CHAPTER 2

THE VERB PHRASE IN
BRITISH ENGLISH
II. The Verb Phrase in British English

2.1 Introductory Remarks

The main objective of this chapter is to provide a theoretical background to the verb phrase in BrE. It can be said that tense, aspect, mood and voice are the subsystems that constitute the verb phrase in English. This chapter discusses the formal and functional features of the verb phrase in BrE. Different classifications related to the verb phrase in BrE are taken into consideration in this chapter. It also presents a brief historical overview of the sub-systems of tense, aspect, mood and voice in English. The present study is based on the framework discussed in Quirk and Greenbaum’s ‘A University Grammar of English’ (1973).

2.2 The Verb Phrase

The term ‘verb’ originally comes from ‘were’, a proto-Indo-European word which means a ‘word’. It comes to English through the Latin word ‘Verbum’ and the old French word ‘Verbe’. Verbs describe actions, events and states and place them in a time frame. They tell us whether actions or events have been completed or are ongoing. They
point out whether a state is current or resultative and perform a number of other functions. Therefore, a verb is considered to be the 'heart' of the sentence. Jennings (1992) brings out the importance of the verb by asserting that, 'A verb is a power in all speech' (p. 27). According to Palmer (1965), a verb or a verb phrase is so central to the structure of the sentence that 'no syntactic analysis can proceed without a careful consideration of it' (p. 1).

As early as 100 BC, Dionysius Thrax stressed the importance of the verb (rhema) which he defined as 'a part of speech without case inflection, but inflected for tense, person, and number, signifying an activity or process performed or undergone' (quoted in Aarts and Meyer, 1995, p. 1). This definition reveals that even the very earliest grammarians were interested in both the formal and semantic characteristics of the verb. Linguists like Sweet (1891), Poustsma (1926), Curme(1931), Jespersen (1943), Diver (1963), Twaddell (1960), Halliday (1961), Joos (1964), Ehrman (1966), Chomsky (1965), Lakoff (1970), Huddleston (1969), Quirk and Greenbaum (1973), Leech and Svartvik (1973), Biber et al. (1999) and Greenbaum and Nelson (2002) have discussed the verb phrase in BrE. The next section presents some of
the definitions of the term ‘verb phrase’ as presented by various linguists.

2.3 A Survey of the Definitions of the Verb Phrase

There have been innumerable attempts to define what a verb is. Since early times the verb has received attention in several scholarly pursuits. Varied definitions of a verb phrase are available due to the differences among scholars who tend to focus on one aspect/some aspects to the exclusion of others. Some definitions aim at incorporating several characteristics, some bring in facts that are relevant and valid only for a particular language, some discuss the linguistic facts that are assumed to be valid for all languages and some focus only on non-linguistic facts. Attempts have also been made to give philosophical, metaphorical, functional, psychological and logical definitions of a verb.

In traditional grammar a verb phrase is ‘a group of words having the same syntactic function as a simple verb in a sentence’ (See Hartman, 1972, p. 248). Chomsky (1965) points out that if we have a sentence like ‘Sincerity may frighten the boy’, a traditional grammar treats ‘frighten the boy’ as a verb phrase, which consists of the verb ‘frighten’ and the noun phrase ‘the boy’.
Modern structural linguists have tended to define a verb more in terms of its formal characteristics rather than the meaning it expresses. They have defined a verb as a positional class in the sense that it occupies a particular slot in various sentences of a language and whatever occurs in that particular slot has the categorical function of a verb. Structural linguists have also defined a verb phrase taking into account the differences in the distribution of various grammatical categories.

Bloch (1947) reports that a verbal base in English is used without any suffix in several different functions, as an infinitive, an imperative and a finite present with the subject in the first or second person singular or in the plural. Bloomfield (1935) argues that the features of selection are usually very complicated in English, with form-classes. He points out that the form-class of finite verb expressions can be divided into two sub-classes - ‘singular’ and ‘plural’. Twaddell (1960) and Gleason (1955) present a classification of verbs in English on the basis of differences in paradigms and Gleason (1955) labels them as ‘paradigmatic subclasses’.
Diver (1963) points out that the chronological system is not the only system of the verb, but there is ‘at least a modal system also’ (p. 181). Zandvoort and Van Ek (1962) also comment on the form of the English verb and point out that regular verbs in English have the following forms.

