present as subordinate future also occurs in some *that*-clauses, *wh*-clauses and relative clauses of future reference:

> Just suppose we *miss* the plane. | Make sure you *get* up early. | The press is bound to report what she *says* tomorrow. | I mustn't forget to ask her how much she *wants*! | The man she *marries* will have to be rich.

The Simple Present is used especially where the main clause clearly suggests futurity, and so we can say again that the sentence makes only one reference to the future through verbs like these, and a (further) use of *will* would be redundant. But some verbs like *hope* and *bet* offer a choice between the Simple Present and *will*: *I hope we (will) win*. *I bet you (will) lose*.

The future subordinate use of the Simple Present applies to other classes of verbs and adjectival expressions, followed by *that*-clauses and typically used in the imperative: *make sure, be sure, be careful, mind, ensure, see*. With these, it is impossible to use *will* in the *that*-clause: *Be careful you don't spill it* is fine, but not **Be careful you won't spill it*. Perhaps this is again because the independent clause clearly places the time-zone of the dependent clause in the future, and no separate reference to the future in the dependent clause is needed.

a. Notice the following ambiguity where both the present and future interpretations of a state verb are possible: *If you already know the answers, you will pass the exam*. Here the *if*-clause can mean 'know the answers now' or 'know the answers when you take the exam'.

b. Compared with the Simple Present, *will* is rather rare in *if-clause*s. When it does occur, it can have a volitional interpretation: *If you'll* (i.e. 'are willing to') *come this way, I'll show you some of our latest products*. On the other hand, the neutral 'prediction' meaning of *will* is not impossible in *if-clause*s, as this example shows:

> If you'll be alone at the New Year, just let us know about it.

The effect of using *will* here is to make the relation between the *if-clause* and the independent clause a matter of present rather than future contingency. The above sentence means 'If you can predict *now* that you will be alone at the New Year, let us know about it *now* (or at least before the New Year)'. The effect of the Simple Present is quite different: *If you are alone this New Year, just let us know about it*. This means: 'If, at the New Year, you find yourself alone, let us know about it *at that time*'. Here the condition exists in the future. (In the above sentence, *If you are going to* … could replace *If you'll . …*)

c. The future subordinate use of tenses is not confined to the Simple Present alone. It can also be found occasionally with (1) a Present Progressive form, (2) a Present Perfect form, and (3) even a Simple Past form. These are illustrated below:

1. A mother, saying goodbye to her daughter about to spend a month abroad, might say: *Don't forget to phone me tomorrow and let me know how* YOU'RE GETTING ON. The Present Progressive here refers to a future scenario.
2. In the following, *have been welcomed* denotes the past-in-future: *As soon as the guests* HAVE BEEN WELCOMED, *show them into the garden*.
3. In the following, the Simple Past *missed* refers to something that is to happen in the past-in-future: If *you don't take this job, you'll always regret that you* missed *your chance*.

103

The name FUTURATE is given to a (rather infrequent) use of the future Simple Present in INDEPENDENT CLAUSES. This represents FUTURE ASSUMED TO BE FACT; that is, it attributes to the future the same degree of certainty we normally accord to present or past events. Statements about the calendar are the most obvious illustrations:

Tomorrow's Saturday. | Next Christmas *falls* on a Thursday. | This Friday *is* Abigail's birthday. |

But any aspect of the future which is regarded as immutable can be similarly expressed:

The semester *starts* on 1st February. | Next year the United Nations *celebrates* the sixtieth anniversary of its charter. | The train *leaves* at 7.30 this evening.

Since most future happenings are in principle subject to doubt, the present futurate, which describes a future event by a categorical statement of fact, is a special or 'marked' form of reference. It overrides the normal feeling that the future is less certain than the present or past. A statement like *Next week John fails his driving test* is unthinkable except as an ironical comment, suggesting that John's failure is as sure as the rising of the sun, or the fact that Wednesday will succeed Tuesday.

104

From this it is an easy step to the Simple Present signifying a PLAN OR ARRANGEMENT REGARDED AS UNALTERABLE:

We *start* for Istanbul tonight. | I *get* a lump sum when I retire at sixty-five. | Her case *comes* before the magistrate next week. | The President *gives* his inaugural address tomorrow afternoon.

The Simple Present is a 'marked' future here also: it carries a special, rather decisive overtone similar to that of the event present (see §10). It would weaken the force of the above sentences to substitute the Present Progressive: *We are starting for Istanbul tonight* announces a present plan which could, conceivably, be altered later. Here the Present Progressive's connotation 'susceptible to change' comes to the fore. But in *We start for Istanbul tonight*, changing the plan is out of the question.

A further difference between the two constructions is that the arrangement conveyed by the Present Progressive is generally (though not necessarily) assumed to have been made by someone named in the subject of the sentence. *I'm starting tonight* almost always means '*I* have arranged to start tonight'. But with the Simple Present, the plan is often felt to be an impersonal or collective one – made, for example, by a committee, a court of law, or some unnamed authority.

a. However, this difference is not always felt: *The match starts at 2 o'clock* and *The match is starting at 2 o'clock* are more or less equivalent statements. In both we suppose that it is the organisers of the match that have made the arrangement.

105

In its FUTURATE use, the Simple Present refers to a definite future occasion in the same way as the Simple Past Tense (see §64) refers to a definite occasion in the past. This means it has to be accompanied by an adverbial referring to future time, unless it occurs in a narrative sequence, or in a context where some definite point of time in the future is assumed. An example of such a narrative sequence is:

> Right! We *meet* at Victoria at 9 o'clock, *catch* the fast train to Dover, *have* lunch at the Castle Restaurant, then *walk* across the cliffs to Deal.

The tone of this statement, as well as suggesting an irrevocable decision to follow the planned programme, also has something in common with the 'dramatic present' of stage directions (see §25*a*): the speaker seems to enact in advance the events as they will take place.

a. A related use of the Simple Present is the expression of inexorable determination in some conditional sentences: *If they reject the appeal, we'*RE FINISHED. *One more step, and I* shoot *you!* The latter example shows a style of threat familiar from popular crime and adventure stories. Similar also is the quasi-imperative use of the Simple Present with the inversion of Verb and Adverbial Complement in *Into bed you go! Up you get!* Such commands have a rather patronising air, and are directed mainly at pets and young children. These are examples of the Present futurate with a strong 'immediate future' connotation: the child or pet is expected to respond straight away.

b. Note the ambiguity of sentences like *His train leaves at 5 o'clock,* which can indicate either future (= '… at 5 o'clock today') or habitual present (= 'at 5 o'clock every day'). Compare a similar ambiguity in travel instructions, §26(b).

Will (also *'ll* and *shall*) + Progressive Infinitive

106

The construction *will* (*'ll* or *shall*) + Progressive, following the normal in-progress use of Progressive Aspect, can refer to temporary situations in the future (see §§28–31):

> This time next week they *will* be *sailing* across the North Sea. | Don't phone me at 7 o'clock – I'*ll be watching* my favourite TV programme.

As these examples show, the activity is often associated with a future point of time round which it forms a 'temporal frame' (see §32). In this, the 'future progressive' with *will* is entirely comparable to the Past Progressive: *This time last week they were sailing across the North Sea.*

   On the other hand, in other examples there is no framing effect, and instead *will* + Progressive conveys the idea of an ongoing happening or state of affairs in the future: *The whole factory will be working overtime next month.*

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There is also, however, a special use of *will* + Progressive: a use which applies to a single happening viewed in its entirety (and therefore without the characteristic 'framing effect' or non-completeness normally associated with the Progressive). This use requires separate attention, as it cannot be regarded just as a combination of the future meaning of *will* with the 'in progress' meaning of the Progressive. Examples are:

> I'*ll be writing* to you soon. | When *will* you *be moving* to your new house? | Next week we'*ll be studying* Byron's narrative poems. | The parties *will be meeting* for final negotiations on July 25th.

The meaning of the verbal construction here can be roughly summed up in the phrase FUTURE-AS-A-MATTER-OF-COURSE: it suggests that the predicted happening will come to pass without the interference of the volition or intention of anyone concerned.

   It is tempting to speculate that this usage has grown up through the need to have a way of referring to the future uncontaminated by factors of volition, plan

or intention which enter into the future meanings of *will* + Infinitive, the Present Progressive, and *be going to*. It appears to combine the future meaning of *will* ('prediction') with the 'arrangement' meaning of the Progressive futurate, so that, for example, *I'll be seeing you* can be glossed: 'The arrangement is such that I predict I will see you'.

Although the volitional uses of *will* and *shall* have not so far been discussed (see §§126–7 below), we need to notice here that with human subjects and 'agentive' or 'doing' verbs, *will* frequently combines prediction with overtones of volition (see §§126B–D). Hence there is a clear distinction of meaning in these pairs:

(a) *I'll drive* into London next week ('I've made up my mind. That's what I've decided').
(b) *I'll be driving* into London next week ('This will happen as a matter of course').
(c) *Will* you *put on* another play soon? ('Please!' – this sounds like a request).
(d) *Will* you *be putting on* another play soon? ('Is this going to happen?').

In principle, it is possible to use (a) in the neutral predictive sense of *I'll die one day*; but in practice, it is difficult to avoid suggesting at the same time that HERE AND NOW I AM DECIDING to drive to London. The possibility of volitional colouring is avoided in sentence (b), which is understood simply as a statement that 'such-and-such is predicted to happen'. There is a similar contrast between examples (c) and (d). As a question, (c) implicates the intentions of the listener, and therefore sounds almost like a cajoling request; but (d) simply enquires whether a further production will take place.

a. To illustrate the difference between the in-progress and special meanings of the *will* + Progressive construction, notice that the following sentence may be interpreted either with or without the 'framing effect': *I'll be visiting my aunt at lunchtime*. Let's define *lunchtime* as the period 12–2 p.m. The 'framing' interpretation is that lunch-time is included in a longer period (say, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.) during which I am at my aunt's house. The matter-of-course interpretation is that I will turn up at my aunt's house sometime during lunchtime (say, 12.15 p.m.) and stay for a while.

b. The matter-of-course meaning does not seem to occur with 'state verbs', as is argued by the lack of ambiguity of a sentence like *We'll be living in London next year*.

108

One reason why the *will* + Progressive usage has become quite common in everyday speech is that it is often a more polite and tactful alternative to the non-progressive form. Sentence (b) §107 could easily precede the offer *Can I give you a lift*? as it would forestall any awkward feeling of indebtedness on the listener's part: 'I'll be making the journey anyway, so don't feel you will be

causing me trouble'. Similarly, sentence (d) expresses polite interest in the future theatrical programme, while avoiding any suggestion of putting pressure on the person questioned.

109

In confirmation of the above comments, *will* + Progressive is found to be largely restricted to clauses with human subjects and with implications of agency. A sentence like *The lights will be coming on in a minute* (referring to an automatic lighting system), although acceptable enough, is unlikely. In this case there is no personal involvement, and so a disclaimer of volition is irrelevant. *The lights will come on in a minute* is a simpler way of expressing virtually the same meaning.

a. The 'matter-of-course' connotation helps to account for a temporal restriction which has been noted in the *will* + Progressive construction: viz., that it generally refers to the near, but not too immediate future. If we think of the underlying notion 'this will happen in the natural course of events', we shall not expect it to refer to events too far in the future nor to events too close to the present moment. This is only a rough guideline, however.

b. A second restriction consists in the avoidance of this Progressive form in describing abnormal or sudden or violent events which could not be said to happen 'in the natural course of things'. Remarks like ?*Margot will be poisoning her husband when he gets home* or ?*We shall be blowing up the Houses of Parliament tonight* have a crazy, semi-comic air which arises from the incongruity of treating such outrages as 'a matter of course'.

c. On the other hand, there is an idiomatic exploitation of such incongruities in colloquial English: *You'll be losing your head one of these days* (said to a very forgetful person) or *He'll be buying himself an island in the Bahamas next* (said to someone aspiring to a life of luxury). The message, with allowance for a certain amount of comic hyperbole, runs: 'This is what things will come to in the natural course of events if things carry on in this absurd way'. In the same spirit of comic exasperation is the routinely heard question *Whatever will they be doing next*?

Concluding remarks

110

Leaving aside the subordinate future use and focusing on the futurate use of the Simple Present (§§102–3), I will subdivide the five major types of future construction listed at the beginning of this chapter into six, which can be placed roughly in the following order of frequency:

1. *will* + Infinitive
2. subordinate future Simple Present
3. *be going to* + Infinitive

4. $\begin{cases} \text{futurate Present Progressive} \\ \text{futurate Simple Present} \end{cases}$

5. *will* + Progressive Infinitive.

Probably the most significant point to notice is the relative infrequency (except in dependent clauses) of the futurate Simple Present Tense as an expression of future time in independent clauses, in comparison with the corresponding construction in other prominent European languages. However, in dependent clauses (as discussed in §102), where the occurrence of the Simple Present is syntactically conditioned, the subordinate future use is much more frequent: in fact, frequent enough to make the Simple Present the second most common future construction after *will* + Infinitive. The *will* + Progressive 'future as a matter of course' construction is the least frequent of the five constructions, although becoming more common. The three constructions *be going to*, Present Progressive, and *will* + Progressive are more likely to occur in speech than in writing.

111

Another list, this time ordering the five main-clause constructions according to the degree of certainty ascribed to the future happening, may also help to give guidance on the choice between these six options:

(1)	futurate Simple Present	'future as fact' – the most certain option
(2)	*will* + Infinitive *will* + Progressive Infinitive subordinate future Present	'future as predicted to happen' – the most neutral way of referring to the future
(3)	*be going to* + Infinitive futurate Present Progressive	'future as outcome of present intention, cause, arrangement, etc.' – the least certain option

Even those marked 'least certain', however, convey at the least a strong expectation of the future event. There are other infinitive constructions with cognitive verbs such as *intend*, *hope* and *expect* which are less certain than those listed under (3) above: *I intend / hope / expect to arrive tomorrow*, etc.

112

Yet further ways of expressing future time include *am / is / are to, be about to +*

Infinitive, *be on the point of* + Ving, and *be destined to* + Infinitive. Of these *am / is / are to* and *be about to* are the only two common enough to be worth comment.

- AM / IS / ARE to consists of a Present Tense form of the verb *be* followed by the infinitive marker *to*. This verb construction is like a modal auxiliary in that it has no non-finite forms (*be to, being to, been to*). It is used in rather formal written style, and is used to refer to something that is going to happen in the future as a result of a plan or decree, normally by some authority other than the subject of the sentence:

    (a) The new play *is to* be staged at the Century Theatre next week.

    (b) All school-leavers *are to* have the chance to attend a university.

    Am / is / are to is thus similar in meaning to the present futurate. But unlike the futurate, it can occur without an adverbial (or some other indicator) referring to future time. It can also occur with 'state verbs' and lacks the sense of certainty that accompanies the futurate. As a result, example (a) above could not happily occur with the Simple Present (?*The new play is staged … next week*), and example (b) could not occur at all with future meaning with the Simple Present. *Am / is / are to* also has additional uses, more appropriate to consider later under the heading of modality (§149).

- BE ABOUT TO refers to the immediate future, and is close to the meaning of *be going to*, except that it suggests greater immediacy:

    I *am about to hypnotise* you. Don't be afraid! ('I am going to hypnotise you right now') | Keep your seat belts fastened, everyone – we'*re about to land*.

a. Was / were (the Past Tense of *am / is / are*) commonly expresses a 'plan' in the past: *The meeting* WAS TO *take place at Oxford the next day*. (There is no claim here that the meeting actually did take place.) In addition, *was / were to* has a factual future-in-the-past meaning 'was / were destined to': *Little did Jenny know that the peace of her life* was to *be shattered* (see §84). Again, these forms are formal, and would rarely be heard in spoken English.

b. Am / is / are to with the interpretation 'plan for the future' is characteristic of newspaper reports, and in headlines, the construction is abbreviated to *to* + Infinitive through the ellipsis of the form of the verb *to be*: UNESCO CHIEF TO VISIT AFRICA; MISS UNITED KINGDOM TO MARRY FILM BOSS.

c. There is a special use of *am / is / are to* with the verb *come* (or, in elevated literary style, with the verb *to be*): *The best is still to come. The best is yet to be*. Both of these could be paraphrased 'The best is still ahead of us, in the future'. They can be compared with a similar construction with *have*: *I have yet to see him smile*. However, in all three cases, the infinitive is a complement rather than part of the finite verb construction.

113

Two final comments. First, the ways of referring to the future dealt with in this chapter illustrate the point made in §5: that the Present Tense, from the semantic point of view as well as syntactically, would be best described as 'non-past'. We have seen that all these future-referring constructions are variations on the Present Tense, with the very minor exception of the future subordinate use of the Past (see §102*c*) – even including the 'non-past' modal auxiliaries *will* / *'ll* / *shall*, to which we turn again in the next chapter. In other words, the Present Tense, in a broad sense, encompasses both present and future domains of time. The future uses of the Simple Present and the Present Progressive are special cases of this.

The very final comment is this. While this chapter has naturally focused on differences of use between these constructions, it appropriately finishes by observing that these differences can be overemphasised. The following sentences, varying only in the choice of future construction and in their consequent connotations, are all entirely acceptable:

The parties will meet for final negotiations on July 25.

The parties are going to meet for final negotiations on July 25.

The parties are meeting for final negotiations on July 25.

The parties meet for final negotiations on July 25.

The parties will be meeting for final negotiations on July 25.

The Primary Modal Auxiliaries

114 six auxiliaries, Primary and (Secondary) Past. CAN: *115* A 'possibility', B 'ability', C 'permission'. MAY: *116* A 'possibility', B 'permission', C quasi-subjunctive uses. MUST: *117* A 'obligation', B 'requirement', C 'logical necessity'. HAVE TO: *118* A 'obligation', B 'requirement', C 'logical necessity'. RELATIONS BETWEEN CAN, MAY, MUST AND HAVE TO: *119* permission, possibility, obligation, requirement and necessity; *120* inverseness; *121 may* and *can* (= 'possibility'); *122 may* and *can* (= 'permission'); *123 must* and *have to* (= 'obligation' or 'requirement'); *124 must* and *have to* (= 'logical necessity'). ROOT AND EPISTEMIC MODALITY: *125*. WILL: *126* A 'prediction/predictability', B 'intention', C 'willingness', D 'insistence'. SHALL: *127* A 'prediction', B 'intention', C 'other volitional meanings', D 'rules and regulations'.

114

Many pages, chapters, books have been written about the modal auxiliary verbs in English. One thing that can make it difficult to account for the use of these words (called 'modal auxiliaries' or 'modals' for short) is that their meaning has both a logical (semantic) and a practical (pragmatic) element. We can talk about them in terms of such logical notions as 'permission' and 'necessity' but, this done, we still have to consider ways in which these notions become remoulded by the social and psychological influences of everyday communication between human beings: factors such as motivation, condescension, politeness, tact and irony. Condescension, for example, in the right context makes the *can* of *You can go now* (which in logical terms means no more than 'permission') into something approaching a command (see §115Cb).

These factors influence not only the modal auxiliaries, but also main verbs: we can compare the ways in which *Would you* MIND … ? and *Would you* LIKE … ? (as face-value questions about the listener's wishes) are typically used as polite commands.

