Chapter II
Tense and Aspect
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This chapter deals with the tense and aspect of the two languages – English and Manipuri. An attempt is made to examine the differences of the two languages. This chapter also shows that English is a tense language and Manipuri is a tenseless language.

2.1 Concept of tense

In the words of Comrie tense can be defined as “grammaticalised expression of location in time”. In other words, tense is verbal form that indicates whether an action or event, was realized or experienced in the past or at present or will be realized in the future. A language that has grammaticalised verbal inflections or morphemes, showing the time of action, is known as tensed language. In the case of tenseless languages, the formal distinction between present, past and future is not made.

Many languages define tense not just in terms of past / present / future, but also in terms of how far into the past or future they are.
Thus they introduce concepts of closeness or remoteness, or tenses that are relevant to the measurement of time into days (hodiernal or hesternal tenses). Some languages also distinguish not just between past, present, and future, but also nonpast, nonpresent and nonfuture.

2.2 English tense system

English only marks verbs for two tenses, present and past. English verbs used in the present tense tend to use the base form of the verb, i.e. *I walk*. The verbal stem undergoes a change in its form to express past tense. We have different forms like *take*, *work* and *put* etc, on the one hand, and *took*, *worked* and *put+∅* on the other. Therefore, the grammarians recommend that English has past and non-past tense opposition.

Past tense indicates the grammatical expression of an event that happened in past or before the moment of speech. Non–past, on the other hand, indicates the grammatical expression of an event that happens at the time of speech or that will happen in future. A non–past tense verb indicates events which are simultaneous with time of speech, habitual, facts, universal truth and modality of the
future. In English, there is no future tense, but there are a variety of modal auxiliaries, when combined with the verbal stem, can express future time reference. Future time is made explicit either by adverbials, as in (1a) or by means of the auxiliaries will or going to (gonna in informal spoken variety) plus the base form of the verb.

(1a) India takes on New Zealand next Friday.
(1b) I will play.
(1c) We are going to have a party.
(1d) We gonna have a party.

The distinction of past tense and non-past (present) tense in English is marked in the verb. A regular verb requires "+ed" to make past tense, i.e. work, play, jump etc, are inflected to worked, played, jumped etc. in the past tense.

English has another formation of auxiliary + verb. In such sentences tense is marked in the auxiliary. As a result of this, not only the finite verb, but also the auxiliary has a set of past and present tense opposition.

Therefore, whenever there is only one finite verb in a sentence, tense is always marked morphologically in that verb. But if there is auxiliary + verb combination, the auxiliary will carry tense, as expressed in the following examples:
Past tense   Present tense

(2 a) He worked. He works.
(2 b) He had worked. He has worked.
(2 c) He had been working. He has been working.

2.2.1 Present tense

Present tense is a tense that refers to the moment of utterance. It also refers to events or states that do not merely coincide with the moment of utterance, such as those that are habitual, and around now.

We need to distinguish three basic types of present (Quirk et al 1985):

I Universal statement and habitual action expressed with the simple (timeless) present form:
  (3 a) The sun sets in the west.
  (3 b) Spiders have eight legs.
  (3 c) I (always) write with a special pen (when I sign my name).

II “Around now”, expressions that talk about actions and situations that are going on “around now”, expressed with the present progressive:
(4 a) I am writing (on this occasion) with a special pen.

(4 b) I'm going to a lot of parties these days.

The action is viewed as in process and of limited duration.

III Now or instantaneous, expressed with either the simple or the progressive form:

(5a) Tomba shoots—and it's a goal!

(5b) As you see, I am dropping the stone into the water.

Present tense verbs are only marked for person in the third person singular form, where the verb takes on the suffix "-(e)s" [where (e) may or may not appear] as in, *He walks and He goes*. In simple usage present tense verbs are used to discuss various present states like, "actual present" events, *He walks to the store*, as a "stative" (Teschner and Evans, 2000) verb, *He has two dogs*, or in reference to a "timeless truth" (Teschner and Evans, 2000), *The Brooklyn bridge is in New York*. Finally, imperatives are always in the present tense since English does not have a means of commanding something to be done in the past, i.e. *Walk to the store!* but never, *Walked to the store!*
2.2.2 Past tense

Past tense is an absolute tense that refers to a time before the moment of utterance. It only locates the situation in the past. It does not say anything about whether that situation continues to the present or into the future, although there is often a conversational implicature that it does not continue to or beyond the present (Comrie, 1985).