a) the stem = play, wait
b) the stem + ing = playing, waiting
c) the stem + sibilant-suffix = plays, waits
d) the stem + dental suffix = played, waited

Joos (1964) defines the finite verb as one that requires a subject. Darbyshire (1968) defines it as a category which can have the properties of person, number, mood, voice and tense. The verb is also defined in terms of its distributional characteristics. Bolinger (1971) points out that if a word form is a verb, either it carries no inflectional morphemes at all or it carries one of the four - past (usually -ed), perfective (-en), third person singular present (-s) and -ing. Lyons (1968) describes the verb as one of the grammatical categories that belongs to the open class of words.
According to Huddleston (1988) the term ‘verb’ can be applied to a grammatically distinct word class in a language having the following properties.

a) It contains amongst its most central members the morphologically simplest words denoting actions, processes or events.

b) Members of the class carry inflections of tense, aspect and mood if the language has these as inflectional categories.

The verb phrase is defined in a different way in the generative grammar framework. In this framework, a verb phrase is a syntactic unit that corresponds to the entire predicate. In addition to the verb, this includes auxiliaries, objects, object complements, and other constituents apart from the subject. Geist (1971) comments that a verb phrase consists of ‘a verb plus other elements’ (p. 46). Chomsky (1957) analyses the sentence ‘They have devoured all the Belgian chocolates’ in the following way.
They have devoured all the Belgian chocolates. Jacobs and Rosenbaum (1968) argue that every verb phrase contains at least one constituent, a ‘verbal’ and therefore consider the verbal to be the primary constituent of a verb phrase. They present various phrase structure rules for verb phrases. They reveal with the help of various examples that a verb phrase can contain only a verbal, a verbal + one/two noun phrases or verbal + a sentence. However, in this
study the term ‘verb phrase’ is used to refer to the ‘main verb’ and its auxiliaries and it excludes the rest of the predicate.

Up to mid 1980’s it was thought that some languages like Japanese and Hungarian lacked a verb phrase, but the current view in generative grammar is that all languages have a verb phrase and the apparent lack of a verb phrase is a consequence of constituents having moved from their positions.

Biber et al. (1999) define the verb phrase as one that contains ‘a lexical verb or primary verb as head or main verb, either alone or accompanied by one or more auxiliaries’ (p. 99).

Thus, the above discussion reveals that though contemporary linguists and grammarians agree upon the existence of the grammatical class of the verb, their approaches to the study of the verb are varied. Linguists with a theoretical orientation have studied the verbs from the perspective of the X-Bar Theory (see, for example, Jackendoff, 1977), while linguists with a descriptive orientation have provided general description of the English verb (see, for example, Palmer, 1965). Linguists with both theoretical and descriptive orientations have focused more on the role of the verb in English grammar (see Huddleston, 1976 and Hudson, 1990). Some semantically oriented linguists have
concentrated on the particular semantic roles that verbs determine in a clause (see Fillmore, 1968 and McCawley, 1971). Duffley (1992) explores the semantic and pragmatic aspects of verbs and verbal constructions.

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) hold the view that the verb element is always a verb phrase. According to them, a verb phrase can consist of one verb or more than one verb and if it consists of more than one verb, the phrase consists of ‘a head verb preceded by one or more auxiliary verbs’ (p. 17).

It can be said that tense, aspect, mood and voice are the subsystems that constitute a verb phrase in English. Quirk and Greenbaum’s ‘A University Grammar of English’ (1973) represents an eclectic grammar and the present study is based on the framework discussed in this book. According to this framework, English has only two tenses- present and past, the progressive and the perfective aspects, active and passive voice and modal verbs. Mood is classified into three types-the indicative, the imperative and the subjunctive.

Thus, the verb phrase in English can consist of a lexical verb. For example,

She writes short stories every day.
In this example ‘writes’ is a verb phrase. The verb phrase may also have one or more auxiliary verbs together with a main verb. For example,

She has been writing poems for several years.

In this example ‘has been writing’ is a verb phrase. In English the main verb can be preceded optionally by a maximum of four auxiliary verbs.