This chapter looks at the meanings of the six verbs *can, may, must, have to,*

will and *shall,* together with the similarities and contrasts between them. These I will call the Present Tense or primary modal auxiliaries. It is important to remember two points about these meanings. First, some meanings are very much more common than others. In fact, for all modals except *must,* one meaning is decidedly the most common and most important meaning. These facts about frequency are indicated in the following sections. Second, the distinctions between the meanings are not so clear-cut as their separation in the lists suggests. It is often better to think of contrasts of meaning as scales of similarity and difference. For example, we can see the three meanings of *can* as forming a diagram as follows:
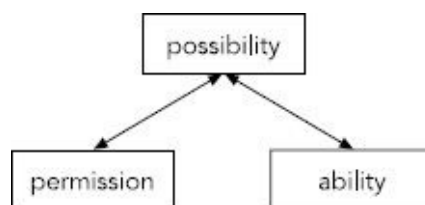
The reason for representing the difference between *can* = 'possibility' and *can* = 'ability' (for example) as a scale is that we often find it difficult to decide whether a given instance of *can* belongs to one category or the other. For example, *No one can see us here* could be paraphrased 'It isn't *possible* for anyone to see us here' or 'No one is *able to* see us here'.

In the next chapter, we will turn to the relation between Present (or primary) forms *may, can,* etc. and the Past (or secondary) forms *could, might, would, should.* It is as well to remember, however, that 'Present' and 'Past' are misleading titles for these forms. The 'Present' auxiliaries might more properly be called 'Non-past', as they can refer to future as well as to present time (see §139). The Past auxiliaries, on the other hand, have more important functions than that of simply indicating past time: some of these functions will be postponed until Chapters 7 and 8. Hence I prefer to call modals like *can* PRIMARY and modals like *could* SECONDARY rather than Present and Past.

The meanings of the modals as stated below apply primarily to positive statements; questions and negative forms are dealt with in §§129–38.

a. In grammatical terms, *have to* is not a modal auxiliary verb on the same footing as the others. It has, for example, an infinitive form, which means that it can combine with other modals (as in *We may* HAVE TO *go*) and can combine with *will* to express future time: *We'll* HAVE TO *go.* In terms of meaning, however, it is closely linked to *can, may* and *must.*

b. The modal auxiliaries themselves vary a great deal in terms of frequency. They divide conveniently into three classes:

VERY FREQUENT: *will* (including *'ll*), *would, can, could*

<pre>
QUITE FREQUENT: must, should, may, might, have to
INFREQUENT: shall, ought (to), need
</pre>

This list includes the 'marginal modal' verbs *need* and *ought* (*to*), which are less important than the other modals, but will also need some discussion in this and the following chapters. (*Need* is infrequent as an auxiliary, but not as a main verb – see §§133, 147.)

Can

115

The meanings of *can* are:

115 A. POSSIBILITY (very common)

Even expert drivers *can* make mistakes (= 'It is possible for even expert drivers to make mistakes'). | I don't understand how he *can* be so stupid. | If it rains, we *can* hold the meeting indoors (= '… it will be possible for us to …').

This sense of *can* is often found in the negative with *cannot* or *can't* (see §§136–8): *She can't be working at this hour!* ('It is not possible, i.e. impossible, …'). Sometimes *can* (= 'possibility') has a habitual meaning which can be paraphrased by the use of the adverb *sometimes*:

Lightning *can* be very dangerous = Lightning is sometimes very dangerous.

a. Colloquially, *can* (= 'possibility') is very often a proposal for future action: *We can see about that tomorrow*. In fact with second- and third-person subjects, *can* expresses a familiar though tactful imperative – the type of imperative that might be used by the captain of a sports team to the team members, or by the producer of a play to its cast: *Mike and Willy, you can be standing over there; and Janet can enter from behind that curtain*. It is as though the speaker does not like to exert authority openly, so, counting on co-operation from Mike and Willy, he/she merely suggests that a certain plan of action is POSSIBLE. This is a democratic imperative, to be used in addressing a person regarded as one's equal. This *can* occasionally occurs with the Progressive Aspect (*you can be standing* …), which is a sign that it belongs to the 'possibility' rather than to the 'permission' sense (see §143). An equivalent usage with a first-person subject can function as an offer: *I can give you a hand for a few minutes, if you need help*.

b. In questions such as *Can you come inside*? or more indirect equivalents such as *I wonder if you can help me? can* (= 'possibility') takes on the force of a (rather polite) request. Note that the adverb *possibly* can intensify such a request: *Can you possibly lend me an umbrella*?

115 B. ABILITY (common)

Paula *can't* sing, but she *can* play the guitar (= 'knows how to …'). | You *can* work harder than this (= 'are capable of …'). | '*Can* you read and write?' 'Of course I *can*.'

Can in this sense is more or less synonymous with *be capable of*. When it refers to an acquired ability (as in *Can you speak Greek*?), *can* is also more or less equivalent to *know how to*.

a. With verbs of 'inert perception' and 'inert cognition' (§§37E, 37F) there is little difference between BEING ABLE TO DO something and ACTUALLY DOING it, so *can* tends to lose its distinctive modal meaning. *I can remember* scarcely differs from *I remember* as a means of referring to a state of recall. Similarly, there is little difference between *I can't understand it* and *I don't understand it*. With 'verbs of inert perception', furthermore, *can* not only loses its distinctive modal value, but has the additional special function of denoting a state rather than an event. As the Simple Present with these verbs has only an 'instantaneous' event meaning (see §37E), the main difference between *I can hear* and *I hear*, *I can see* and *I see*, etc. (referring to visual or auditory perception) is one of 'perception as a state' versus 'perception as a (momentary) event'.

b. There is no clear-cut distinction between *can* (= 'ability') and *can* (= 'possibility') as discussed in §115A above. The two meanings are especially close because 'ability' implies 'possibility' – that is, if someone has the ability to do X, then X is possible. However, as *can* (= 'ability') and *can* (= 'permission') require a human or at least animate subject, the 'possibility' sense is the only one available when the subject is inanimate, as in *Appearances can be deceptive*. Another distinguishing mark of the 'possibility' meaning is its likelihood in passive clauses: *This game can be played by young children* means 'It is possible for this game …', but the active sentence *(Even) young children can play this game* is more likely to be interpreted in the 'ability' sense.

c. The common verbal construction *be able to* is not always associated with the 'ability' meaning. Like *can*, it can be used to express possibility and even permission: *When the children are grown up, you will be able to live more cheaply*. The most appropriate paraphrase for this remark is '… it will be possible for you to live …'. As this example shows, *be able to* has an advantage over *can*, in that we can use it as an infinitive after a modal auxiliary, or as a participle, e.g. *The British have never been able to understand the Americans' devotion to baseball*.

115 C. PERMISSION (less common)

> You *can* stay here as long as you like (= 'You're allowed to …'). | Residents *can* use the car park without a permit. | '*Can* I see the letter you wrote?' 'Sure, you *can* keep it.'

Linguistic law-makers of the past have considered *may* to be the 'correct' auxiliary of permission, and have condemned the use of *can*. Generations of English-speaking schoolchildren have been reprimanded for saying *Can I … ?* instead of *May I … ?* Yet in fact, *can* is much more widely used as an auxiliary of permission than *may*. In asking and giving permission, *can* and *may* are almost interchangeable, except that *may* is more formal, and is sometimes felt to be more polite.

a. One place where *can* cannot replace *may* (= 'permission') is in the fixed phrase *if I may*, used as a polite formula: *I'll leave my car in the garage, if I may*.

b. The meaning of 'permission' is strengthened to something like 'strong recommendation' in more or less joking or offensive remarks such as:

> You *can* forget about your holiday. | If he doesn't like it he can lump it. | This chicken is half-

cooked. Take it back to the cook and tell him where he *can* put it.

A possible explanation for the impolite tone of *can* here lies in a touch of irony: the speaker sarcastically offers someone the choice of doing something that cannot be avoided, or something no one would choose to do anyway.

May

116

Although *may* is one of the middle-frequency modals, its use is declining in present-day English. The only meaning of *may* which is still flourishing is the first sense of 'possibility'. The uses of *may* are:

116 A. POSSIBILITY (common)

> Careful, that gun *may* be loaded. (= 'It is possible that it is loaded.') | You *may* lose your way if you don't take a map. | Don't wait for me – I *may* be a few minutes late.

This use of *may* is common in statements, but does not occur in questions. *May* in this sense, as well as in the 'permission' sense below, usually indicates a future event when it combines with an 'event verb': *may lose, may go, may become*, etc. (see §139).

   May in the sense of 'possibility' can be replaced by *might* with little or no difference of meaning – see §183. In fact, spoken AmE shows a preference for *might* in the sense of possibility over *may*. For example, *might* could easily be substituted for *may* in the three examples above: *That gun* MIGHT *be loaded. You* MIGHT *lose your way. I* MIGHT *be a few minutes late.*

a. There is a concessive use of *may* (= 'possibility') in remarks like: *The buildings may be old, but academically it's an excellent school* (i.e. 'I admit that the buildings are old, but …').

b. There is generally a difference between *can* and *may* in the sense of 'possibility'. Notice, for example, that in *We may see you tomorrow, can* could not replace *may* without a considerable change in meaning. There is, however, a rather formal use of *may* where the meaning of 'possibility' is the same as for *can*. Thus in *Transitive verbs in English may be either active or passive, can* could be substituted for *may* with no change of meaning. This use of *may* is typically found in formal contexts such as in academic writing. This difference between the 'possibility' senses of *can* and *may* is discussed in §121.

116 B. PERMISSION (less frequent)

> *May* I offer you a drink? | If you wish to consult another doctor, you *may* do so. | Visitors *may* park their vehicles in the main square.

May characteristically signals permission given by the speaker or writer, or (in

questions) by the hearer. *May* (= 'permission') is traditionally considered more polite and 'correct' than *can,* but is now increasingly restricted to formal contexts where writers (or speakers) are on their best linguistic behaviour. A guidebook might say *Visitors may ascend the tower for £2,* but *can* would be more natural in speech: *You can go up the tower for £2.* Especially in AmE and in spoken English, *may* (= 'permission') is losing ground to the more popular form *can.* In part this may be because *may* suggests a difference of power between the giver and the receiver of permission – for example, the power of a schoolteacher over children in class.

a. In *if*-clauses, as in questions (see §129), *may* typically indicates not permission given by the speaker, but permission to be given by the hearer. Thus approximately, *May I join you*? means 'Will you allow me to join you?' and *I'll pay you tomorrow, if I may* means '… if you will allow me'.

b. The 'permission' and 'possibility' meanings of *may* are close enough for the distinction to be blurred in some cases. We should not conclude from this, however, that the 'permission' / 'possibility' distinction is unreal. There are important grammatical differences between the two senses of *may.* Only the 'permission' sense, for example, is found in questions (see §129), and the negation of the 'possibility' sense (= 'It is possible that … not …') is different in kind from the negation of the 'permission' sense ('You are not permitted to …') (see §§137–8).

c. Writers of academic literature are fond of impersonal phrases such as *It may be noted … We may now consider . …* It is particularly difficult to say whether 'be permissible' or 'be possible' is intended here. These are rather empty formulae soliciting and focusing the reader's attention.

116 C. QUASI-SUBJUNCTIVE USES (becoming even rarer than B)

Under the heading quasi-subjunctive I am grouping three rare uses of *may* which appear as alternatives to old-fashioned subjunctive forms (see §162). The first is the EXCLAMATORY WISH construction, where *may* is placed in front of the subject, and is separated from the Infinitive verb:

May he never set foot in this house again! | *May* God *grant* you happiness!

This use of *may* is very formal and is more or less limited to the expression of blessings and curses. It is marked by the inversion of the subject and the auxiliary verb. There are no interrogative, negative or Past Tense forms. The *may* construction here is an alternative to the equally rare FORMULAIC SUBJUNCTIVE, expressing an exclamatory wish in utterances like *God be praised, Heaven forbid, God grant you happiness.*

A second rare use of *may,* again resembling an old-fashioned use of the subjunctive, is found in concessive subordinate clauses, especially those beginning with *whatever, whenever, however,* etc.: *Our task is to deal with the customer's complaints, however unreasonable they* MAY *be.* (Another variant of

this kind of clause has a pre-posed complement: … *unreasonable though they* MAY *be*.) Like the present subjunctive in general, this is truth-neutral (see [§163](#)); i.e. the speaker expresses a relatively open mind as to whether any customer's complaints are unreasonable. It is synonymous with the archaic subjunctive *however unreasonable they be*, and is slightly more open-minded than the indicative form of *however unreasonable they are*, which would suggest that at least some customers' complaints *are* unreasonable. This 'quasi-subjunctive' use of *may* is similar to *may* (= 'possibility'), and could in fact be regarded as a variant of it.

Yet another, very rare, formal and old-fashioned use of *may* is found in dependent clauses of purpose beginning with *in order that* or *so that* (or occasionally *that* alone): *The object is to preserve these monuments, in order that the achievements of the past* MAY *not be forgotten*. Again, this has an affinity to the archaic subjunctive (… *that the achievements of the past* BE *not forgotten*), and also to the *may* of 'possibility'.

Must

117

Must, like *may*, is a middle-frequency modal which is suffering a decline in use in present-day English. Its 'obligation' meaning, in particular, is used less frequently than it used to be. The meanings are:

117 A. OBLIGATION [SPEAKER'S AUTHORITY] (quite common)

> You *must* be back by 10 o'clock ('You are obliged [by me] to …'). | Tell Betty she *must* be more careful with her money. | I *must* go now, or I'll be late.

The usual implication of *must* (= 'obligation') is that the speaker is the person who exerts authority over the person(s) mentioned in the clause. Consistent with this principle, *I must* and *we must* convey the idea of SELF-OBLIGATION: the speaker exerts power over himself/herself (and possibly others), e.g. through a sense of duty, through self-discipline, or merely through expediency. Especially in spoken AmE, the 'obligation' use of *must* is giving way to the more common 'obligation' use of *have to* (see [§118](#)).

a. Like *may* ([§116](#)B), *must* in questions and *if*-clauses involves the hearer's authority, instead of that of the speaker: *Must I answer those questions*? means 'Is that what *you* require?' Here we note a special sarcastic use of *must* with *you*: *Must you make that ghastly noise*? ('For heaven's sake stop it!') *If you must behave like a hoodlum, at least make sure the neighbours aren't watching*. Remembering that *must* here indicates obligation (i.e. self-obligation) by the hearer, we can see in this an element of irony, as if the speaker pays

lip-service to the idea that the hearer acts under internal compulsion rather than by free will. *If you must smoke, use an ash-tray* could be expanded 'If you are under compulsion to smoke (but of course you aren't – smoking is just a nasty habit you could break if you wanted to) …'. *Must* in such sentences could be replaced by *will* in the sense of 'insistence' (see §126D), and like *will* in that sense, is invariably stressed. But nowadays in AmE it is more likely to be replaced by *have to* (e.g. *Do you have to make that ghastly noise*?), which here appears to avoid a flavour of pomposity associated with *must* (see §118A*b*).

117 B. REQUIREMENT (quite common)

Often the meaning of *must* is more impersonal than in the examples above, and is better captured by the label of 'requirement':

> Old people *must* be treated with sympathy and understanding. | All students *must* register for the examinations by Monday 10th March. | As a crime has been committed, there *must* now be a trial. | The wine *must* be well chilled before it is served.

In paraphrasing these sentences, we might say 'It is essential that …' or 'It is necessary to …'. But it is difficult to draw a dividing line between this use and that of 'obligation': they are arguably two variants of the same meaning, which extends along a scale from personal authority at one end to general regulations, instructions, moral imperatives at the other.

a. A variant of the 'requirement' meaning of *must* is found in examples like these:

(1) *If we want to change society*, we must be prepared for struggle and sacrifice.
(2) *To compete with the world* our workforce must adapt to the twenty-first century.

The italicised *if*-clause in (1) or *to*-infinitive clause in (2) describes a desirable goal – and the main clause with *must* then specifies a pre-condition that has to be achieved. In brief, the pattern is: if goal X is to be reached, condition Y must be fulfilled. Again, a paraphrase 'It is necessary to …' can be used instead of *must* here, and this 'requirement' meaning can be alternatively labelled 'practical necessity', to distinguish it from the 'logical necessity' meaning in §117C below.

117 C. LOGICAL NECESSITY (common)

> He's not home yet – he *must* be working late at the office (… 'That is necessarily the case – no other explanation is possible'). | Her head is hot and clammy: she *must* have a temperature. | There *must* be some mistake. | You *must* have left your handbag in the theatre.

Must is used here of knowledge arrived at by inference or reasoning rather than by direct experience. For each example we could add the comment 'Given the evidence, there can be no other conclusion'. In each case, too, a chain of logical thinking can be imagined. For *I must be dreaming*, the stream of thought could run something like this: 'Here I am watching a fight between a lion and a unicorn; but unicorns do not exist; therefore, the unicorn I see cannot be real;

therefore, I cannot really be watching it; therefore I MUST be dreaming'.

This use of *must* normally has no negative or question form; but see §137*b*.

a. There is an understandable feeling that knowledge acquired indirectly, by inference, is less certain than knowledge derived from direct experience. Hence 'logical necessity' can easily be weakened to 'reasonable assumption'. This weakening is evident in remarks like *You must be Mr Jones* (i.e. 'I assume / take it that you are Mr Jones'). There is a further weakening in estimations like *You must be taller than Sue; His mother must be well over eighty*: these express no more than an informed guess.

Have to

118

The meanings of *have to* correspond closely to those of *must*.

118 A. OBLIGATION (common)

> You *have* to be back by 10 o'clock ('It is obligatory …'). | She'll *have* to sleep in the kitchen. | I *have* to take five of these pills every day.

The meaning of *have to* differs from sense a of *must* above in that the authority or influence of the speaker is not involved. *Have to* expresses obligation or requirement without specifying the person exercising power or influence. The constraining power may be some authority figure such as a doctor or an employer, the government, or simply the power of 'circumstances'.

a. By an evasive strategy of politeness, however, *have to* can indirectly imply the speaker's involvement: *Someone will have to do the shopping* (e.g. spoken by one spouse to the other) can be taken to imply 'I want *you* to do it'.

b. Furthermore, there is an ironic use of *have to* in conversation, whereby someone's wilful behaviour is disguised as something they can't avoid: *I don't know why that guy has to try out his new car on a Sunday afternoon. My ex-husband just had to buy the most expensive one.* (Compare the similar use of *must* in §117A*a*.)

118 B. REQUIREMENT (common)

As with *must*, there is the closely related meaning of *have to* in which the required course of action is general or public, and for which a paraphrase with 'it is essential to …' or 'it is necessary to …' is more appropriate:

> The Department of Education will *have* to rethink its policy (= 'The Department of Education will be compelled to rethink its policy'). | The garden *has* to be watered every day. | Pensioners *have* to be careful with their money.

Also, as with *must*, *have to* in this sense can express a 'practical necessity',

where to reach some goal (expressed by an *if*-clause, *to*-Infinitive, or some other adverbial), some kind of action is a necessary or required condition: TO KEEP WARM, *elk have to eat and move around. She had to wait five minutes* BEFORE BEING SERVED. Sometimes, the goal is obvious, and does not need to be stated: *Mrs Harris has to please her customers.* The missing implied goal here is: 'if her business is to succeed'. The examples above can also be interpreted in terms of such an implicit goal: e.g. *The garden has to be watered every day* IF THE PLANTS ARE TO FLOURISH. There is no absolute boundary between sense B and sense A.

118 C. LOGICAL NECESSITY (chiefly colloquial AmE)

There *has* to be some reason for his absurd behaviour ('That is necessarily the case – no other explanation is possible'). | You *have* to be joking. | Everybody *has* to die sometime, pal [a jokingly obvious statement].