An action in the past may be seen as:

I as having taken place at a particular point of time prior to the present moment;

(6a) I wrote the event of 18 June 2001 with a special pen.

(6b) Mom adopted me in 1985.

II over a period; the period may be seen as:

(i) extended time period prior to the present moment.

(7a) John lived in Delhi from 1998 to 2005.

(7b) I worked all day yesterday.

(ii) the whole of time up to the present moment.

(8) Up to this moment this disease was incurable (Comrie, 1985).

Past tense verbs are not conjugated for person or number, all regular past tense verbs has the suffix \(-ed\) to show past tense, i.e.
walk becomes walked. In simple usage past tense verbs can be used to discuss a “single past event”, I walked to the store, an “enduring past event” Bill walked for three weeks, or a “repeated / habitual past event” (Teschner and Evans, 2000), I walked to the store every Tuesday.

The suffix -ed is the regular or major means of forming the past tense in English. However, there are various minor classes of verbs that take different past tense forms. Here are few examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Past</th>
<th>Past</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) drive</td>
<td>drove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ride</td>
<td>rode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write</td>
<td>wrote, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) grow</td>
<td>grew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>throw</td>
<td>threw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blow</td>
<td>blew, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) drink</td>
<td>drank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sink</td>
<td>sank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sing</td>
<td>sang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ring</td>
<td>rang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sit</td>
<td>sat, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Present and past are expressed using direct modifications of the verb, which is then modified further by one or more non-simple aspects; i.e., either progressive / continuous, perfect / completed, or both. Each tense is named according to its combination of aspects and time. So, it can be noted, for the present tense:

- Present Simple: “I eat”.
- Present Continuous: “I am eating”.
- Present Perfect: “I have eaten”.
- Present Perfect Continuous: “I have been eating”.

And for the past tense:

- Past Simple: “I ate”.
- Past Imperfect: “I was eating”.
- Past Perfect: “I had eaten”.
- Past Perfect Continuous: “I had been eating”.

(d) eat ate
go went
win won
run ran
fly flew
choose chose, etc.
2.3 Aspect

Aspect is not concerned with relating the time of the situation to any other time point, but rather with the internal temporal constituency of the one situation. In brief we can state that tense is "situation-external time" and aspect is "situation – internal time" (Comrie, 1976). In the words of Holt (1943) "aspects are a different way of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation".

2.4 English aspect system

English verbs have aspectual oppositions that pervade the whole of verbal systems that between progressive and non-progressive and that between perfect and non-perfect (Comrie, 1976). Aspects of English tenses are marked by auxiliaries, modals and non-finite verb forms. The English auxiliary *have* functions as both perfect and perfect progressive, in case of "have +been". The English auxiliary *be*, on the other hand, combined with the verbal form *-ing* indicates an ongoing activity. Other aspectual notions are marked by main verbs in English indicating starting, finishing, and continue action. From aspectual point of view we need to differentiate dynamic verbs from those of stative verbs. Dynamic verbs have
progressive aspect but stative verbs do not have progressive aspect, except in some cases.

2.4.1 Perfect aspect

English verbs have perfect aspect which is marked by “have + past participle of a verb”. Perfect aspect can be divided into perfect non-progressive and perfect progressive.

(9) Perfect non-progressive           Perfect progressive.
    a. He has eaten.           He has been eating.
    b. He had eaten.           He had been eating.
    c. He will have eaten.     He will have been eating.

To express a verb, in perfect non-progressive, the verbal form past participle is needed, but for expressing a verb in perfect-progressive aspect, the verbal form ‘stem + ing’ is required.

2.4.2 Non–perfect aspect

Non–perfect aspect can be divided into non–perfect non–progressive and non–perfect progressive aspect. Non–perfect non–progressive aspect of a verb indicates an event that happened in the past, happens in the present or will happen in the future time having no durative meaning. Non–perfect progressive aspect of a verb
on the other hand, indicates an event that is happening, was happening or will be happening with a period of time.

Non–perfect non–progressive  Non–perfect progressive aspect
(10a) He eats /ate /will eat.  He is / was / will be eating
(10b) He walks /walked / will walk. He is / was / will be walking.