Although gaining in popularity, *have to* in the 'logical necessity' sense is less usual than *must*, especially in BrE – where it is still felt to be an Americanism. (The alternative construction (*have*) *got to*, especially in its reduced form *gotta*, is a likely substitute for *have to* ('logical necessity') in AmE: e.g. *You*('*ve*) *gotta be joking* – see §148.)

a. *Have to* has question and negative forms both with and without the auxiliary *do: Do you have to go now? Have you to go now*? The second of these, however, is now rare, and is confined to BrE.

b. The meanings of *have to* tend to merge, especially in scientific and mathematical writing, for the same reason as applies to the different meanings of *may* (§116B*c*). To take a linguistic example: *Every clause has to contain a finite verb* could be interpreted either 'Every clause is obliged/required (by the rules of the language) to contain a finite verb', or 'It is necessarily the case that every clause contains a finite verb'. In examples like this, the boundary between 'obligation', 'requirement' and 'logical necessity' is an indistinct one.

c. *Have got to* (often reduced in speech to *gotta*) is a verbal construction similar to *have to*, favoured in informal usage. (See §148 for examples and discussion.)

Relations between *can, may, must* and *have* to

119

What should be clear by now is that there are close relations of meaning between the four verbs *can, may, must* and *have to*. In fact, the relationships between all four can be summarised in the diagram:
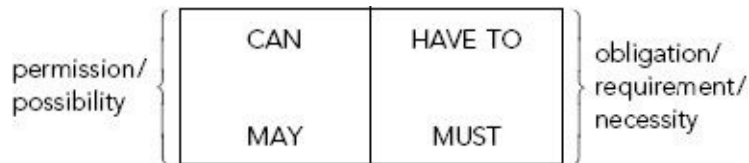
May and *can* share the same box because both express 'permission' and 'possibility'; *must* and *have (got) to* likewise both express 'obligation', 'requirement' and '(logical) necessity'. But we cannot consider any two verbs actually interchangeable: there are always some slight differences of meaning or effect, and these we now consider.

120

First, however, there is another question to be answered: 'What is the horizontal relation of meaning between the left-hand box and the right-hand box?' There is a special kind of meaning contrast between 'permission' and 'obligation', and between 'possibility' and 'necessity': this contrast may be termed INVERSENESS (the two senses may be imagined as opposite sides of the same coin). So:

'permission' is the inverse of 'obligation'

'possibility' is the inverse of 'necessity'

What is meant by 'inverse' is made clear by these equations:

1 Some of you *can* stay out late = Not all of you *have* to be in early.

2 Someone *has* to be telling lies = Not everyone *can* be telling the truth.

Pair 1 shows the connection between 'permission' and 'obligation', and pair 2 shows a similar connection between 'possibility' and '(logical) necessity'. Further, this interesting relationship of meaning is reversible: exchanging the positions of subject and modal in pair 1, we arrive at another pair of sentences with the same logical meaning:

Some of you *have* to be in early = Not all of you *can* stay out late.

A great deal more could be said about such relations of meaning. One puzzle in the diagram in §119, to which I will return in §125, is: Why are there just two terms ('permission' and 'possibility') on the left side of the diagram, but three terms ('obligation', 'requirement' and '(logical) necessity') on the right side? But let's now turn to differences of meaning between *may* and *can, must* and *have to*. The following is an overview of the differences (some of which have been mentioned in §§115–18 above).

121

MAY and *CAN* (= 'possibility') (see §§115A, 116A)

In general (but see Note *a* below), *may* represents 'factual possibility', and *can* represents 'theoretical possibility'. The difference is clarified by these sets of equivalent statements:

| (A) FACTUAL: | The road *may* be blocked = 'It is possible that the road is blocked' = 'Perhaps the road is blocked' = 'The road might be blocked'. |
| (B) THEORETICAL: | The road *can* be blocked = 'It is possible for the road to be blocked' = 'It is possible to block the road'. |

As we see, *may* is paraphrased by *It is possible* followed by a *that*-clause, but *can* is paraphrased by *It is possible* followed by a (*for* + Noun Phrase +) *to* + Infinitive construction.

   The second sentence describes a theoretically conceivable happening, whereas the first feels more immediate, because the actual likelihood of an event's taking place is being considered. The situations they conjure up are quite different:

(A) The road can be blocked by police ('and if we do this, we might intercept the criminals' – said by one detective to another).

(B) The road may be blocked by flood water ('that possibly explains why our guests haven't arrived' – dialogue between husband and wife expecting visitors).

'Factual possibility' is stronger than 'theoretical possibility':

   This illness *can* be fatal. | This illness *may* be fatal.

The second of these statements is likely to be far more worrying than the first. It is not hard to see why this is: CAN *be fatal* merely postulates a theoretical possibility; MAY *be fatal* envisages the event actually happening. If a doctor used the second statement in addressing a patient, the patient would have reason to be pessimistic.

a.   *Can* (= 'possibility') is associated with general statements. Contrast *A friend can betray you*, an observation about friends in general, with *A friend may betray you*, which is more likely to be a warning about one person (uttered, for example, by a fortune teller).

b.   It would be pleasant if the auxiliaries *can* and *may* corresponded exactly with the 'factual' and 'theoretical' types of possibility. But in formal English, *may* is sometimes used for theoretical, as well as for factual possibility. E.g.: *During the autumn, many rare birds may be observed on the rocky northern coast of the island.* A suitable paraphrase for this is: … *it is possible to observe* … ; or the original sentence with *can* replacing *may*: … *many rare birds can be observed* . … This type of 'theoretical *may*', unlike the usual *may* of factual possibility, is rather uncommon and is normally unstressed.

122

MAY and *CAN* (= 'permission') (see §§115C, 116B)

The normal auxiliary for 'permission' is *can*. *May* tends to be used in formal and polite contexts, especially in polite formulae such as *if I may*; *May I speak to …? How may I help you*? with a first-person subject.

123

MUST and *HAVE TO* (= 'obligation' or 'requirement') (see §§117A/B, 118A/B) *Must* (= 'obligation') is generally subjective, in that it refers to what the *speaker* thinks it important or essential to do. *Have to,* on the other hand, is more 'objective', i.e. the obligation or compulsion tends to come from a source outside the speaker. Contrast:

> You *must* save that money to buy a house (= 'I'm telling you').

> You *have* to save that money to buy a house (= 'This is a financial requirement').

In addition, since *have to* has past and non-finite forms, it can be used in variable tenses and aspects, and also after modal auxiliaries, including *will* in reference to the future:

> I'*ve had* to go to hospital every week for tests. | Families *are having to* hold down two – sometimes three – jobs to make ends meet. | You'll *have to* fill out this form to borrow the money.

124

MUST and *HAVE TO* (= 'logical necessity') (see §§117C, 118C)

Must is the normal verb to use for this meaning. *Have to* is much less common, and is particularly associated with AmE. But it is growing more common in BrE. There is a further difference, in that *have to* can give a slightly stronger meaning of necessity than *must*:

> Someone *must* be telling lies.

> Someone *has to* be telling lies.

The second of these has the uncompromising effect of:

> It's impossible for everyone to be telling the truth.

Since 'logical necessity' and 'possibility' are inverse concepts (see §119), *have to* and *must* can be paraphrased by a doubly negated use of *can*:

> These lines *have to* be by Shakespeare = These lines *can't* be by anyone *but* Shakespeare. [*but* = 'who is not', 'other than']

Root and epistemic modality

125

This section is an exception. The general policy of this book is to avoid technical terminology, and to use only terms that have a relatively transparent meaning in everyday English. The discussion of modality, however, can be full of technicalities, and terms such as 'deontic', 'dynamic' and 'epistemic' are commonplace in classifying the meanings of modal auxiliaries. Here I will make use of just two technical terms for modal meaning, ROOT MODALITY and EPISTEMIC MODALITY.

ROOT MODALITY is the ordinary, more basic type of modality denoting constraint and lack of constraint in situations (typically situations involving human behaviour) in our universe of experience: it includes 'permission', 'obligation', 'theoretical possibility' and 'requirement' as discussed in the preceding sections. EPISTEMIC MODALITY is more oriented towards logic, dealing with statements about the universe, and constraints of likelihood on their truth and falsehood. It includes 'practical possibility' (*may*) and 'logical necessity' (*must, have to*) in the preceding sections. The diagram in §119 can be refashioned as follows:
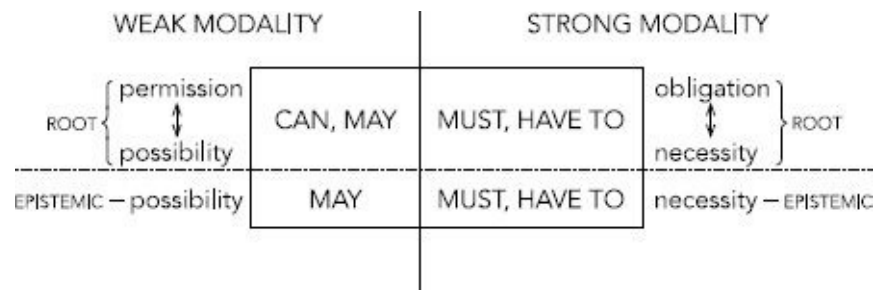
There was a lack of symmetry in the labelling of the diagram in §119: two labels appear on the left of the diagram ('permission' and 'possibility'), whereas three labels appear on the right ('obligation', 'requirement' and 'necessity'). This can be explained by the fact that the term 'possibility' on the left of the diagram should be subdivided into two categories, designated 'theoretical possibility' and 'factual possibility' in §120. These now enter into the following set of terminological equivalences:

'permission' = (ROOT) PERMISSION 'theoretical possibility' = (ROOT) POSSIBILITY	'obligation' = (ROOT) OBLIGATION 'requirement' = (ROOT) NECESSITY

'factual' possibility' = EPISTEMIC POSSIBILITY	'logical necessity' = EPISTEMIC NECESSITY

There is an INVERSE relation, as already described in §119, between a modal term on the left side of the diagram, and its corresponding modal term on the right. The terms in single quotes on the left of '=' are the terms I have chosen to be as reader-friendly as I can in this book. But the terms on the right are more technically correct, as they show equivalences and contrasts which would otherwise be obscured.

A good test of epistemic modality is a paraphrase in which a modal sentence about a statement is expanded as follows:

She may be hungry = It may be *that she is hungry* = It is possible *that she is hungry*.

She must be hungry = It must be *that she is hungry* = It is necessarily the case *that she is hungry*.

The statement that the modal sentence is about is the italicised part of the expanded paraphrases above. Notice that it shows up as an Indicative clause introduced by *that* – the hallmark of a proposition. In contrast, root modality is paraphrased by a non-indicative construction – either an Infinitive construction or a *that*-clause containing a Subjunctive (see §162):

Anyone can make mistakes = It is possible (for anyone) *to make mistakes*.
The treaty must be signed = It is necessary for the treaty *to be signed*.
                        = It is necessary to *sign the treaty*.
                        = It is necessary *that the treated be signed*.

In the table above, the distinction between root and epistemic modality enables us to see that there are two kinds of possibility and two kinds of necessity – and that possibility and necessity are inverse concepts which balance one another. Similarly, 'permission' and 'obligation' are inverse concepts (although there are no epistemic variants of these two meanings). What the table does not show is that the root distinction between permission and possibility or between obligation and necessity is not an absolute one – but a gradient or scale.

Will

126

In the last chapter (§§87–91), we looked at *will* and *shall* as auxiliaries of future time. Our task now is to look at the full range of the meanings of these modal

auxiliaries. *Will* has meanings of PREDICTION/PREDICTABILITY, INTENTION, WILLINGNESS and INSISTENCE.

126 A. PREDICTION/PREDICTABILITY (very common)

Usually *will* with this meaning makes reference to the future (see §§87–90), but there is also a kind of 'prediction' that refers to the present or past:

> By now they'*ll* be eating dinner [looking at one's watch]. | That'*ll* be the electrician – I'm expecting him to call about some rewiring [on hearing the doorbell ring]. | They'*ll* have arrived home by now. (Note the use of the Perfect here.)

It is only a small step from the 'future prediction' of sentences like *You will feel better after a good night's sleep* to the more general idea of prediction illustrated in the three sentences above. In *By now they'll be eating dinner*, the speaker makes a 'forecast about the present', based on previous experience, concerning an event not directly observable. In the same way, someone who says *That'll be the electrician* 'predicts' the identity of someone at that moment invisible.

To this extent, *will* (= 'prediction') belongs to contexts similar to those of *must* (= 'logical necessity'). In fact, *must* could replace *will* in all three examples above with little change of effect.

This 'prediction' meaning may be broadened still further to include general or habitual predictions: a use for which the label 'predictability' is more appropriate. Examples are common in scientific or quasi-scientific statements such as *If litmus paper is dipped in acid, it will turn red*. The meaning of such conditional sentences is roughly: 'Whenever *x* happens, it is predictable that *y* happens'.

In many general statements, including scientific and proverbial statements, habitual 'predictability' comes to have the force of 'typical or characteristic behaviour'. Thus:

> A lion *will* attack a human being only when hungry (= 'It is predictable or characteristic of lions that they attack …'). | Truth *will* out (a proverb meaning 'Truth has a habit of making itself known').

'Predictable or characteristic behaviour' is also the meaning of such descriptions of human habit as:

> She'*ll* go all day without eating. | At weekends, he'*ll* be in the club by 7 o'clock, and there he'*ll* stay till they close. | That parrot *will* chatter away for hours if you give him a chance.

Will (= 'predictability') is normally without stress, and can be contracted to *'ll*.

a. The *will* of predictability is found in a number of traditional proverbs: *Accidents will happen. Boys will be boys. When the cat's away the mice will play. A drowning man will clutch at straws. Faith will move mountains. Love will find a way*. These have a rather dated feel – but one proverb with *will*, dignified by the name of 'Murphy's Law', remains popular: *If anything can go wrong, it will*.

b. The choice of adverbial is often crucial for distinguishing 'present prediction' from the more common 'future prediction'. Compare: *The plane will be ready for its test flight by now* with: *The plane will be ready for its test flight tomorrow*.

c. The use of *will* in general scientific statements is comparable with the Simple Present in its 'event' and 'habitual' senses (see §§9, 13): *Oil floats on water* and *Oil will float on water* are more or less equivalent statements. There are, however, no 'predictability' statements equivalent to habitual statements like *Deciduous trees lose their leaves in autumn*; *The Kyoto train leaves at 4.20 daily*. This must be because the recurrent events described in such sentences are thought to be so certain or predetermined that to talk in terms of their predictability is to introduce an inappropriate element of doubt. It would be a poor train service in which departure times were 'typical' only. The notion of 'prediction' (see §87) admits a possibility of non-occurrence, and the same seems to apply even more strongly to the related notion of 'predictability'.

d. There is a type of sentence where *will* indicates 'disposition': *The auditorium will seat 500* (= 'One can seat 500 people in the auditorium'); *This watch won't work* (= 'I can't make this watch work'); *Will that window open*? (= 'Can one open that window?'). As the parentheses show, this use of *will* is closely connected with the 'possibility' sense of *can*. It can, however, be treated as a type of 'predictability' meaning, in which a conditional clause is understood: *The auditorium will seat 500* (if required), etc.

126 B. INTENTION ('INTERMEDIATE VOLITION') (common)

This meaning and the following two meanings are all concerned with 'volition', which often combines with *will*'s future implication of 'prediction'.

> I'*ll* write tomorrow. | You *won't* get any help from us. | She says she'*ll* be back next week. | The board members have assured us that they *will* give the matter their full consideration.

Occurring mainly with first-person subjects (except in indirect speech), *will* in this sense can convey a promise, a threat, an offer or a shared decision. The volitional element is reinforced by a feeling that in the act of speaking, a decision is made, and that the fulfilment of the intention is guaranteed. There is thus a superimposition of predictive and volitional meanings, which could justify the inclusion of this use in Chapter 4 as a 'volitionally coloured future'. This *will* is frequently contracted to '*ll*.

a. Note that there is a slight difference between *will* and *be going to* (see §93) in their expression of a future intention: *I'll give you a hand* expresses the speaker's present resolve to do something in the (near) future; *I'm going to give you a hand* reports what the speaker may have already decided to do. In this sense, *will* is more 'performative' whereas *be going to* is more 'premeditative'.

126 C. WILLINGNESS ('WEAK VOLITION') (quite common)

> What *will* you pay me if I mend this radio? | Jim'*ll* help you – he's always ready to oblige a friend. | Give it to the dog – she'*ll* eat anything. | I'*ll* lend you some money, if you like.

Although 'intention' is the most common type of volition, we can also distinguish a weaker and a stronger version of volitional *will*. Weak-volitional *will* is normally unstressed, and is frequently reduced to *'ll*. This meaning is particularly common in second-person requests: *Will you guys play a game with me*?

a. Will you … ? in requests, although in logical terms a question about the listener's willingness, is in effect a politer substitute for an imperative. But there are even politer ways of making requests, and so *Will you*? can sound peremptory unless toned down by further markers of politeness, including the use of the hypothetical Past Tense (see §176): *Will you please … ? Won't you … ? Would you …* ? When spoken with falling intonation, *will you* … can sound positively impolite: *Will you be quiet!*

126 D. INSISTENCE ('STRONG VOLITION') (rare)

He '*will* go swimming in dangerous waters ('He insists on going swimming …'). | Janet, why '*will* you keep making that awful noise? | 'I'm soaked to the skin.' 'Well, if you '*will* go out without an umbrella, what can you expect?'

This variant meaning is uncommon, and is virtually unused in AmE; it carries strong emotional overtones. With second- and third-person subjects, the feeling of annoyance at someone else's obstinacy is uppermost. With a first-person subject, the speaker makes his/her own uncompromising determination felt, with a force the verbal equivalent of banging one's fist on the table: *I bwill go to the dance!* ('you can't stop me!') *I bwon't have you telling lies!* ('it's intolerable').

Strong-volitional *will* is always stressed, and cannot be contracted to *'ll*.

a. There is a difference between the *will* of insistence above and a quasi-imperative *will* found with second- and third-person subjects: *You will do as I say. The Duty Officer will report for duty at 0700 hours.* This *will* is a stronger equivalent of *must,* and expresses the will of the originator of the message, rather than of the subject. It also differs from the *will* of insistence in that it is not strongly stressed. The quasi-imperative *will* seems to be a special use of the future *will* of 'prediction', the implication being that the speaker or writer has so much authority over the addressee that failure to perform the predicted action is out of the question. Hence it has military and despotic associations. (Compare *shall*, §127D below.)

Shall

127

The use of *shall* is declining, especially in AmE. In fact, *shall* occurs nowadays only in a few rather restricted linguistic contexts. In virtually all these contexts, *shall* could be replaced by a different modal or other verbal construction.

127 A. PREDICTION (with first-person subjects)

In statements with *I* or *we* as subject, *shall* is a more formal equivalent of *will* (see §§87–90):

> Unless business improves, we *shall* have no alternative but to close the factory.

127 B. INTENTION ('INTERMEDIATE VOLITION') (with first-person subjects)

> I *shall* inform you if the situation changes. | We *shall* succeed where others have failed. | We *shall* overcome [the words of a campaigning song].

Again, this is more formal than the equivalent use of *will* (§126B). *Shall*, rather than *will*, is traditionally considered the 'correct' form here, as in §127A above.

127 C. OTHER VOLITIONAL MEANINGS (with second- or third-person subjects in statements, or with first-person subjects in questions)

There is a (now) rare volitional use of *you shall, he shall*, etc. in granting favours:

> You *shall* stay with us as long as you like. | Good dog, you *shall* have a bone when we get home. | Very well, Minister, it *shall* be done [spoken by a senior civil servant in mock-obedience to a government minister in the BBC satire *Yes, Minister*].

The meaning is 'I am willing …' and the implication is that the speaker is YIELDING TO THE WISHES of another. For this reason, this use often has a connotation of condescension, and is used in reference to pets or young children. Often (as in the first two examples above) this use of *shall* can be replaced by *can*. Another, very rare and old-fashioned, use of *shall* is to express strong volition, especially in making threats: e.g. *No one shall escape!*

   Although rare in statements, the volitional use of *shall* (*Shall I? Shall we*?) is quite common in questions in BrE (see §130).

127 D. RULES AND REGULATIONS (with second-person or third-person subjects)

> A player who bids incorrectly *shall* forfeit fifty points [rules of a card game]. | The hood *shall* be of scarlet cloth, with a silk lining of the colour of the faculty [rules for academic dress].

This usage is found only in legal or quasi-legal documents. Here *shall* could be replaced by *must* (= 'obligation'), or by the 'quasi-imperative' *will* (§126D*a*).

Modality Continued

128 introduction. MODAL AUXILIARIES IN QUESTIONS AND *IF*-CLAUSES: *129 may* and *must*; *130 shall*; *131 if*-clauses; *132 may* ('possibility'); *133 need* as an auxiliary; *134 must, need,* and *do … have to*; *135* complaining questions. THE MODAL AUXILIARIES AND NEGATION: *136–7* auxiliary and main verb negation; *138* meaning similarities and differences associated with negation. MODAL AUXILIARIES IN RELATION TO TENSE AND ASPECT: *139* future time; *140* past time; *141* meanings not available with the Past Tense; *142* Perfect Aspect; *143* Perfect and Progressive Aspects. *SHOULD* AND *OUGHT TO* AS WEAKER EQUIVALENTS OF *MUST*: *144*; *145 should*; *146 ought to.* SOME SEMI-MODALS OF 'CONSTRAINT': *147 need to*; *148* (*have*) *got to*; *149 am / is / are to*; *150* (*had*) *better*. OTHER SEMI-MODALS: *151 be bound to, be supposed to, may as well,* etc.

128

This chapter continues the discussion of modal auxiliaries begun in Chapter 5. The major topics we explore in this chapter are:

- How modals are used in questions and *if*-clauses
- How modals are combined with negation by *not* or *n't*
- How modals behave in relation to tense and aspect
- The so-called 'semi-modals': a range of verbal constructions (e.g. *need to, had better*) related in meaning and behaviour to the primary modals, but also sharing to varying extents the characteristics of main verbs.

In this chapter the discussion begins again with the primary modals (*can, may*, etc.), but the second half of the chapter gives attention to the secondary or Past Tense modals (*could, might*, etc.).

Modal auxiliaries in questions and if-clauses

129

The use of modal auxiliary verbs in questions is somewhat different from their use in statements.

In §§122 and 123, we noted a 'subjective' tendency in the use of *may* (= 'permission') and *must* (= 'obligation'). This means that in statements, these modals are often used for *giving permission* and *imposing obligation,* with the speaker acting as the 'authority figure':

> You may Verb = 'You are permitted (by me) to Verb'.
>
> You must Verb = 'You are obliged (by me) to Verb'.

But in questions, the role is reversed, and typically the 'authority figure' is the hearer:

> May I Verb? = 'Do you permit me to Verb?'
>
> Must I Verb? = 'Do you oblige me to Verb?'

In other words, when we ask questions, we anticipate the attitude of the person being asked, and use the form appropriate for the reply:

> May I ask you a few questions? [Yes, you may.]
>
> Must I answer these questions? [Yes, (I'm afraid) you must.]

However, remember *must* is rare in questions (see §§134, 135): in practice it is more common to use *Do I have to…*. Similarly, *May I…* is less common than *Can I…*.

130

Such a change of roles is also found in questions with *shall*:

> *Shall* I carry your suitcase? ('Do you want me to carry your suitcase?') |
>
> *Shall* we have dinner? ('Do you agree with my intention to have dinner?')

Questions beginning *Shall I* or *Shall we,* which are a way of offering help, an invitation or a suggestion to another person, obviously consult THE WISH OF THE HEARER, not that of the speaker. In this they again reverse the role of volitional *shall* in statements (§§127B, 127C). However, volitional *shall* is more common in questions than in statements, because it is in keeping with good manners. It is more polite to consult the wishes of the listener than to assert one's own wishes as speaker. With first-person subjects, then, *shall* has survived in questions more robustly than it has in statements.

a. Even this use of *shall,* however, can be avoided by other constructions, e.g. *Do you want* (*me*) *to* … ? or *Would you like* (*me*) *to* … ?

b. In questions with *shall we? shall* generally includes reference to the listener (= 'you and I / we'). *Shall we*? is therefore used in suggestions about shared behaviour. This accounts for the use of *shall we*? as a tag

question (in BrE) after imperatives beginning *Let's* … : *Let's have an ice-cream, shall we*? (In AmE *shall we*? is sometimes heard as a complete utterance equivalent to *Shall we go*?)

131

If-clauses are in many ways like questions (e.g. in co-occurring with *any, anyone, ever*, etc. rather than with *some, someone, sometimes*), so it is not strange to find modal auxiliary usage in *if*-clauses imitating the rules for questions rather than for statements. An example from BrE is the frequently heard tag of politeness *if I may* (e.g. *I'll have another biscuit, if I may*), which obviously means 'if you will permit me' rather than 'if I will permit myself'. Similarly *if you must go* implies self-compulsion by the listener; *Go skating if you must, but make sure you wrap up nice and warm*.

132

May in its 'possibility' sense does not occur at all in questions, where its function is usurped by *can* or *could*. Thus the statement *They may be asleep* ('It is possible that they are asleep') has no corresponding question **May they be asleep*? Instead, *can* or (more likely) *could* is used: *Can* / *Could they be asleep*? = 'Is it (just) possible that they are asleep?' Factual possibility and theoretical possibility therefore become indistinguishable in questions, as they do also in negative sentences.

133

Need as an auxiliary verb (i.e. *need* followed by the main verb without *to*) is now rare, especially in AmE. Where it occurs, it can be considered the negative and interrogative counterpart of *must*. In questions, however, the semantic distinctions between *must* and *have to* (§§123–4) seem to fade away, so that *do … have to* is a more common equivalent of *need*.

Need you be so strict?	[Yes, I'm afraid I must.] (rare)
Do you have to be so strict?	[Yes, I'm afraid I do.]

Notice that *need* does not normally occur in positive statements, so a reply *? *Yes, I need* is impossible, except as a joke.

a. But the auxiliary *need* does occur in some non-question constructions which resemble questions in other ways: e.g. in *if*-clauses: *I doubt if we need buy any extra food*.

b. This auxiliary *need* should be carefully distinguished from the full verb *need* occurring in the semi-modal construction *need + to* + Infinitive (see §147).

c. A distinction is sometimes felt between *do … have to*, which can convey a habitual meaning, and *have …*

got to (see §148), which refers more typically to a single present or future occasion. For example: *Do you have to be at work by 8 o'clock*? can mean 'Is that what you have to do every day?' but *Have you got to be at work by 8 o'clock*? means 'Is that what you have to do this morning?'

134

Must occurs alongside *need* and *do … have to* in questions, but only rarely and in rather special circumstances, i.e.:

1   to express an obligation or requirement imposed by the listener (see §129): *Why must you leave so early*?

2   in questions with what we may call 'positive orientation': i.e. when the question form presupposes some positive assertion mentioned or suggested by the preceding conversation:

> Rob: Well, the purse isn't here, so we'd better look for it at the train station.
>
> Sue: (Why) *must* it be at the station? I could have dropped it anywhere, you know.

The purpose of Sue's question is to get Rob to reconsider his assumption 'the purse must be at the station'. This use of *must* is often preceded by *why: But why must doctors be so much better treated than nurses*?

135

Must, need and *do… have to* are all used in a complaining type of question (usually with a second-person subject) already mentioned in §117A*a*:

> Need you be so rude? | Do we have to have rice pudding every day? | Must you drop ash all over my carpet?

Although the logical meaning of these verbs is 'Is it obligatory / necessary … ?' the force of the question is probably ironic, communicating at two levels: 'Is it a fact that you can't help this annoying behaviour? (But, of course, I know very well that you *could* help it if you wanted to!)'

a. Again, we can compare a similar ironic usage in *if*-clauses: *If you must smoke* … (see §131).

b. Complaining questions beginning *Must you* … are avoided in AmE, probably because of the superior, mocking tone they convey.

The modal auxiliaries and negation

136

If we look at the following pairs of sentences, we see that *not* can have two very

different effects, according to which auxiliary verb it is combined with:

(a) He can't be serious   ('It is *not* possible [that he is serious]').
(b) He may not be serious   ('It is possible [that he is *not* serious]').
(c) You don't have to go yet   ('You are *not* required [to go] yet').
(d) You must not go yet   ('You are required [*not* to go yet]').

The meaning of each sentence containing a modal can, as we see here, be broken down into the modal statement itself (the statement of possibility, necessity, etc.) and the statement on which the modal statement comments (that within square brackets above). Sometimes the insertion of *not* (or *n't*) after the modal auxiliary negates the modal statement – in examples (a) and (c) above, *not* falls outside the square brackets. In other cases (examples (b) and (d)), the main verb statement is negated. The first type of negation may be called AUXILIARY NEGATION, the second type MAIN VERB NEGATION.

a. An occasional case of 'double negation' is observed with modal auxiliaries, especially with *can: I can't not tell her about it*. In such cases, auxiliary negation and main verb negation are combined in the same clause. The meaning is 'It is *not* possible for me *not* to tell her about it'. (Because of inverseness – see §120 – this 'double negative' is an emphatic equivalent to *I have to tell her about it*.)

137

The following are examples of AUXILIARY NEGATION (where allowable, I will cite the colloquial contracted forms *can't, needn't,* etc. rather than the full forms):

May not (= 'permission'):   You may not go until you've finished your work
                               ('I do not permit you [to go]').
Cannot, can't (all senses):   You can't smoke in here
                               ('You are not permitted [to smoke in here]').
                               You can't be serious
                               ('It is not possible [that you are serious]').
                               He can't drive a car
                               ('He is not able [to drive a car]').
Don't / doesn't have to (all senses):
You don't have to pay that fine
                               ('You're not obliged [to pay that fine]').
It doesn't always have to be my fault
                               ('It is not necessarily the case [that it is always my fault]')
                               (= 'It isn't necessarily [always my fault]').
Need not, needn't: You needn't pay that fine.
                               It needn't always be my fault.

(*Need not / needn't* is equivalent in meaning to *Don't / doesn't have to,* but is now rare, especially in AmE.)

Examples of MAIN VERB NEGATION **are**:

May not (= 'possibility'):   They may not come if it's wet
                                 ('It is possible [that they won't come if it's wet]').
Must not, mustn't (in all senses):
                                 You mustn't keep us all waiting
                                 ('It is essential [that you do not keep us all waiting]').
                                 She must not be on campus today
                                 ('It's necessarily the case [that she's not on campus today]).
Will not, won't (in all senses):
                                 Don't worry – I won't interfere
                                 ('I'm willing [not to interfere]').
                                 He won't do what he's told
                                 ('He insists on [not doing what he's told]' i.e. 'He refuses').
                                 They won't have received your letter yet
                                 ('It is predictable [that they haven't received your letter yet]').

Won't in the strong-volitional sense of 'refusal' is more common than the rare corresponding sense of *will* (= 'insistence').

There is no logical difference between auxiliary and main verb negation with *will* (= 'intention'): *I won't go if it rains* means indifferently 'I do not intend to go' or 'I intend not to go' (cf. §138*a* below).

a. When the meaning of *may not* is 'permission', the stress normally falls on *not*; when the meaning is 'possibility', the stress normally falls on *may*. Thus: *You may ˈnot disturb us* (= 'You are not permitted to disturb us') contrasts with *You ˈmay not disturb us* (= 'It is possible that you will not disturb us').

b. Must not (= 'logical necessity') has a dubious status in BrE, but seems to be gaining ground, particularly in AmE. Notice the logical equivalence of *must not* in this sense and *can't* (= 'impossibility'): *She must not be on campus today* is virtually equivalent to *She can't be on campus today*. Less problematic in BrE is the use of the contracted form *mustn't* in tag questions following *must* in the 'logical necessity' sense: *They must have hundreds of people looking for jobs*, MUSTN'T THEY?

c. Shall not (*shan't*), like *will not* (*won't*), follows the pattern of main verb negation. But the negative of *shall* is too rare to be illustrated, except in a footnote: *We shall not be moved by these entreaties. Don't worry – you shan't lose your reward. You shan't escape my revenge!* The contraction *shan't* is rare in BrE, and even rarer in AmE.

138

A number of differences between positive and negative interpretations of the modals need to be noted.

Because *can* and *may, have got to* and *must* are not generally comparable in their negative and question forms, the 'factual'/'theoretical' contrast we have noted in positive statements is not discernible in negative statements or questions. On the other hand, for permission and obligation, *may not* and *mustn't*

often keep the implication of the speaker's authority in contrast to *cannot* and *don't have to. You may not* typically means 'I do not allow you …' and *You mustn't* 'I forbid you …'.

The type of meaning-contrast called 'inverseness' (see §120) leads to a curious equivalence, in the negative, of auxiliaries which in a positive context have opposite meanings:

> You may not smoke in here (= 'You are not permitted to smoke [by me] …').
>
> You mustn't smoke in here (= 'You are obliged [by me] not to smoke …').

Both these statements are prohibitions, but differ in that the second sounds rather more forceful, positively forbidding instead of negatively withholding permission. The secret of this equivalence is that the 'inverse' opposition of the two meanings is cancelled out by the contrast between auxiliary and main verb negation. There is a logical equivalence, for the same reason, between *There doesn't have to be an answer to every question* and *There may not be an answer to every question*. ('It's not necessary that X' = 'It's possible that not-X'.)

a. Shan't (= volition) is residually used with first-person subjects, so that *I shan't!* (the cry of a disobedient child in a dated novel) is synonymous with *I won't*. Both express strong refusal.

b. The fact that a different type of negation neutralises inverseness of meaning makes it difficult to decide whether *won't* and *shan't* in their 'strong' and 'weak' volitional senses are instances of auxiliary or main verb negation. We can paraphrase the 'refusal' meaning in *He won't do what he's told* either by 'He insists on not doing what he's told' or by 'He is not willing to do what he's told', the difference between the two being only a matter of emphasis.

Modal auxiliaries in relation to tense and aspect

139

FUTURE TIME. None of the modal verbs we have been considering has a special construction for combining future with modality, except *have to*, which combines with *will* / *shall* and *be going to* (and shows, by that fact, that it is not, syntactically speaking, a modal auxiliary verb):

> We'// *have to* meet again next week.

This is to be contrasted with:

> We *must / can / may* meet again next week.

These true modal auxiliary verbs are unchanged for the expression of future time.

When an 'event verb' (see §12) is combined with an auxiliary, we generally assume that the event referred to is in the future, even when there is no time

adverbial to point in that direction:

The weather may improve. | You must give me all the information you have. | They can catch the bus right over there.

a. There is also, however, the possibility of interpreting an 'event verb' as 'habitual present': *She can cook very well*. This may well be the more common interpretation with *can* (= 'ability') and *will* (= 'predictability').

b. Must ('logical necessity') is exceptional: it does not normally permit future reference. Note the contrast between the 'obligation' interpretation of *The building must be demolished*, which refers to an event in the future, and the 'logical necessity' interpretation of the same sentence, which refers to a state in the present (*demolished* being here adjectival). When the event is located in the future, the meaning of 'logical necessity' can be expressed by *be bound to: The building is bound to be demolished* (= 'It is necessarily the case that the building will be demolished') (see §151).

c. Along with *We* WILL HAVE TO *meet next week* above, it is also possible to say *We* HAVE TO *meet next week*. There is a slight difference of meaning between the two sentences, which can be explained as follows. We have already noted, in discussing negation, that a sentence containing a modal can be thought of as expressing two statements: a modal statement, and the main verb statement on which the modal statement comments. Thus any modal statement can be represented as one statement within another, like this: [*We must* [*meet next week*]]. Modal auxiliaries in themselves are 'state verbs', and so a sentence with a primary modal like *must* is regarded as in the 'state present'. Thus the obligation exists in the present (or more precisely non-past) time zone. But the event to which the obligation applies can exist in a different time zone, especially the future: *We must meet next week* expresses a present obligation regarding a future action. With *have to*, this possibility exists too: *We have to meet next week* describes a present obligation about a future action. But there is also the further possibility, expressed by *We will have to meet next week*, where the modality (obligation), as well as the obligated event, are temporally located in the future. Notice that *will have to* is the only option if the obligation is conditional on another event that happens in the future: *If we miss the bus tonight we* WILL HAVE TO *walk home*, but not *?*If we miss the bus tonight we* HAVE TO *walk home*.

140

PAST TIME. To express past time, most primary modals have special Past Tense (or secondary) forms:

PRESENT		PAST	PRESENT		PAST
may	~	might	need	~	—
can	~	could	will	~	would
must	~	—	shall	~	should

The two exceptions, as we see from the above list, are *must* and *need*, both of which have no Past Tense counterpart (there is a Past Tense form *needed to*, but this belongs to *need to* as a semi-modal – see §147).

The following are examples of Past Tense forms used in reference to past time in direct speech (indirect speech will be separately considered in Chapter 7, §§156–60):

May (= 'permission') (*might* in this use is now rare and old-fashioned, chiefly BrE)

The prisoners *might* leave camp when they wished.

Can (= 'permission')

> The prisoners *could* leave camp when they wished.

Can (= 'possibility')

> In those days, a transatlantic voyage *could* be dangerous.

Can (= 'ability')

> Not many of the tourists *could* speak French.

Have to (= 'obligation')

> Children *had to* behave themselves when I was a boy.

Have to (= 'requirement')

> Someone *had to* be the loser.

Will (= 'willingness')

> In those early days my parents *would* lend me the money.

Will (= 'insistence')

> 'What did she think of the new boss?' 'I don't know – she *wouldn't* tell me.'

Will (= 'predictability')

> At the end of the day, I *would* return to my mother's house, where she was preparing the dinner.

In this last sense of 'predictability', *would* is probably more commonly used than *will*, as it is popular in historical or fictional descriptions of characteristic, habitual behaviour:

> In his last years, the King *would* spend whole days in morose solitude, speaking only to his immediate family and refusing all official audiences. At such times he *would* behave with the utmost churlishness to his ministers, and *would* fly into a violent rage whenever his will was crossed.

In its role of describing habitual events in the past, this *would* overlaps in function with *used to* (see §85).

a. The most common meaning of *will*, prediction, has a comparatively uncommon past time counterpart in *would* used as a future-in-the-past auxiliary (see §84): *Sama was my benefactor, and would become my guardian for the next decade*.

b. The rules of stress for *will* apply also to *would*: with the strong-volitional meaning, *would* has to be stressed; otherwise it is generally unstressed, and can be contracted to *'d*.

c. *Could* being a modal auxiliary has 'state' meaning, while the roundabout expressions *was permitted / allowed to, was able to,* etc. can denote events, and can add a sense of 'fulfilment' to the ordinary meaning of the modal auxiliary. *We were able to reach camp that night* implies 'We were able to, and moreover we did'; in a similar way, *We were permitted to leave camp early* suggests the extra information that we actually *did* leave camp early.

d. As noted in c above, *was able to* replaces *could* to express the 'fulfilment' of a past ability. But *couldn't* can negate *was able to* in this sense. There is thus an asymmetry between *could* and *couldn't*. We can say: *I ran hard, but couldn't catch the bus*. We cannot say: **I ran hard, and could catch the bus*. Here *couldn't* is equivalent to *wasn't able to,* but *could* is not equivalent to *was able to*.