Therefore, a finite verb in English has the following aspectual oppositions:

Perfect
(i)  progressive
(ii) non–progressive

Non–perfect
(i)  progressive
(ii) non–progressive

The four aspectual variations of the verb to work in English can be illustrated with help of the following tree–diagram.

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Aspect

Perfect   Non–perfect

Progressive  Non–progressive  Progressive  Non–progressive
(have+been+working) (have+worked) (be+work+ing) (work, worked, will work)
```
The aspectual variations of English verbs can be illustrated in the following table with help of the verb “to eat”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspectual distributions</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Non perfect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. He ate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. He eats.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. He will eat.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Non–perfect progressive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. He was eating.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. He is eating.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. He will be eating.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Perfect non–progressive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. He had eaten.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. He has eaten.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. He will have eaten.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Perfect progressive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. He had been eating.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. He has been eating.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. He will have been eating.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.5 The concept of Tense in Manipuri

It is the opinion of Sino–Tibetan linguists that tense is not distinct in Tibeto–Burman languages. This indistinctiveness of tense is one of the structural features of the Tibeto–Burman (TB)

In the study of tense in Meiteilon, we have two opposing opinions. The traditional Manipuri grammarians who had been influenced by the Sanskrit grammarians have held firmly that Manipuri has three tense – present, past and future. Modern Manipuri linguists have the view that the tense system found in Greek, Latin and Sanskrit is not found in this language.

Tense, in this language, is shown by an adverbial time element, not by morphological markers. Some other mentioned “Meiteilon as a tenseless language” (Mahabir quoted in Yashawanta, 1995).

This is supported by the following examples:

(11a) məhak kɔphi thək-y

he coffee drink-

He drinks coffee.

(11b) məhak nəraŋ kɔphi thək-y

he yesterday coffee drink-

Yesterday he took coffee.
The verb *thsk* remains same in the above two examples without changing the suffix *-y*. The meaning of the sentence (11a) is: "He has the habit of drinking coffee", or it may be a simple statement, "He takes coffee". The same suffix *-y* occurs with the adverbial time *ŋeraj* "yesterday" in the sentence.

From this analysis, it is concluded that a verbal form can go with past and present temporal adverbs without any change in it, in other words past and present time reference is not grammaticalised.

2.51 The question of future tense in Manipuri

One may say that in simple sentences occurring with future temporal adverbs, say *həyen* "tomorrow" *hŋcit* "day after tomorrow" etc, the suffix *-gəni ~ -kəni* is added to the verb, as in the following:

(12a) məhak həyen imphal cət-kəni

he tomorrow Imphal go-

Tomorrow he will go to Imphal.

(12b) øykhoy həyen sa ca-gəni

we tomorrow meat eat-

Tomorrow we will eat meat.
They will clean the drainage the day after tomorrow.

But in negative sentences having future reading the suffix -geni ~ -kani is not added to the verb, as in the following:

(13a) məhak həyen  imphal ca-t-loy

he tomorrow Imphal go-not

Tomorrow he will not go to Imphal.

(13b) øykhoi həyen  sa ca-roy

we tomorrow meat eat-not

Tomorrow we will not eat meat.

(13c) məkhoi həncit  nəladu  senok-loy

they day-after tomorrow drainage-DET. clean-not

They will not clean drainage the day after tomorrow.

Again, the suffix -geni ~ -kani can occur with past temporal adverb ḫərəŋ “yesterday”.

Yesterday Tomba Imphal left.

Yesterday Tomba would have left Imphal.

I imagined that the dish of yesterday tasted good.

Again, there are number of sentences without the suffix 

-\textit{g}ə\textit{n}i~--\textit{k}ə\textit{n}i occurring with future temporal adverbs, say \textit{h}ə\textit{yen} “tomorrow”.

I will leave Imphal tomorrow.

I must leave Imphal tomorrow.

From these examples, it is concluded that the suffix 

-\textit{g}ə\textit{n}i ~-\textit{k}ə\textit{n}i is not a future tense marker but a mood marker just as 

-\textit{ge} is in the example (15a). Therefore it is concluded that, unlike 

English, the question of absolute tense does not arise in Manipuri.
2.6 Aspect in Manipuri

Manipuri verbs have aspectual oppositions between perfect and non-perfect.

2.6.1 Perfect aspect

I Perfect aspect: this is indicated by -re ~ -le or khre, as in the following sentences:

(16a) oy cak ca-re
I rice eat-PERF.ASP.
I have eaten rice or I have taken meal.

(16b) mohak cak ca-khre
he rice eat-PERF.ASP
He has eaten rice or he has taken meal.

(16c) tomba philamdu yen-le
Tomba film-DET. see-PERF.ASP.
Tomba has seen the film.

II. Perfect progressive aspect: this is denoted by -remli ~ - lemli ~ remmi ~ lemmi as in the following sentences.
(17a) mahak layrik pa-rəmli

he book read-PERF.PROG.

He has/had been reading.

(17b) tombə ti. bhi. yəŋ-ləmli

Tomba TV watch-PERF.PROG.

Tomba has/had been watching TV.

(17c) øykhoy isey ta-rəmmi

we song hear-PERF.PROG.

We have/had been listening to the music.

(17d) øykhoy ca thək-ləmmi

we tea drink-PERF.PROG.

We have/had been drinking tea.

2.6.2 Non-perfect aspect

I. Simple aspect. This expresses simple statement or habitual meaning. The markers are -y ~ -mi ~ -ŋi ~ -pi etc., as in the following:

(18a) møytəy ca kəc ca-ŋ

Meitei rice eat-SIM.ASP.

Meitei eats rice.
(18b) toʊm səŋ tʰoŋ-ŋi

Tom cow cook-SIM.ASP

Tom cooks beef.

(18c) eŋ iŋŋeŋ pɑm-mi

I song like-SIM.ASP.

I love music.

(18d) siŋə hŋeŋə kʰəŋ-pi

Sima loudly cry-SIM.ASP

Sima cries loudly.

II. Non-perfect progressive aspect: this is denoted by -ᵣi ~ -ᵢ as in
the following sentences.

(19a) məhək ɬəŋrik pə-ri

he book read-PROG.

He is reading.

(19b) tômbə ti.bi. yɛŋ-li

Tomba TV watch-PROG.

Tomba is watching TV.
Based on these aspects, a finite verb in Manipuri has the following aspectual oppositions: perfect and non-perfect.

Perfect  
- (i) progressive  
- (ii) non-progressive

Non-perfect  
- (i) progressive  
- (ii) non-progressive

This can be represented in the following tree-diagram:

```
Aspect
   /\
  /   \
Perfect       Non-perfect
     /\
    /   \
Progressive Non-progressive Progressive Non-progressive
(rək-li-rəm-mi) (-re~le-rəm-me) (-ri~li) (i~y)
```
The aspectual variations of Manipuri verbs can be illustrated in the following table with help of the verb “to eat”.

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<td>1. Non perfect</td>
<td>a. ma ca-y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Non-perfect progressive</td>
<td>a ma ca-ri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Perfect non–progressive</td>
<td>a. ma ca-re</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. ma ca-rəm-le</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Perfect progressive</td>
<td>a ma ca-rəm-mi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.7 Conclusion

It is evident from the above discussion that both English and Manipuri verbs show the oppositions between progressive and non-progressive aspect on the one hand, and perfect and non-perfect on the other.

As for the differences, unlike English Manipuri is a tenseless language. Again, in English there is combination of aspect and time; whereas in Manipuri there is no such thing therefore Manipuri has no aspectual difference between past progressive and past perfect progressive. The combination “root + -rəm ~ -ləm + -mi ~-ri ~-li”
indicates both past (time) progressive and past (time) perfect progressive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>English</th>
<th>Manipuri</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past prog.</td>
<td>He was eating.</td>
<td>ma cak ca-rəm-mi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past perf. prog.</td>
<td>He had been eating.</td>
<td>ma cak ca-rəm-mi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another area of contrast is the verbal structure. In English, aspectual variations are marked by both auxiliary and inflection. To indicate a progressive aspect in English, both in the past and present tenses, the structural pattern used is “be + stem - ing”. In the perfect aspect, the structural pattern is “have + V-ed (past participle)”. By way of contrast in Manipuri aspectual variations are marked morphologically.

The aspect markers or morphemes attached to the verbal root in the two languages are given in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Manipuri</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lexicalised be, have</td>
<td>Inflectional-ləm<del>rəm,-lək</del>rək</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflectional -ing, -ed</td>
<td>-ri, -re, -mi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>