141

MEANINGS NOT AVAILABLE WITH THE PAST TENSE. Gaps are left in the expression of past modality not only by the absence of Past Tense forms for *must* and *need*, but by the non-occurrence of certain meanings of *might* and *should*. *Might* is virtually unused in senses A and C of *may* in §116 ('possibility', 'quasi-subjunctive'), and *should* is not used at all as the ordinary Past Tense of *shall* (although it functions occasionally as the Past form of *shall* in indirect speech, and in hypothetical clauses – see Chapters 7 and 8).

   Even in the 'permission' sense, *might* in direct speech is so rare as to be discounted. We can therefore present a simplified picture of past modal meanings as follows: for semantic purposes, neither *may, must* nor *shall* have Past Tense equivalents, and their special nuances of meaning cannot therefore be expressed in the Past Tense. Instead, *could* and *had to* are the best available Past Tense translations of *may* and *must*:

> Visitors *may* ascend the tower for £2 this summer →
>> Visitors *could* ascend the tower for £2 last summer.
> I *must* confess that his latest novels bore me →
>> I *had* to confess that his latest novels bored me.

The most suitable Past Tense equivalent of *shall* (with first-person subjects, meaning prediction or intention) is *would*, which, as noted in §140a, has a future-in-the-past meaning corresponding to the prediction or intention meaning of *will*:

> We shall always be grateful → We *would* always be grateful.

Would here is understood in the sense of 'be destined to'. (Another interpretation of the same sentence, as FREE INDIRECT SPEECH, will be dealt with in §160.)

142

PERFECT ASPECT. The Perfect Infinitive following a modal auxiliary assigns past time to the meaning of the main verb and what follows it (the included main verb statement), as distinct from the meaning of the auxiliary itself (the modal statement). There is thus a difference between *In those days voyages could be dangerous*, which informs us of a PAST POSSIBILITY (see §140), and *The voyage may have been dangerous*, which informs us of the (PRESENT) POSSIBILITY of a PAST DANGER. It may be a little misleading, though, to talk of 'present possibility', as a possibility (as an example of the 'state present') tends to be a timeless thing, akin to the 'eternal truth' of scientific and proverbial statements

(see §8). It is for this reason that expression of past possibility by means of *could* is rather unusual.

In its Infinitive form, the Perfect Aspect (see §67) is a general marker of past time, without respect to the 'definiteness' and 'indefiniteness' which distinguish Past Tense and Present Perfect with finite verbs. Thus it covers the whole area of meaning which, in finite verbs, is subdivided between Perfect and Past (see §64). Note the use of different tenses in these two paraphrases of *may have come*:

They may have come already.　　(= 'It's possible that they *have come* already.')
They may have come last year.　　(= 'It's possible that they *came* last year.')

143

PERFECT AND PROGRESSIVE ASPECTS. After a modal, the Perfect and Progressive Aspects are ordinarily incompatible with the meanings of 'ability', 'permission' and 'obligation', and also with the volitional meanings of *will* and *shall*. It makes no sense, for instance, to give someone present permission to do something in the past: *You may have seen me yesterday* (as opposed to *You may see me tomorrow*) necessarily has the meaning of 'possibility', not 'permission'.

The remaining meanings, those available to occur with the Perfect and Progressive Aspects, are exemplified below. Some of these are called EPISTEMIC uses of the modals (see §125): they concern the likelihood of truth and falsehood, expressed through such notions as possibility, necessity and predictability. In these modal usages, the modal itself expresses a current state of the mind, while the main verb and what follows it describe an event or state which has variable time and aspect. The Perfect or Progressive construction applies not to the modal meaning itself, but to the meaning of what follows.

May (= 'possibility')
The heat *may* have affected the cables.　　　　She *may* be bluffing.
Can (= 'possibility')
What *can* have happened? (rare, BrE)　　　　They *can't* be telling the truth!
Must (= 'necessity')
He *must* have misunderstood you.　　　　I *must* be dreaming.
Have to (= 'necessity')
　You *have to have been* in a coma. (rare)
　To speak excellent English, you *don't have to be living* in an English-speaking country.
Will (= 'prediction', 'predictability')
　They *will have* read your letter by now.
　Don't phone him yet – he *will* still *be eating* his breakfast.

a. Can is rarely used with the Perfect outside negative statements. *Could* may be used instead: *What could have caused her death*?

b. Although the examples of modal + Progressive above show the normal Progressive meaning of temporariness, this construction can, as we have seen in §§105–08, also convey the 'future-as-a-matter-of-course' meaning with *will* (and *shall*). The same meaning can arise with other modals such as *may*, or even semi-modals such as *had better*. E.g. *I may not be coming this afternoon*, as an expression of future possibility, differs from *I may not come this afternoon* in suggesting that the coming is not a matter of personal choice or decision. In a similar way, *I'd better be going soon*, spoken by a guest to a host or hostess, seems to place the choice of whether to go or stay outside the speaker's control, and is to that extent more polite than *I'd better go soon* (cf. §108).

Should and *ought to* as weaker equivalents of *must*

144

Something must now be said about a number of verbs and verb constructions that express constraint, and therefore have meanings in some ways similar to *must* and *have to*. Of these, *should* and *ought to* are the first to be considered, as they are members of the modal auxiliary category (although, in the case of *ought to*, only marginally so).

145

SHOULD is a secondary modal which, as hinted earlier (§141), nowadays has very little common ground with *shall*, the modal of which it is historically the Past Tense. In its most important uses, *should* has the same kind of meaning as *must*, except that it expresses not confidence, but rather lack of full confidence, in the fulfilment of the happening described by the main verb. For example, if someone says *You must buy some new shoes*, it is assumed that the purchase will be carried out: the tone of *must* tolerates little argument. But *You should buy some new shoes* is a different matter – the speaker here could well add in an undertone 'but I don't know whether you will or not'. This meaning can be called WEAKENED OBLIGATION: and the weakening often reduces 'obligation' to something like 'desirability'. *Should* is less categorical than *must* both in this sense of 'obligation' and its sense of 'logical necessity' (see §117):

'OBLIGATION OR REQUIREMENT (BY SPEAKER)'

    Milo *must* pay for that broken window

       ('… and moreover he *will* do so, because I say so').

    Milo *should* pay for that broken window

       ('… but he probably won't').

'LOGICAL NECESSITY'

    Our guests *must* be home by now

('I conclude that they are, in that they left half-an-hour ago, have a fast car, and live only a few miles away').

Our guests *should* be home by now

('I conclude that they are, in that… , but whether my conclusion is right or not I don't know – it's possible they had a breakdown, for instance').

Should weakens the force of *must* (= 'logical necessity') by indicating that the speaker has doubts about the soundness of his/her conclusion. An optimistic treasure-seeker would say, after working out the position by the aid of maps, *This is where the treasure* MUST *be*. A more cautious one would say *This is where the treasure* SHOULD *be*, so acknowledging that there could be something wrong with his/her assumptions or his/her calculations. This sense of *should* can often be equated with 'probability': here it will be called WEAKENED LOGICAL NECESSITY.

a. The negative form *shouldn't*, parallel to *mustn't* (see §§136–7), is a further instance of main verb negation. *We shouldn't complain* is a weakening of *We mustn't complain*, carrying the supposition '… but maybe we do'. *Shouldn't* can also have the second interpretation 'logical necessity'. (On the rare use of *must not* in this sense, see §137b.) Hence *You shouldn't have any difficulty getting the tickets* means approximately 'If my suppositions are correct, it is unlikely that you will have any difficulty'.

146

Should is one of the middle-frequency modals, and weakened obligation is its most common meaning. In contrast, OUGHT TO is nowadays rather rare. It is a less common alternative to *should* for both (a) weakened obligation and (b) weakened logical necessity:

(a) Milo *ought to* pay for the broken window = Milo *should* pay for the broken window.
(b) Our guests *ought to* be home by now = Our guests *should* be home by now.

Should is normally unstressed, whereas *ought to*, being disyllabic, tends to receive more accentuation. Both these modals are historically Past Tense forms, but nowadays have little connection with past time. To express 'weakened obligation' or 'weakened logical necessity' in the past, we have to combine these modals with the Perfect: e.g. *I should* HAVE BROUGHT *an umbrella*. This describes a desirable (but unfulfilled) action in the past.

The 'logical necessity' meaning of *should* and *ought to* differs from the corresponding meanings of *must* and *have to* in that the former modals express a favourable attitude towards the event or state referred to. Thus these are quite normal:

Our candidate *ought to* win the election. | Roses *should* grow pretty well in this soil.

But there is something decidedly strange about sentences with the opposite meaning: *?*Our candidate ought to lose the election. ?*Roses should grow badly in this soil*. It appears that the 'logical necessity' meaning here is tinged with the connotation of 'desirability' that naturally accompanies the meaning of 'weakened obligation'.

a. *Should* + Perfect and *ought to* + Perfect referring to past time often have a stronger negative connotation of 'contrary to fact'; *She should / ought to have seen the car coming* has the implication '… but in fact she didn't'.

Some semi-modals of constraint

147

NEED TO. In the construction *need + to +* Infinitive, *need* behaves like a full lexical verb, forming question and negative forms with *do: Does she need to …? We didn't need to…* etc. It also takes Present and Past Tense endings (*She needs to rest. She needed to rest.* etc.). In these respects it shares the characteristics of *have to*. While the modal auxiliary *need* (see §133) has been becoming a rarity in present-day English, the *need to* construction has been becoming much more common. Since *need* as an auxiliary is practically confined to questions and negative statements, it is only the *need to* construction that can be used in ordinary positive statements: **We need wait. We need to wait.*

In terms of meaning, *need to* is somewhere between *must* and *should / ought to*: it asserts obligation or necessity, but without either the certainty that attaches to *must* or the doubt that attaches to *should / ought to*:

SCALE OF INTENSITY

(1) You must get a hair-cut (most categorical)

(2) You need to get a hair-cut

(3) You ought to get a hair-cut (least categorical)
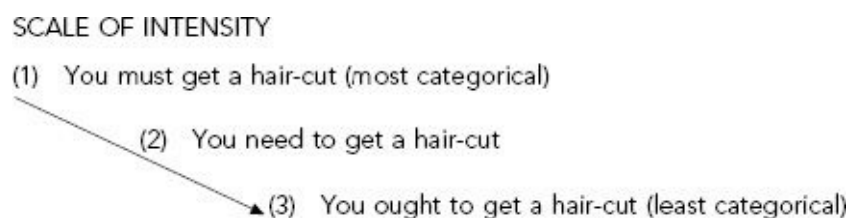
Yet there is a difference in the quality, as well as in the degree of constraint. For *must* and *should / ought to*, the constraint comes from outside the obligated person rather than inside (except for *I / we must* – see §117A). If I say to you *You must get a hair-cut*, I am exerting my own authority over you. But if I say *You need to get a hair-cut*, I am primarily pointing out to you the constraint that your own situation imposes upon you – that your hair is too long, that you look untidy, so that it is for your own sake that a hair-cut is to be recommended. We can make a similar comparison of *She ought to feel wanted and She needs to feel*

wanted, the one expressing an external and the other an internal constraint.

It is useful to note that in this construction, the main verb *need* has the same meaning as when it is followed by a direct object. The following sentences are virtually synonymous:

My boots need to be cleaned	=	My boots need a clean.
He needs to practise more	=	He needs more practice.

The auxiliary verb *need* and the main verb *need to* scarcely differ in effect on many occasions: *You needn't wake her up* and *You don't need to wake her up* are semantically alike.

a. But in other contexts we can detect a clear distinction between them. Let us suppose that Mrs P. addresses her gardener with the words: *The hedges needn't be trimmed this week, John.* This means 'You are excused the task – I don't want you to trim the hedges this week' (perhaps because Mrs P. is feeling kind, or has more important jobs for John). But the meaning is different if she says: *The hedges don't need to be trimmed this week, John.* The point she makes here is that the hedges do not require attention – because, we presume, they have not grown enough to make them look untidy. (Bearing in mind the infrequency of *needn't,* particularly in AmE, this point and the following one in Note *b* are of minor importance.)

b. There is also a difference between the modal and semi-modal constructions referring to past time, *needn't* + Perfect and *didn't need to.* The *needn't* + Perfect construction is 'contrary to fact': e.g. *We needn't have sold the car* implies 'We did sell it'. But *We didn't need to sell the car* allows us to continue: … *and so we didn't sell it.* (Compare *should* + Perfect, §146*a*.)

148

(HAVE) GOT TO is a fairly common construction in colloquial English. I have placed the (*have*) in brackets here because it can very easily be omitted: in statements, either the *have got to* is contracted to *'ve got to* (or in the third-person singular *'s got to*) or the verb is entirely elided. What we hear is *I got to* or *you got to,* etc., often represented in writing as *I got to, you got to*, etc. But the *have* appears in questions: *Have you got to go now*?

In meaning, (*have*) *got to* is similar to *have to,* expressing 'obligation' or 'logical necessity' (see §118):

They've *got to* decide what to do = They *have to* decide what to do.(obligation)

You've *got to* be joking = You *have to* be joking, (logical necessity)

However, it has no non-finite forms: **(to) have got to, *having got to* do not occur. Thus *got* cannot be inserted in the following: *We may have to leave earlier. I regret having to refuse your offer*.

Although it is tempting to treat *have got to* as a variant of *have to,* it is sometimes important to distinguish the two forms. *Have got to,* lacking non-

fmite forms, is closer to being a modal auxiliary than *have to*; and this goes with its tendency to share the 'subjective' connotation of *must* (= 'obligation'). E.g. *International crime is a problem all governments have got to face.* Here *have got to* could be replaced without noticeable change of meaning by *must*, but not by *have to,* which would suggest a general state of affairs, rather than a strong expression of personal opinion.

a. Although (*have*) *got to* on the whole is more common in BrE, the variant *gotta* seems to be more common in AmE.

b. *Have to* can be used in a habitual sense (see §13), whereas *have got to* normally cannot. Compare:

Hotel guests have to check out by 12 noon.

Hotel guests have got to check out by 12 noon.

The first statement is likely to be habitual, describing a general rule of the hotel (= 'every day'); the second is more likely to be non-habitual, probably meaning 'by 12 noon today').

c. There is no usual Past Tense of *have got to: had to* can be used instead. *Had got to* (BrE) is rare and limited to indirect speech: *She realised that she'd got to find some way out* (see Chapter 7).

149

AM / IS / ARE TO*,* consisting of a finite form of the verb *be* followed by *to* + Infinitive, has already been discussed as referring to a future plan (§112), as in *The Queen is to undergo surgery on her ankle this evening.* This semi-modal is unusual, compared with other semi-modals, in being rather formal in its style and in showing signs of declining frequency in present-day English.

Am / *is* / *are to* covers a shifting range of modalities. In the following examples, it could be approximately replaced by *can* in (a), by *should* or *has to* in (b), and by *is appropriate* (*to hope*) in (c):

(a) Nowadays no such concentrations of geese are *to* be found on Rockliffe Marsh.

(b) What *is to* be done then? We must find some solution.

(c) It *is to* be hoped that the UN will re-establish its authority.

As (a)–(c) show, these modalities are associated with the Passive.

a. A special use of *am* / *is* / *are to* in *if*-clauses adds to the notion of 'condition' that of 'purpose or goal': *If we are to win the competition, we must start training now* (cf. §117B*a*). The meaning of the *if*-clause here is close to 'In order to win the competition …' or 'If we are going to (i.e. intend to) win the competition …' *Was* / *were to* can also be employed in *if*-clauses as a marker of future hypothetical meaning (see §173).

150

(HAD) BETTER. This construction is often abbreviated in colloquial English to *'d better* or (in casual speech) just *better*. Although it is Past Tense historically and in outward form, in current English it has no Present Tense equivalent, and its meaning is 'non-past' (present or future) rather than 'past'. In these respects it is like *ought to*.

(*Had*) *better* expresses 'ADVISABILITY'. It is like *must* in being 'subjective': it represents the speaker's assessment of what has to be done. But it is not so strong in its coercive force as *must*; it signifies exhortation or strong recommendation rather than compulsion:

> You'd *better* be quick (roughly = 'I urge you to be quick').

The negative of *(had) better* is *(had) better not*:

> He'*d better not* make a mistake (roughly = 'I advise him not to make a mistake').

With *I* or *we* as subject, it is as if the speaker is giving advice for the benefit of himself/herself (and possibly others):

> I think I'*d better* tell you the truth.
> We'*d better* clear up this mess before the others come home.

a. A construction with the Progressive is possible: *You'd better be working harder than this when the boss comes back.*

b. In rare negative questions with (*had*) *better,* the negative word is placed in front of *better,* rather than after it. It is attached, as a contraction, to *had: Hadn't we better phone the police*?

Other semi-modals

151

There are a number of other verbal constructions used to express modality. Some of them, such as *be bound to, be supposed to* and *would rather* (see [§171](#)) are idiomatic, in that their form does not clearly reflect their meaning. Others are more transparent: e.g. *be allowed to, be permitted to, be willing to, be able to, want to*. However, all the forms listed here have some characteristics which make them similar to modal auxiliaries. For example, *want to,* especially in AmE, is increasingly pronounced as if it were a single word: *wanna*. In its meaning, too, *want to* is expanding to include meanings that would otherwise be expressed by modals:

> The last thing you *want to* do is replace the dishwasher (= '… you *should* do …').

Another matter of interest is that some 'semi-modals' can be used both in an epistemic and a non-epistemic (root) sense, just like the modal auxiliaries (see §125). For example, *be supposed to* and *be bound to* both have meanings approximating to 'obligation' and 'logical necessity', and in this respect are similar to *should* and *must*:

> Civil servants, as the name suggests, are *supposed to* be servants of the public.
>
>> (compare *should* = 'obligation')
>
> They say *it's supposed to* snow here by the end of the week.
>
>> (compare *should* = 'probability', weakened 'logical necessity')
>
> Everyone has these rights, and I'm *bound to* respect them.
>
>> (compare *must* = 'obligation')
>
> Working in the same building, they're *bound to* meet fairly often.
>
>> (compare *must* = 'logical necessity')

The parallel between *be bound to* and *must* is not exact. This is, first, because *be bound to* can change from Present to Past tense, and can also have non-finite forms. For example, there is no comparable way of expressing the following with *must: I was bound to find out sometime* (a logical necessity in the past). A second difference is that *be bound to* can refer to something which will inevitably happen in the future:

> 'I've lost my car keys.' 'Don't worry – someone's *bound to* find them.'

Must cannot be easily substituted for *be bound to* here, but if the necessary event is placed in the past, *must* + Perfect can be used: *Someone must have found them*.

   From a general perspective, it may be said that semi-modals are typically more versatile than core modals in allowing combinations with Tense, Aspect and non-finite forms. This is because the modals are particularly irregular and restricted in such combinations. On the other hand, the core modals are still, in general, far more frequent in their use than semi-modals. However, it appears that semi-modals are increasing in frequency at the same time as core modals are declining in frequency. This trend is especially noticeable with the important semi-modals such as *have to* and *be going to*.

a. We can extend the loosely defined class of semi-modals to include idiomatic combinations beginning with one of the true modals such as *can* or *may*. Two interesting examples are *can't help* + Ving and *might as well* (also *may as well*) + Infinitive. Although not common, these idioms fill what would otherwise be gaps in the semantics of modality in English. *Can't help* is used as a 'strong' or inverse equivalent of *can* (= 'ability'): Consider: *It's so funny – I can't help laughing*. Here *can't help* means 'I can't avoid it' or, in ability terms, 'I'm not able not to laugh'. *Might as well*, on the other hand, is a 'weak' or inverse equivalent of *had better*: whereas *had better* recommends some action as advisable, *might as well* recommends it only

in the weak sense of 'there's no good reason not to do it'. The difference between them can be compared in these examples:

I've started the job, so I'd *better* finish it.

I've started the job, so I *might as well* finish it.

Indirect Speech

152 direct and indirect speech, BACKSHIFT: *153* backshift in reported clauses; *154* ignoring the rule of backshift; *155* reported feelings and thoughts. AUXILIARY VERBS AND INDIRECT SPEECH: *156* auxiliaries in reporting clauses; *157* auxiliaries in reported clauses; *158 must, should*, etc. in reported clauses; *159* involvement of the speaker of the reported speech with *must*, etc. FREE INDIRECT SPEECH: *160*.

152

The distinction between DIRECT SPEECH and INDIRECT SPEECH (or reported speech) is shown in these two sentences:

> (A) DIRECT SPEECH   (B) INDIRECT SPEECH
> I enjoy playing football →   Jim said that he enjoyed playing football.

Sentence (A) specifies the words actually uttered by Jim, while sentence (B) reports the fact that he uttered something to the effect that he enjoyed playing football. Sentence (B) is similar in meaning to: (C) *Jim said, 'I enjoy playing football'*. But actually, there is a difference between sentences (B) and (C): whereas (C) indicates the actual words spoken by Jim, (B) only reports the MEANING or FORCE of what he said. Thus (B) could be a report of an utterance *I like playing football* or *I love a game of football* or *Playing football – it's great!* which is not identical to (A), but like it in meaning.

Backshift

153

If the verb in the main or REPORTING CLAUSE is in the Past Tense, it is usual for a verb in the reported clause to be BACKSHIFTED:

> [A]   'I understand' → Zoe said that *she understood*.

[A] 'I don't want to frighten you' → The officer told the passengers *he didn't want to frighten them*.

[A&] 'I've forgotten his name.' → She said *she had forgotten his name*.

[B] 'Did you see the accused on the night of the 25th?' → She was asked *whether she had seen the accused on the night of the 25th*.

There are two possible types of backshift: [A] present → past (including [A&] PRESENT PERFECT → PAST PERFECT) and [B] PAST → PAST PERFECT. The first three examples above show Present → Past backshift. The last example shows Past → Past Perfect backshift.

In semantic terms, backshift can be explained quite simply as follows. The time of the original speech, which is 'now' for direct speech, becomes 'then' for indirect speech, and all times referred to in the speech accordingly become shifted back into the past.

The rule of backshift

SPEECH ABOUT	'now' (Present Tense)	→	PAST REPORT OF SPEECH ABOUT . . . (Past Tense)	'then' (Past Tense)
SPEECH ABOUT	'then' (Present Perfect or Past)	→	PAST REPORT OF SPEECH ABOUT . . . (Past Tense)	'before then' (Past Perfect)
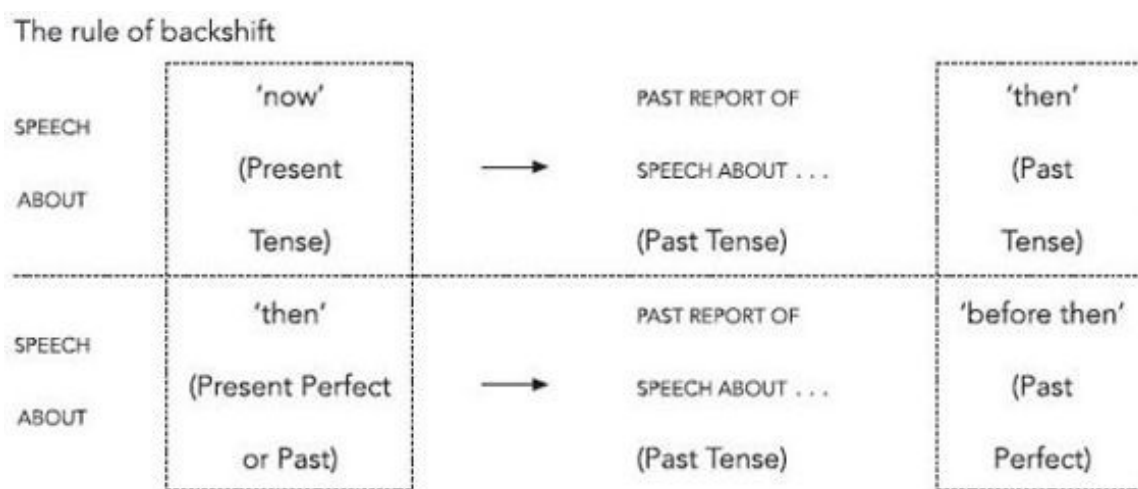
a. If the utterance in direct speech contains a verb in the Past Perfect, no backshift is possible, as English has no means of expressing 'past before past before past': '*Before his death, my father had made a new will*' → *She explained that before his death, her father had made a new will*. There is no double Perfect **had had made*, so the Past Perfect remains unchanged in the indirect speech report.

b. The term 'indirect speech' is traditionally used for reported discourse in general, whether the original discourse is in spoken or in written form. For our purposes, then, *She wrote in her diary that she had fallen in love with Leo* is an example of indirect speech.

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Although backshift is the rule when the reporting verb is in the Past Tense, the speaker can sometimes BREAK THE CONCORD between reporting verb and reported verb, keeping the tense form of the original utterance:

(A) 'I hate spiders' → (B) John admitted that he *hates* spiders.

(A) 'The police are still looking for him' → (B) We were told that the police *are* still looking for

him.

    (A) 'No one has ever spoken to me' → (B) She complained that no one *has* ever spoken to her.

The implication of this avoidance of backshift is that the time of the original utterance ('then') and the time of the report ('now') are both included within the time-span during which the statement in the reported clause remains valid. Thus, in the first example above, the person who utters (B) supposes, at the time of uttering (B), that John still claims to hate spiders.

  So it is still appropriate to use the Present. The circumstances in which backshift can be broken are best illustrated by historical statements:

'Virtue is knowledge'	→	Socrates said that virtue was knowledge
OR		Socrates said that virtue *is* knowledge.
'I am blameless'	→	Socrates said that he was blameless
BUT NOT		?*Socrates said that he *is* blameless.

The obvious difference between these cases is that the statement *Virtue is knowledge*, if true, is true for all time: it is an 'eternal truth' (see §8), and can therefore have reference to the present day (the time of report) as well as to the time of Socrates. But the declaration *I am blameless*, as spoken by Socrates, has no reference to the present time, since Socrates is now dead. So backshift cannot be avoided in this case. Here is an everyday example:

  'Where do you get your hair done?' → I asked her where she *got* / *gets* her hair done.

Both *got* and *gets* are possible here. But *gets* implies that (when 'I' am speaking) 'she' still has her hair done at the same place. *Got* does not have this implication – although it does not exclude the possibility that she still has her hair done at the same place.

a. When the Past Tense has a global indefinite meaning in combination with *ever, always*, etc. (see §64d), backshift is virtually compulsory: *I always said he was a liar* (NOT *?*I always said he's a liar)*. With the Present Perfect, however, backshift can be avoided: *I've always said he's a liar*.

b. There is an interesting parallel between backshift of tense and the shift from first- and second-person to third-person pronouns in cases like

  I don't believe *you* → She told Tom *she* didn't believe *him*.

  Just as the backshift of tenses can be broken in special circumstances, so the third-person rule may be broken in cases where people mentioned in the reported clause are identical with speaker or hearer in the reporting situation. For example, *'You're a fraud, Sam'* → *He told me I was a fraud* (spoken by Sam).

c. The backshift from Simple Past or Present Perfect to Past Perfect can also be avoided: *I once met President Kennedy* can be rendered in indirect speech as either *She said she* HAD *once* MET *President*

Kennedy or *She said she once* MET *President Kennedy*. This can be explained as follows: the same past happening can either be viewed as 'past in past' (related to another, more recent point of reference in the past) or it can simply be viewed as 'past' (related directly to the present time as its point of reference) – see the diagram in §74.

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The backshift rule applies not just to indirect speech in the strict sense, but also to REPORTED FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS. In fact, it applies more regularly with verbs such as *know, think, realise* and *forget* than with verbs such as *say* and *tell*:

> I forgot you were listening (rather than 'I forgot you are listening'). | I didn't know he was a teetotaller (rather than 'I didn't know he's a teetotaller').

Strangely, in these conversational examples one cannot easily substitute the Present Tense, even though the situation in the reported clause would normally obtain at the time of reporting. On the other hand, in the case of a general truth, we can say *While still young, I realised that life* is *a gamble* as well as … WAS *a gamble*.

a. It is important to realise that in an example like *I forgot you were listening* above, the reported clause *you were listening* is most likely to extend its reference to the present moment. Here, in following the sequence of tenses ordained by backshift, the Past Tense reported speech differs in one particular way from the characterisation of the Past Tense in §61. Normally the Past Tense indicates that the state of affairs referred to does not extend up to the present moment; but in indirect speech, that constraint does not apply.

Auxiliary verbs and indirect speech

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In determining backshift, a modal auxiliary followed by a Perfect Infinitive can IN REPORTING CLAUSES, as in other contexts, be counted as the equivalent of a Past Tense form:

> 'What's wrong?' → You *should have asked* the mechanic what was wrong.
> 'They're bluffing' → You *must have realised* that they were bluffing.
> 'I'm guilty' → He *may have admitted* he was guilty.

If we paraphrase this last example 'It is possible that he admitted he was guilty', we use the Past Tense *admitted*, and show that in terms of meaning, this is no exception to the backshift rule.

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In REPORTED CLAUSES, the backshifting of a primary auxiliary *can, may, will*, etc. results in the use of the secondary form *could, might, would*, etc. Whereas these secondary forms are not always usable for past time reference in direct speech (e.g. **It might rain yesterday* is not the direct Past Tense equivalent of *It may rain today* – see §141), in indirect speech the following backshifts are available without exception: *can → could, may → might, will → would*.

'You may stay as long as you like.' → She said they *might* stay as long as they liked.

'It may rain tomorrow' → We were afraid it *might* rain the next day.

'I can meet you there in an hour' → She said that she *could* meet us there in an hour.

'You *will* keep interrupting me' → He complained that I *would* keep interrupting him.

'The plan *will* fail' → I felt sure that the plan *would* fail.

In the first example, the backshifted *might* (= 'permission') is now rare, and *could* would be a more natural form to use here. At the other extreme of frequency, the last example shows the backshift of future *will* to a 'reported past future' *would*. This *would* is one of the most common uses of *would* – many times more common than the direct future-in-the-past *would* described in §84.

a. The backshift of *shall* to *should* is not so systematically observed, although we meet it occasionally in an example such as the following: '*Shall I open the window?'* → *She asked whether she* SHOULD *open the window*. Here, however, *should* could alternatively be interpreted in the much more common sense of 'weak obligation' (equivalent to *ought to*).

b. The backshift of future *shall* to *should* is also possible (though rare) alongside *would* with a first-person subject: *I warned them that we would / should lose the battle unless we tried harder*.

c. Should is acceptable following verbs such as *promised, decided, insisted* and *intended*, even where the corresponding direct speech use of *shall* would be unusual and rather declamatory: *He promised we should have our reward. We decided that the house should be built of stone*. However, these are best seen as examples of weak-obligation *should* (see §145) or (in the latter case) 'putative *should*' (see §§164, 165), rather than of backshift of *shall*.

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Must, ought to, should (= 'ought to'), *need(n't)* and *(had) better* have no Past Tense forms (see §§140, 145, 146, 150), but in indirect speech they may themselves be used as if they were Past Tense forms. In this sense, these modal forms are tenseless. We can say that *must* is backshifted to *must, ought to* to *ought to*, etc.:

'You *must / needn't* take the written exam' → She was told she *must /* needn't take the written exam.

'You *ought to / should* be ashamed of yourself' → He told me I *ought to / should* be ashamed of myself.

'You'd *better* hurry up' → He warned her she'd *better* hurry up.

Although it can be said that *must* backshifts to *must* and *need(n't)* backshifts to *need(n't)*, these forms are infrequent in indirect speech, and it is more natural to backshift by switching to the Past Tense forms of *have to* and *need to: She was told she* HAD TO *take a written exam. She was told she* DIDN'T NEED TO *take a written exam.*

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The auxiliaries *may, must, shall* and *ought to* (as we have seen in §§116B, 117A, 127B, and 146) can involve the speaker as the person who exerts his/her will or authority. In indirect speech, the same principle holds good, both for these auxiliaries and their backshifted variants *might* and *should,* so long as we remember that it is THE SPEAKER OF THE REPORTED SPEECH whose will or authority is in question. A sentence like *John has told her she may stay,* in other words, is a true translation into indirect speech of *John has told her 'You may stay'.* If *may, must,* etc. are applicable in direct speech, they are also (if without backshift) applicable in indirect speech. Ordinarily the speaker of the reported speech is also the subject of the main or reporting clause:

Jenkins said you *must* pay before you go. *(must* = 'obligation')

Jenkins said they *ought to* be ashamed of themselves, *(ought to* = 'obligation')

Jenkins promised we *should* have our reward, (backshift of *shall* = 'speaker's volition')

In each of these cases it is Jenkins (subject of the reporting clause) whose authority or will is invoked by the modal auxiliary.

Free indirect speech

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FREE INDIRECT SPEECH, a very common device of narrative writing, consists in the indirect-speech reporting of what someone said or thought by back-shifting the verb while omitting (or parenthesising) the reporting clauses *(he said …,* etc.) which are the conventional signals of indirect speech.

DIRECT SPEECH: *Agnes*: 'Why do they always have to pick on me?'
INDIRECT SPEECH: Agnes asked why they always had to pick on her.
FREE INDIRECT SPEECH: Why did they always have to pick on her (thought Agnes)?
                      or *simply*: Why did they always have to pick on her?

Free indirect speech is a more flexible medium for reporting than normal indirect speech; it also aids brevity by allowing a writer to retell someone's words in indirect speech and at length without having to keep inserting expressions like *He said* or *She exclaimed*.

Free indirect speech, unlike ordinary indirect speech, can incorporate the question and exclamation structures of direct speech:

> Would they ever meet again? (Anna wondered) | Here was home at last (thought John) | How many years had he and his sister dreamed of this moment! | So that was their plan, was it!

It can also, as these sentences show, include words such as *here* and *this*, which tend to be replaced by *there* and *that* in indirect speech proper.

The use of free indirect speech for describing 'interior monologue' has become a very widespread practice in modern fiction. Instead of *She said …* we have to imagine an omitted reporting clause such as *She thought…, She said to herself…, She reflected …*. Here is a more extended example:

> Well, it *was* no matter now. The dead *couldn't* come back to demand an accounting from the living, and there *was* very little point in dwelling upon her friend's lack of feeling for a man who*'d been* chosen from complete strangers to be her spouse. Of course, he *wouldn't be* her spouse now. Which nearly *made* one thing …. But no. Rachel forced all speculation from her mind.
>
> (From Elizabeth George, *Deception on his Mind*, Chapter 2.)

The Past Tense verbs in italics in this passage are clearly in indirect speech; they narrate the train of thought in Rachel's mind, which could be otherwise represented in direct speech as 'Well, it's no matter now. The dead can't come back …', etc.

In addition to direct question and exclamation forms, other characteristics of direct speech, such as the *Well* which begins the passage, are telltale signs of free indirect speech. But sometimes the only indicators are backshifted verbs in the Past Tense – including the Past Perfect. For example, *would* in main clauses often invites interpretation as the backshifted equivalent of future *will*, none of the other senses of *will* (volitional, conditional, direct future-in-the-past) being suitable to the context: *That evening he* WOULD *be seeing Sylvie again*.

Mood: Theoretica and Hypothetical Meaning

161 mood: factual, theoretical and hypothetical meaning, THE SUBJUNCTIVE: *162* Present and Past Subjunctive, THEORETICAL MEANING: *163* factual and theoretical meaning, truth-commitment and truth-neutrality; *164* grammatical markers of factual and theoretical meaning; *165* putative *should* and the mandative subjunctive, CONDITIONAL SENTENCES: *166* real and unreal conditions; *167* real conditions; *168* constructions expressing theoretical meaning in *if*-clauses; *169* unreal conditions, HYPOTHETICAL MEANING: *170; 171* hypothetical meaning in dependent clauses; *172* in main clauses (implied conditions); *173* grammatical markers of hypothetical meaning; *174* relation between real and unreal conditions; *175* negative truth- commitment ('contrary to assumption' and 'contrary to expectation'). HYPOTHETICAL USE OF MODAL AUXILIARIES: *176* indicated by Past Tense form; *177* regularities and exceptions; *178* past hypothetical meaning; *179* signs of fluctuating usage, SPECIAL HYPOTHETICAL USES OF MODAL AUXILIARIES: *180–83; 181* permission; *182* volition; *183* possibility; *184* three uses of *might have; 185* 'pure hypothesis'; *186* seven meanings of *could.*

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Historically, the verbal category of Mood was once important in the English language, as it still is today in many European languages. By distinct forms of the verb, older English was able to discriminate between the Indicative Mood – expressing an event or state as a FACT, and the Subjunctive – expressing it as a SUPPOSITION. Further, the Present Subjunctive – conveying a REAL supposition (such as a plan for the future), was distinct from the Past Subjunctive – conveying an UNREAL supposition (referring to an imaginary or hypothetical state of affairs). Nowadays the Indicative Mood has become all – important, and the Subjunctive Mood is little more than a footnote in the description of the

language.

While the contrast between the Subjunctive and Indicative Moods has largely disappeared from present-day English grammar, the distinctions of meaning which Mood used to express are still important within the language. Modern English has a threefold distinction between FACTUAL, THEORETICAL and HYPOTHETICAL meanings, corresponding to the Mood distinctions mentioned above, and in the title of this chapter I use the term 'mood' loosely to refer to these meanings.

The Subjunctive

162

The Subjunctive Mood survives to a limited degree, in modern English, in both Present Tense and Past Tense forms.

> It is proposed that the Assembly *elect* a new Committee. | William insisted that Sarah *go* to his doctor in Harley Street. | If an Association member *be* found guilty of misconduct, his membership will be suspended and appropriate dues refunded.

Present Subjunctive Mood is here shown by the absence of – *s* from the third – person singular Present Tense verb, and by the use of *be* in place of the Indicative *am / is / are*. Whether it occurs in conditional, concessive, or *that* clauses, the Present Subjunctive is an indicator of non – factual or THEORETICAL meaning (see §§163 – 4). However, it is in *that*-clauses, illustrated in the first example above, that the Present Subjunctive occurs most. This construction, called the MANDATIVE SUBJUNCTIVE, is more common in AmE than in BrE.

The Past Subjunctive, on the other hand, expresses HYPOTHETICAL MEANING. It survives as a form distinct from the ordinary Indicative Past Tense only in the use of *were*, the Past Tense form of the verb *to be*, with a singular subject: *She looks as if she* WERE *accusing me of fraud*. Like the Present Subjunctive, this is nowadays fairly infrequent, and is often replaced by the Past Indicative *was: as if she* WAS *accusing me…* especially in informal English.

a. The Subjunctive singular *were*, however, still prevails in more formal style, and in the familiar phrase *If I were you* ….

b. In addition to its occurrence in subordinate clauses, the Present Subjunctive (here called the 'formulaic subjunctive') lives on in set exclamatory wishes such as *God* BE *praised! God* SAVE *the Queen! Long* LIVE *the bride and groom! Lord* HAVE *mercy upon us! Heaven* HELP *us all! If the rich countries have to raise taxes, so* BE *it. Far* BE *it from me to spoil the fun*. But here again there is often an alternative construction, the construction beginning with *may* mentioned in §116C: *May God be praised!* (Sometimes *Let*, as a quasi-imperative verb, has a similar function: *Let God be praised.)*

Theoretical meaning

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The contrast between factual and theoretical meaning was introduced in §121, where it was pointed out that as auxiliaries of possibility, *may* is 'factual', whereas *can* is 'theoretical'. It was noted, by way of exemplification, that while *This illness can be fatal* (= 'It is possible for this illness to be fatal') treats death as an IDEA, *This illness may be fatal* ('It is possible that this illness will be fatal') treats a death as a possible FACT, and to that extent has a stronger and more threatening meaning.

The factual/theoretical contrast is by no means confined to the area of possibility and necessity, as further examples show:

    (a) It's a pity to refuse such an offer (IDEA).

    (b) It's a pity (that) you refused such an offer (FACT).

    (c) It's nice to live high up above the town (IDEA).

    (c) It's nice living high up above the town (FACT).

First, notice that the theoretical examples (a) and (c) contain Infinitive constructions, whereas the factual sentences (b) and (d) contain a *that*-clause and a Verb-*ing* construction respectively.

Second, with regard to meaning, notice that the factual sentences assume the truth of the statements they contain, whereas the theoretical sentences do not. Thus sentence (b) lets us know that you *did in fact* refuse the offer; sentence (a) does not tell us whether the offer was refused or not. The factual sentence, we may say, is TRUTH-COMMITTED, whereas the theoretical sentence is TRUTH-NEUTRAL (that is, leaves the question of truth and falsehood open).

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These observations about sentences (a) – (d) cannot, unfortunately, be generalised to apply to all cases of factual and theoretical meaning. They are useful clues, not infallible tests.

The best I can do, with regard to grammatical form, is to give the following list of constructions *normally* expressing one meaning rather than another:

FACTUAL MEANING:	Indicative mood in dependent clauses Verb-*ing* construction

THEORETICAL MEANING:	*to* + Infinitive construction *should* + Infinitive in dependent clauses ('putative' *should*) – especially in British English Present Subjunctive – especially in American English

All these constructions are illustrated now with the same phrase *(It)'s an excellent thing*:

FACTUAL MEANING:
(1) It's an excellent thing *(that) she learns to sing properly*.
(2) *Learning to sing properly* is an excellent thing.

Theoretical Meaning:

(3) It's an excellent thing *to learn to sing properly*.

(4) It's an excellent thing *(that) she should learn to sing properly*.

(5) It's an excellent thing *that she learn to sing properly* (rare, possibly archaic).

But these correlations should not be pressed too far. After some verbs of reporting, for example, the *to* + Infinitive construction is factual:

We know Keating to be in town = We know that Keating is in town.

Further, whether a sentence is truth-neutral or truth-committed often depends on factors other than the choice of verbal construction. In *I'm surprised that your wife should object,* the effect of the main verb is to cancel out the neutrality of the *should* + Infinitive construction, with the result that we clearly understand from this sentence that the wife does object. There is hence no logical difference, in many cases, between *should* + Infinitive and the simple Indicative form *objects*. This is not to say, however, that there is no difference in feeling. In *I'm surprised that your wife should object,* it is the 'very idea of it' that surprises me; in *I'm surprised that your wife objects,* I am surprised by the objection itself, which I take to be a known 'fact'.

 The meaning swings in the opposite direction (from truth-commitment to truth-neutrality) through the influence of verbs such as *believe* and *suppose*:

I believe (that) his mother is dead. | I suppose (that) you're waiting for my autograph.

Because of the essential element of uncertainty in the meanings of these verbs, a *that*-clause that would elsewhere be truth-committed becomes truth-neutral. The same applies to adjectives such as *possible* and *likely*.

 We could go on to note that the primary modals (e.g. *can, may, will)* also express an element of uncertainty, and so belong to the truth-neutral category.

However, they express more specific meanings, such as 'possibility' and 'obligation', whereas the forms with 'theoretical' meaning discussed here – the Infinitive, the Subjunctive and 'putative' *should* – express truth-neutrality in its most generalised form.

a. Notice that the differences between *can* ('theoretical possibility') and *may* ('factual possibility') lies not in the modal meaning itself, but (recalling the terminology of §§136 and 142) in the main verb statement that follows the modal. (The modality 'possibility' is by its very nature non-factual.)

b. In support of the distinction drawn here between factual *that*-clauses and theoretical *that*-clauses (with *should),* note the different choice of construction in these sentences: *This fact – that the human race destroys its environment – worries us deeply; This idea – that the human race should destroy its environment – worries us deeply.* It would not be possible here to change the positions of the nouns *idea* and *fact.*

c. Similarly, note that of the following four sentences, the fourth is unacceptable: *I like to see you; I'd like to see you; I like seeing you; *I'd like seeing you.* No doubt this is because the strong element of doubt in the hypothetical construction *I'd like* (§§169 – 70, 180 – 2) conflicts with the truth-commitment of the Verb-*ing* construction *seeing you.*

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PUTATIVE *SHOULD* and the MANDATIVE SUBJUNCTIVE. These terms are used for *should* + Infinitive and the corresponding Present Subjunctive in *that*-clauses. As we would expect from the above discussion, *that*-clauses with the Subjunctive can be converted into *that*-clauses with *should* without any change of meaning:

> The judges have decided / decreed / insisted / voted that the existing law *(should) be* maintained.

In this sense, the putative *should* might be called, historically speaking, a 'subjunctive substitute'. Note, however, that the putative *should* construction is usable in many *that*-clauses where the Subjunctive is impossible: *It is interesting that the play should be such a huge success.* The Subjunctive is restricted to *that*-clauses expressing some element of wish, intention or command. This is why it is called the mandative Subjunctive.

Putative *should* has to be carefully distinguished from *should* = 'ought to'; and yet in many instances it is difficult to tell from the context which meaning is meant to apply. Do we interpret *They agree that the rules should be changed* as 'They agree that the rules be changed' or 'They agree that the rules ought to be changed'? In practice, there is little difference between these, although the second interpretation brings out an element of 'obligation'.

There are a number of special uses of putative *should* in exclamations and questions, e.g.:

Dyson was stunned by the vulgarity of it. That poor old Eddy *should come* to this!
  (= 'the very idea')

We were having a great time, when who *should come* along but the managing director.
  ('Who do you imagine came along …?')

How *should* I *know*? | Why *should* we *bother* about that?

a. Fifty years ago the Present Subjunctive appeared to be on its deathbed in BrE. But since then, the mandative Subjunctive has undergone a mild revival, probably under the influence of the more robust survival of the same construction in AmE. However, the mandative Subjunctive remains rare in BrE, and it is not particularly common in AmE either. There is a tendency, particularly in BrE, to avoid both the Subjunctive and the *should* constructions by using a third option, the Indicative: *It's important that the expedition* REACHES *its destination by the end of the month*. Although the factual Indicative form is used, the clause is truth-neutral: the speaker does not claim to know whether the destination will be reached. This use of the Indicative is sometimes felt to be 'incorrect'.

b. *May* / *might* + Infinitive, like *should* + Infinitive, can be regarded as a 'subjunctive substitute' in clauses of purpose and concession: *Let us fight on, that every future generation may bless our memory* (= '… that every future generation bless our memory'); *Our cause is just, though the world may be against us* (='… though the world be against us'). Nowadays, this usage is confined to an elevated, rhetorical style. (See also §116C.)

Conditional sentences

166

In CONDITIONAL SENTENCES, the statement expressed by the main clause is qualified by a condition expressed by an *if*-clause or some equivalent construction (e.g. a conditional clause introduced by *unless, lest* or *whether)*. Conditional sentences can express either a REAL CONDITION (also called an 'open condition') or an UNREAL CONDITION:

If you want a dessert, it will cost more money.   (REAL CONDITION)
If you wanted a dessert, it would cost more money.   (UNREAL CONDITION)

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In REAL CONDITIONS, both the main clause and the dependent clause are truth-neutral: hearing the remark *If he asks me, I'll marry him*, we are not in a position to judge whether either the proposal or the marriage will take place. Nevertheless, it is normal, in contemporary English, to use the factual Indicative form of the verb in both clauses. (For future conditions, the Simple Present is used rather than *will* + Infinitive in the dependent clause – see §102). Although a very common type of real condition, as in the above example, refers to the future, there are no special restrictions on the time reference of conditions, or on the tense forms used to express them. The following examples illustrate

something of the variety and mixture of times and tense forms permitted for real conditions:

> If you're happy, you make others happy.
>   (Simple Present + Simple Present)
>
> If James told you that last night, he was lying.
>   (Simple Past + Past Progressive)
>
> If my son is a genius, I've underestimated him.
>   (Simple Present + Present Perfect)
>
> If they left at nine, they will certainly be home by midnight.
>   (Simple Past + *will* 'future').

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The truth-neutrality of an *if*-clause is reflected in the possibility of using constructions expressing theoretical meaning (Present Subjunctive and *should* + Infinitive) in place of the Simple Present:

> PRESENT SUBJUNCTIVE: If the server *serve* a fault twice, he shall lose a point (archaic, legalistic).
>
> *should* + INFINITIVE: If you *should hear* news of them, please let me know.

The effect of the putative *should* is to make the condition slightly more tentative and 'theoretical' than it would be with the ordinary Present Tense.

a. Another expression of a tentative real condition is achieved by omitting *if* and inverting the subject and auxiliary *should: Should you want to return anything for any reason, it's no problem* (cf. §173a).

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UNREAL CONDITIONS are normally formed by the use of the Past Tense – Indicative or Subjunctive – in the conditional clause, and *would* + Infinitive in the main clause. (Another 'past' modal – *could, might* or *should* – can be used instead of *would.)* Thus it is possible to derive unreal conditions from the examples of real conditions in §167 by a process of 'backshift' somewhat similar to that employed in indirect speech:

> If you *were* happy, you *would make* others happy. | If John *had told* you that last night, he *would have been* lying. | If my son *were* a genius, I'd *have underestimated* him. | If they *had left* at nine, they *would* certainly be home by midnight.

The precise grammatical and semantic nature of this switch from real to unreal conditions is discussed in the following account of hypothetical meaning

Hypothetical meaning

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When a verbal construction expresses HYPOTHETICAL MEANING, this means that the happening described is assumed to take place not in the real world, but in an imaginary world. For example, someone who says *I wish I* WAS clever, implies '… but I am *not* clever'. Someone who says *Just suppose I* HADN'T APPLIED *for the job*, suggests that '… but I *have* applied for the job'. In effect, this implication is considerably weakened in some contexts (see §§175, 181–3, 185); but it is this NEGATIVE TRUTH-COMMITMENT of hypothetical meaning that distinguishes it both from factual meaning (positive truth-commitment) and from theoretical meaning (truth-neutrality).

   The difference between the three meanings is registered in a simple way, in the three sentences:

> *Factual:*
> It's laughable that Septimus is in love ('Yes, it's a fact that he is in love').
>
> *Theoretical:*
> It's laughable that Septimus should be in love ('Whether he *is* in love or not is a different matter').
>
> *Hypothetical:*
> It would be laughable if Septimus were in love ('But actually, he's *not* in love').

Of the three attitudes to Septimus' being in love, we can say the first and the third are opposites, while the second is on neutral territory between them.

a. The negative feeling of the hypothetical construction is demonstrated by the approximate equivalence between *I wish she loved me* (positive, hypothetical) and *It's a pity she doesn't love me* (negative, factual).

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Apart from unreal conditions such as *If you were happy, you'd make others happy* (§166), hypothetical meaning is found in DEPENDENT CLAUSES in a number of less important sentence-types:

> *It's time* you were in bed ('… I see you're not').
>
> He behaves *as if* he owned the place ('… but he doesn't').
>
> It's not as *though* we were poor ('… we are not').
>
> *Suppose / imagine* you and I were living on a desert island ('… but of course we aren't').

If only I had listened to my English teacher! ('… but I didn't').

Even though he were my brother, I would refuse to help him (archaic) ('… but he is not').

I wish I were young again ('… but I'm not').

I'd rather you were listening to me ('… you're not listening at the moment').

Of these constructions, those with *it's time, if only*, and *wish* require hypothetical verb forms, while those with *as if, as though, suppose / imagine, even though* and *would rather* permit a choice between hypothetical and non-hypothetical forms. The difference between the second sentence above and *He behaves as if he owns the place* is that the sentence with *owns* leaves the question of whether he owns the place open, whereas the sentence with *owned* presupposes that he does not. (However, context may suggest a negative presupposition also where *owns* is used.)

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In MAIN CLAUSES, a hypothetical verb form often requires the presence of an accompanying conditional clause. **The Eiffel Tower would fall down* standing alone as a main clause is not a self-sufficient English sentence. Unless we add a condition to it, the listener is left baffled, consciously or unconsciously asking the question 'If what?' There are, however, various circumstances in which a hypothetical main clause stands on its own, and we can often explain such cases by positing an IMPLIED (or suppressed) CONDITION. For example:

1. I'd be inclined to trade that car in for a new one *(suppressed condition*: '… if I were you').
2. Would you like some peas? ('… if I offered you some').
3. No, I'd prefer beans / I'd rather have beans, please ('… if you wouldn't mind').
4. I'd hate to live in a house like that ('… if I had to').
5. Would you help Robbie change his shirt? ('… if I asked you to').

It is probably an exaggeration to suggest that speakers reconstruct such 'ifs' when producing these somewhat conventionalised utterances, but the ellipsis helps to explain why the hypothetical form is used. As examples (2)–(4) show, we commonly make use of a suppressed hypothetical condition in expressing or alluding to a wish. Apparently this is because there is a certain indelicacy or rudeness in expressing one's wishes bluntly, as a statement of volition can often seem like an imperative. *I'd like beans* is therefore more polite than *I want beans*. It removes from reality the whole question of whether I am going to get the beans or not, or even makes the diplomatic assumption that I am *not* going to receive any.

The most important cases of implied conditions involve the secondary modal

auxiliaries *could, might, would* and *should,* and will be dealt with later in §§181–5.

a. Notice that *I'd like beans* is the hypothetical equivalent of *I want beans*. With hypothetical meaning, *would want…* is unidiomatic, and *would like* is substituted for it.

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The GRAMMATICAL MARKERS of hypothetical meaning are:

1. *Would* + Infinitive
   (a) in main clauses
   (b) in reported speech clauses which would be main clauses if converted into direct speech
   (c) but not in any clause (main or dependent) containing another modal auxiliary, as modals cannot combine with one another. (Instead, other secondary modals can be used: *could, might, should* – see §§176–85.)
2. Past Tense (Indicative or Subjunctive)
   (d) in other dependent clauses.

3. The Past Tense construction *was* / *were to* + Infinitive (Indicative) or *were to* + Infinitive (Subjunctive) as an alternative to the plain Past Tense
   (e) in conditional clauses (and clauses introduced by *suppose* or *imagine)* (f) only in reference to future time, and mainly with 'event' verbs.

Examples:

(1a) I'd *love* to live abroad (if I had the money).

(1b) She says she'd *love* to live abroad.

(1c) If I owned a car, I *could* teach you how to drive, (*could* = 'would be able to')

(2d) He talks as if he was / were my rich uncle.

(3e) { Perhaps it would be helpful if I *were to* say something.
      { Just suppose that crocodile *were to* escape!

(3f) { *If you *were to* know Spanish, you might get a better job.
      { If we *were to* win the lottery, we'd go on a world tour.

It is clear that the Past Tense cannot be used twice in the same verb phrase, so where the Past Tense or *would* / *should* / *could* / *might* + Infinitive is used to signal hypothetical meaning, pastness of time has to be conveyed by the Perfect Aspect. Once again (see §§67, 142) the Perfect acts as a past time indicator where the Past Tense is not available for that function. The hypothetical version

of the past real condition *If I said that, I was lying [If… Past, … Past]* is therefore *If I had said that, I'd have been lying [If… <u>Past Perfect</u>, … <u>would</u> + Perfect]*. (Here the single underlining shows the marker of hypothetical meaning, and the wavy underlining shows the marker of past time meaning.)

a. In a rather formal style of English, a conditional clause with inversion of subject and auxiliary verb (or *be)* is sometimes used instead of a hypothetical *if*-clause: *Had I known* (= 'If I had known'); *Were he to return* (= 'If he were to return …'); *Were they alive* (= 'If they were alive …'). *Had* and *were* are the auxiliaries most commonly involved. *Was* is rarely preposed because in the rather elevated style in which this inversion occurs, the Subjunctive is preferred to the Indicative form. Inversion is just possible with *could* and *might*, but not with *would: Could / might I but see my child once more …* (= 'If only I could / might see my child once more …'). Here the inversion, which has a decidedly archaic, rhetorical flavour, has to be supported by the intensifying word *but*. Comparison can be made between such inversions and the similar inversion of *should* in real-conditional sentences (§168*a*). Incidentally, *should* is sometimes used as a marker of unreal conditions, as well as of tentative real conditions: *Should the container explode, there would almost certainly be widespread damage*.

b. Examples such as *I wish it would rain* appear to be exceptions to the rule that in dependent clauses, hypothetical meaning is conveyed by the Past Tense rather than *would / should* + Infinitive. Arguably they are not exceptions, however, since *it would rain* in this context is the hypothetical equivalent of future *it will rain* rather than of present *it rains*. Hence the difference between *I wish this clock worked* and *I wish this clock would work* is that the former is a wish about the present, and the latter a wish about the future. In practice, to refer to the hypothetical future we can use the future *would* for 'event verbs', but can only use the non-past hypothetical Past Tense for 'state verbs'. For example, we could not say **I wish that book would belong to me*, but we might say *I wish that bus would arrive soon. Would* in this position can have volitional colouring: *We wish you would come and stay with us. I wish you wouldn't drink so much.* Such remarks often have the force of requests or commands.

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The tables below plot past, present and future time against real and unreal conditional sentences, (1), (2) and (3) being the three grammatical markers of hypothetical meaning listed in §173.

Verbal indicators of real and unreal conditions

	PAST TIME	PRESENT TIME	FUTURE TIME
REAL	Past Tense Present Perfect Tense Past Perfect Tense	non-perfect Present Tense	*will* + Infinitive, etc. non-perfect Present Tense

	PAST TIME	PRESENT TIME	FUTURE TIME
UNREAL	(1) *would* (etc.) + Perfect Infinitive (2) Past Perfect Tense	(1) *would* (etc.) + Infinitive (2) non-perfect Past Tense	(1) *would* (etc.) + Infinitive, etc. (2) non-perfect Past Tense (3) *was / were to* + Infinitive

   From the second table it is evident that there is little difference, in unreal conditions, between the expression of present and of future time. This means that a sentence like *If it were my birthday, I'd be celebrating* refers indifferently to the present or the future. We could insert either a future or a present adverbial to make the time-span explicit:

   If it were my birthday today, I'd be celebrating.

   If it were my birthday tomorrow, I'd be celebrating.

(Incidentally there is no conflict, here, in the co-occurrence of a Past Tense verb with a future adverbial.) It might be appropriate with hypothetical, as with modal verb forms (see §139), to distinguish primarily 'past' from 'non-past' time, rather than 'past' from 'present'.

a. Was / were to can be used to single out hypothetical future reference in *if-* clauses, as is seen in examples (3e) and (3f) in §173. But in *if*-clauses *would* cannot be used with this function, but can only be a hypothetical volitional auxiliary, except in the idiomatic sequences *if you would like …* and *if you wouldn't mind …*. Thus in *If the building were to collapse, there could be catastrophic loss of life, were to* cannot be replaced by *would: ?*If the building would collapse …*. However, the ordinary Past Tense would be an acceptable substitute: *If the building collapsed …* (bear in mind, though, that *collapsed* here is 'non-past' in meaning, and so could just as well refer to the present time as to the future).

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It is now time to think further about the MEANING OF HYPOTHETICAL CONSTRUCTIONS.

I pointed out earlier that the distinguishing mark of hypothetical meaning is its implication of NEGATIVE TRUTH-COMMITMENT. The exact interpretation, however, varies in accordance with past, present and future time.

In referring to imaginary past events, the hypothetical forms in dependent clauses (in practice mostly *if*-clauses) normally have the categorical sense of 'CONTRARY TO FACT', since it is not difficult to have definite knowledge of past events:

> If your father *had caught* us, he *would have* been furious ('… but in fact he didn't').
>
> What if we'd *lost* our way! ('… but in fact we didn't').
>
> I wish I *hadn't swallowed* that last glass of whisky ('… but in fact I did').

Non-past imaginary happenings do not usually have such uncompromising implications. In the present, the sense is not so much 'contrary to fact' as 'CONTRARY TO ASSUMPTION', and in the future, it is weakened further to 'CONTRARY TO EXPECTATION':

> If you really *cared* for your children, you'd *look* after them properly ('… but I assume you don't care for them').
>
> If it *were to snow* tomorrow, the match *would have to be* cancelled ('… but I expect it will not snow').

The second sentence does not rule out the possibility of snow but, on the other hand, its sentiment is more disbelieving (and less pessimistic) than the real condition of: *If it snows tomorrow, the match will have to be cancelled.*

a. The MAIN clause of an unreal condition, unlike the DEPENDENT clause, is not necessarily contrary to fact or to expectation. E.g.:

> I won't tell Susan about my problems: (even) if she were my closest friend, I (still) wouldn't want her to know.

Clearly the implication of the *if*-clause is that 'Susan is not my closest friend'. But the independent clause does not carry the implication that 'I want to tell her about my problems' – in fact it has rather the opposite implication. So the main clause here is not 'contrary to fact / expectation'.

b. The negative truth-commitment of the hypothetical Past is additionally weakened in sentences which indirectly recommend or request a course of action: e.g. *Would you mind if I taped this conversation, Mrs Darcy*? It is a tactful tentativeness, rather than lack of expectation, which leads a speaker to use the hypothetical form in such cases. (Compare the tentative use of *could, might*, etc. – §§181–5.)

c. A more extreme example of weakening is seen in a tendency to use the *it's time* construction in circumstances where the implication of negative truth-commitment is quite inapplicable. You might hear, for example, the following snatch of dialogue: A: *Tiny's cooking the breakfast this morning*, B: *Oh good – it's about time he helped out with the cooking.* Now it is quite evident that here the hypothetical verb *helped* refers to what Tiny is doing, rather than what he is not doing. The hypothetical Past seems anomalous in this construction: the meaning is one of truth-neutrality (or even positive truth-commitment) rather than of negative truth-commitment.

Hypothetical use of modal auxiliaries

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Modals, if we except semi-modals like *have to*, cannot follow other modals, and therefore cannot combine with *would* according to the rule (rule 1(a), §173) for expressing hypothetical meaning in main clauses. Instead, in main as in dependent clauses, THE HYPOTHETICAL MEANING OF A MODAL IS INDICATED BY THE PAST TENSE FORM ALONE. Another way to express this is to say that all the secondary modals *would, could, might* and *should* can express, in both independent and dependent clauses, hypothetical meanings corresponding to the meanings of the primary modals *will, can, may* and *shall*. The difference about *would* (see §173) is that, besides expressing *will's* meanings of prediction and volition in the hypothetical mood, it can also express pure hypothetical meaning in main clauses. Compare:

> If you *could* drive, you *could* teach me.
>
> If you were able to drive, you *would* be able to teach me.

Notice that here the first *could* is replaceable by *were able to*, the second with *would be able to*.

a. Have to, being a modal auxiliary only for purposes of meaning, has the infinitive form *have to*, and so in main clauses combines with *would* to form the regular hypothetical form *would have to: If the diagnosis should be confirmed, she* WOULD HAVE TO *stay in the hospital*.

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Difficulties arise because of gaps in the Past Tense paradigm of modal auxiliaries. First, here are straightforward examples of unreal conditions expressed by means of the hypothetical Past Tense:

> *Could*:   (a) If you got a job in Sydney, you *could* come to see us more often (='… it would be possible for…').
>   (b) If I had a visa, I *could* visit the country for as long as I wanted (='… I would be permitted to …').
> *Might*:   (c) If Holmes were playing, Scotland *might* win (='… it's possible that Scotland would win.').
> *Would*: (d) If you were a real friend, you'd do anything I asked (='… you would be willing to …').

Against these must be placed the following gaps and exceptions:

1. *Might* and *could* rarely occur in unreal conditions with the sense of hypothetical permission (except – rarely in the case of *might* – in polite requests – see §181).
2. The hypothetical forms of *will* (= 'strong volition', 'predictability') and *shall* (= 'volition') are rare or non-existent.
3. As *must* has no Past Tense form, *would have to* is the only verbal expression available for hypothetical obligation, requirement or necessity. Contrast:

> REAL CONDITION: If it's that serious, we *must* act at once.
>
> UNREAL CONDITION: If it were that serious, we'd *have to* act at once.

a. Examples (a) and (c) above associate *could* with 'theoretical possibility' and *might* with 'factual possibility' (§121), as one would expect, seeing that they are the Past Tense forms of *may* and *can* respectively. These are their most common hypothetical meanings. However, both modals can be used in both 'factual' and 'theoretical' senses. Here is *could* in the 'factual' sense: *If the astronaut momentarily lost radio contact with earth, the whole mission could be mined*; and here is *might* in the 'theoretical sense': *The whole exercise might be described as a self-training process*. (*Might* and *could* are interchangeable in both examples.) If we paraphrase the modal auxiliaries in these examples, an interesting difference between 'hypothetical factual possibility' and 'hypothetical theoretical possibility' emerges. *The whole mission could be mined* = 'It is possible that the whole mission would be ruined'. *The whole exercise might be described…* = 'It would be possible to describe the exercise …'. Notice that in the 'factual' case, the hypothetical *would* applies to the main verb, whereas in the 'theoretical' case, it applies to the modal meaning of possibility. This is analogous to the contrast between the main verb negation of *may* (= 'factual possibility'), and the auxiliary negation of *can* (= 'theoretical possibility'), as illustrated in §§136–7.

b. *Could* in the 'ability' sense does not occur in a hypothetical main clause when the main verb is a 'state verb', referring to a permanent accomplishment: **If you'd had proper lessons, you could speak English*. Instead, *would be able to* or *would know how to* can be used.

c. There is a possible occurrence of the hypothetical form of *will* (= 'predictability') in exclamations like *You 'WOULD make a mess of it! He 'WOULD interfere like that*. These remarks do not have the negative truth-commitment one expects with hypothetical forms, but their sardonic flavour can be brought out by a gloss of this kind: 'This is just the sort of (wilful) behaviour you would predict from such a person'. The hypothetical predictability meaning of *would* is shown in this dialogue: *'The leaders of the nuclear power industry claim that their safety standards are the best in the world.' 'Well, they WOULD (say that), wouldn't they?'* The implication is: 'This is the sort of behaviour we would predict, even if we did not know about it'.

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With modal auxiliaries, as already noted, past hypothetical meaning can be expressed by the Perfect Infinitive:

> If Holmes had been playing, Scotland *might have won* ('… it is possible that Scotland would have won'). | Had you come to me sooner, I *could have cured* you. | If he'd asked me politely, I *would / should have given* him a lift.

Would have had to can be used for past hypothetical necessity or obligation: *If fire had taken hold of the building, he would have had to clamber out on to the roof.*

a. In spoken English, utterances like this last example could occur with 'double marking' of the Perfect Aspect (see §179 below): *If the police had caught us, we'd have had to have made a clean breast of it.* In such an utterance, the *have* is invariably reduced to the weak syllable /əv/, so that it could be more realistically rewritten *'ve: … we'd've had to've made a clean breast of it.*

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Past hypothetical meaning and the use of the modals is one of the most difficult areas of English not only for non-native speakers, but also for native speakers. It may be partly as a result of this that the language shows signs of confused and fluctuating usage, especially in the area of 'hypothetical past time'. We have noted that the hypothetical past expressed by a Past Perfect in a dependent clause is strongly associated with 'contrary to fact' meaning. Also 'contrary to fact' are some secondary modals + Perfect in main clauses: we notice this with *shouldn't* (§146*a*), *needn't* (§147*b*), and *might* (§183*b)* + Perfect. (With negatives like *shouldn't have,* of course, it is the negative statement that is assumed to be false, and the positive statement to be true: *You shouldn't have stolen it* implies *You stole it.)* There seems to be a growing tendency, in fact, to associate the Perfect after a secondary modal purely with 'contrary to fact' meaning, rather than past time. On this basis, we can suggest why speakers sometimes produce sentences like this:

I *would have enjoyed* meeting you and Maria next Thursday, but I'm afraid I'll be away.

In this case, the imaginary event of meeting 'you and Maria' is located in the future, rather than in the past, so it is only the 'contrary to fact' meaning that is applicable: the past meaning of the Perfect seems to have been lost.

   Another area of confusion, in spoken English, is in the 'double marking' of hypothetical meaning in examples such as these:

If they'd *have arrived* yesterday, they'd *have seen* the place at its best.

By 'double marking', I mean that the *if-*clause has two forms signalling the same meaning. The expected construction is *If they'd arrived*, expandable into *If they had arrived* (Past indicating hypothesis, and Perfect indicating pastness). However, the dependent clause in this example matches the main clause, in containing *'d* + *have* + Past Participle. It seems possible here that the reduced auxiliary *'d* in the dependent clause has been reinterpreted as *would*. This is

supported by the occasional (growing?) occurrence of 'pure' hypothetical *would* in dependent clauses – a construction generally supposed to be 'unEnglish':

> ?*I'd feel happier if somebody *would have said* something.

However, the idea that*'d* is reinterpreted as *would* is belied by the negative form *hadn't have* which can occur in the *if*-clause:

> If they *hadn't have arrived* yesterday, they would have missed the gala performance.

In practice the form written *have* here always occurs in its contracted form *('ve,* pronounced /əv/), so conceivably a new 'contrary to fact' morpheme /dəv/ + Past Participle is entering the spoken language. In any case, it appears that past hypothetical usage in spoken English is in a state of some uncertainty, both semantically and syntactically, and is probably undergoing change.

Special hypothetical uses of modal auxiliaries

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We turn finally to special hypothetical uses of modal auxiliaries in main clauses where there is no expressed condition. The four main areas of meaning concerned are permission, volition, possibility and 'pure hypothesis'. These special uses can best be explained in terms of psychological factors such as diffidence and tact. Hypothetical forms are substituted in order to tone down the meaning of the non-hypothetical auxiliary where it might be thought too bold or blunt.

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HYPOTHETICAL PERMISSION. *Could* and *might* are sometimes used as more polite alternatives to *can* and *may* in first-person requests:

> *Could* I see your driving licence? | I wonder if we *could* borrow some tea? | *Might* I ask you for your opinion? | Do you happen to have a brochure I *might* look at?

The strict force of the hypothetical form here is that the speaker does not expect his/her plea to be granted, the negative inference being '… but I don't suppose I can/may'. But this is a further instance of the weakening of hypothetical meaning: people will choose *could* and *might* out of a habit of politeness, even when they expect their requests to be complied with. If one should want to

supply an 'implied condition' here, it might be '… if I were bold enough to ask you'.

Here *could* and *might* are parallel to *can* and *may* (= 'permission'), in that *might* is more polite-sounding, and also less common, especially in AmE, than *could*.

a. One of the many ways of making a polite request in English is by the phrase *I don't suppose* followed by a clause containing hypothetical *could: I don't suppose I could borrow some wine glasses, could I*? In this case, the negative truth-commitment of the hypothetical form is made explicit in *don't suppose*.

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HYPOTHETICAL VOLITION. The polite use of *would* instead of *will* (= 'willingness') in second- and third-person requests provides a further example of the absolute use of a hypothetical clause with verbs expressing desire:

Would you lend me fifty pence? | I wonder if someone *would* help me pitch this tent.

We can account for the air of politeness of these requests by postulating again some such unexpressed condition as '… if I were to ask you'. Compared with a direct imperative, the *will* question is itself, of course, a step in the direction of politeness: it issues a directive in the form of a question rather than a command. But through habit, it has acquired strong imperative overtones, especially when delivered in a tone of command: *Will you sit down!* It is therefore not surprising that a still more indirect form of imperative, with hypothetical *would*, has come into use.

a. This *would* – the hypothetical form of weak-volitional *will* – needs to be carefully distinguished from *would* used purely as a marker of hypothetical meaning in main clauses. The former differs from the latter in that (a) it can be replaced by *will*; and (b) it can be paraphrased by *would be willing to*. On the other hand, the *would* which precedes *mind* and *like* (*Would you mind* … ? *Would you like* …?) is the pure hypothetical one. In these cases it is the main verb *(mind, like)* that conveys volition.

b. Significantly, the answer to a hypothetical request often contains the corresponding non-hypothetical auxiliary:

'Would you hold the gate open?' 'Of course I will.'
'Could I ask your opinion?' 'Certainly you can.'

The answerer here is granting a favour, and so has no reason to be politely indirect or evasive.

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HYPOTHETICAL POSSIBILITY. Used hypothetically, *could* and *might* are substitutes for *may* in expressing factual possibility (see §121):

> There *could* be trouble at the World Cup match tomorrow. | The door *might be* locked already. | Our team *might* still win the race.

The effect of the hypothetical auxiliary, with its implication 'contrary to expectation', is to make the expression of possibility more tentative and guarded. *Our team might still win the race* can be paraphrased 'It is barely possible that…' or 'It is possible, though unlikely, that…'.

A possible event in the past can be described by means of the construction *could* / *might* + Perfect Infinitive: *'Could you have left your umbrella at the bus-station?' 'I could have.'* In this respect, *could* + Perfect is a slightly more tentative variant of *may* + Perfect (which could not, however, be used in the question form – see §§131, 142). *Might,* on the `other hand, seems to be used almost as a variant of *may* (= 'factual possibility') with little implication of reduced likelihood.

Another difference between *could* and *might* is that *couldn't* is an instance of auxiliary negation, and *mightn't* is an instance of main verb negation:

> He *couldn't* have made that mistake!
> (= 'It is not even barely possible that he made that mistake').
>
> He *might not* have made that mistake
> (= 'It is just possible that he did not make that mistake').

In this contrast, *couldn't* and *might not* are parallel to *can't* and *may not* respectively. On the other hand, *might* (= 'possibility'), unlike *may* (= 'possibility'), is very occasionally used in questions: *Might it have been left at the bus station*?

a. Both *could* and *might* are commonly used in suggestions for future action, in a way analogous to the 'democratic imperative' *can* (see §115A*a*): *YOU could answer these letters for me. We might meet again after New Year, if you're agreeable*. Predictably, the hypothetical forms *could* and *might* are more polite, in their directive force, than *can,* since they make the expression of possibility more tentative. Once again, the contrast between *can* and *may* seems to be smoothed away in the hypothetical forms: there is little to choose between *could* and *might* here, although in the non- hypothetical 'democratic imperative', only *can* is possible (see §115A*a*).

b. In familiar speech, *could* and *might* are used more forcefully, in a tone of rebuke, in such remarks as *You 'could try and be a bit more chilised! You 'might stop grumbling at me for a change!* The negative hypothetical implication is clearly present here: 'It would be possible for you to do these things, but you don't in fact do them'. Notice also the use of *could* / *might have* in complaints about past omissions: *You might have let me know the boss was in a foul temper! You could have given me some notice!* ('It would have been possible for you to do these things, but you didn't').

184

Note that there are three distinct meanings of *might* + Perfect, all involving possibility:

1. You might have told me! (§183b)
   ('It would have been possible for you to tell me').
2. You might have dropped it somewhere (§183)
   ('It is just possible that you (have) dropped it somewhere').
3. You might have met him if you'd been there (§177)
   ('It is possible that you would have met him …').

In all three of these examples, *could* can replace *might* without any appreciable change of meaning. In the third, however, *could* would be more likely to convey the somewhat different meaning of theoretical rather than factual possibility: 'It would have been possible for you to meet him if you'd been there'.

a. Note a difference between the main statements in the three examples above: (f) is 'contrary to fact', implying 'but you didn't'; (2) is not 'contrary to fact', as the speaker entertains the possibility that 'it has been dropped'; (3) is not absolutely 'contrary to fact', although as the *if*-clause is, the main clause is also likely to imply that 'you did not meet him'.

185

A fourth special category of the use of hypothetical modals without an overt condition is here called 'pure hypothesis', because it shows the modal *would* used in main clauses in its pure hypothetical sense (§173) – that is, without any additional meaning, such as 'permission', associated with the primary modal:

> It *would seem* that much of the furore over drug costs has been misplaced. | The self-teacher *would seem* to be a contradiction. | By the time Felix turned up it was early afternoon, which, *I would think*, would be late enough. | Intuitively one *would expect* that this parameter should be very close to zero.

In such examples, hypothetical *would* + Infinitive could be replaced by the plain Indicative form of the verb: *would seem* can be replaced by *seems*, etc. There appears to be no suppressed 'if' that could explain the hypothetical form, so the avoidance of the Indicative seems to be just an evasive or defensive strategy on the part of the writer. (This is mainly a feature of written English, strongly represented in academic prose.) The main verb belongs to a category of cognitive state verbs implying lack of knowledge, and so the effect of hypothetical *would* is to distance the writer's claim even further from reality. I say 'even further' because there is a double tentativeness: *it seems* already shows a lack of confidence, and *it would seem* takes an additional step in the same direction.

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The last three chapters have shown the variability of meanings (past time, past time in indirect speech, and hypothetical) associated with the secondary modals. To conclude, the following sentences illustrate this multiplicity with examples of seven different meanings of *could*. (Past time examples are of direct rather than indirect speech.)

1. Past time equivalent of can (= 'possibility') (cf. §140)
   Nothing *could* be done to stop the water flooding into the house.

2. Past time equivalent of can (= 'ability') (cf. §140)
   Like every self-respecting young Victorian lady, Charlotte *could* paint and play the piano; but she *couldn't* peel a potato to save her life.

3. Past time equivalent of can (= 'permission') (cf. §140)
   After the 1920 Act, women *could* vote, but they still *couldn't* become Members of Parliament.

4. Hypothetical equivalent of can (= 'possibility') (cf. §176)
   The house is one of the most beautiful that *could* be imagined.

5. Hypothetical equivalent of can (= 'ability') (cf. §176)
   Do you know anyone who *could* repair this clock for me?

6. Hypothetical equivalent of can (= 'permission') (cf. §176)
   I'd be grateful if I *could* borrow your electric drill.

7. Tentative equivalent of *may* (= 'factual possibility') (cf. §183)
   The weather has been terrible up there in the mountains. You *could* find climbing very difficult.

The last meaning is rather more anomalous than the others, as it shows *could* extending its range of meaning into the epistemic territory of 'factual possibility' which is the domain of *may*, not *can*.

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