2.4 Classification of Verbs in English

Verbs can be classified in different ways in English. For example, it is possible to draw a distinction between lexical and auxiliary verbs, simple and complex verbs, finite and non-finite verbs, transitive and intransitive verbs, regular and irregular verbs and primary and modal verbs. This section only discusses the distinctions between stative and dynamic verbs, transitive and intransitive verbs and primary and modal verbs in detail as these distinctions are of greater significance as far as observations on the verb phrase in IE are concerned.
2.4.1 Stative and Dynamic Verbs

The distinction between stative and dynamic verbs is considered to be a fundamental one in English grammar. Verbs that can occur with the progressive aspect are labelled as dynamic verbs and verbs which generally do not occur in the progressive form are termed as stative verbs. For example, activity verbs like 'call', 'drink' and 'throw', process verbs like 'grow', 'change' and 'deteriorate', verbs of bodily sensation like 'feel', 'ache' and 'hurt', momentary verbs like 'jump', 'hit' and 'knock' and transitional event verbs like 'fall' and 'arrive' are frequently used in the progressive aspect and therefore, they are called dynamic verbs. Thus, it is possible to say in English 'He is drinking coffee' or 'My head is aching'. On the other hand, verbs of involuntary perception like 'see', 'hear' and 'smell', verbs of likes and dislikes like 'love', 'hate' and 'prefer', and verbs of mental processes like 'remember', 'know' and 'understand' are generally not used in the progressive form and therefore, they are called stative verbs. Thus, English does not allow constructions like 'We are knowing him very well' or 'He is liking music'.
2.4.2 Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

There are different kinds of verbs corresponding closely to the different types of object and complement. Verbs which require a direct object to complete the sentence are called transitive verbs. Greenbaum (1991) argues that the term 'transitive' comes from the notion that a person performs an action that affects some person or thing. Verbs like 'bring', 'obtain', 'reduce' and 'take' essentially require an object and are, therefore, called transitive verbs. If a main verb does not require another element to complete it (object/complement), the verb is termed intransitive. For example, verbs like 'sit', 'wait' and 'fall' are intransitive verbs. There are some verbs in English that can function both as transitive and intransitive. For example, 'change', 'continue' and 'understand'. Biber et al. (1999) make an observation that verbs occurring with transitive patterns are common across all semantic domains of verbs in English, whereas there are only a few exclusively intransitive verbs. According to them, there are only three semantic domains that have common verbs which are exclusively intransitive. They are activity verbs like 'smile' and 'stare', occurrence verbs like 'die' and 'happen' and existence verbs like 'exist' and 'live'.
2.4.3 Primary and Modal Auxiliary Verbs

According to Quirk and Greenbaum (1973), auxiliary verbs can be classified into primary and modal auxiliaries. Primary auxiliary verbs play a kind of dual role, as they can function both as lexical and auxiliary verbs. 'Be', 'Have' and 'Do' are examples of the primary auxiliary verbs. For example, in the sentence 'I do my work sincerely', 'do' is a lexical verb, whereas in the sentence 'I do believe in God', 'do' is an auxiliary verb.

During the last few decades, a number of linguists have taken interest in the English modals. Modal auxiliaries represent a very special class of verbs in English. According to Berk (1999), in contrast to primary auxiliary verbs, modal auxiliary verbs are semantically rich. Marino (1973) defines modality as 'the speaker’s view of the potential involved in the predication' (p. 312). Modals always occur as the first element of the verb phrase, and they help the main verb to express a range of meanings like possibility, probability, permission, certainty, necessity and obligation. Modal auxiliaries do not carry third person present (-s) ending, and they do not have past participle, present participle and infinitive forms.
Twaddell (1963) discusses twelve modal auxiliary verbs and divides them into two groups - ‘Paired Modals’ and ‘Unpaired Modals’. Paired modals are ‘shall-should’, ‘will-would’, ‘can-could’ and ‘may-might’. Unpaired modals are ‘must’, ‘dare’, ‘need’ and ‘ought to’. Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) add the modal ‘used to’ to this list and they label ‘ought to’, ‘dare’, ‘need’ and ‘used to’ as ‘marginal modals’.


Lyons (1977) discusses ‘epistemic modality’, ‘deontic modality’ and ‘dynamic modality’. Epistemic modality expresses ‘possibility’ and ‘necessity’. Its main exponents are ‘may’ and ‘must’, though ‘should’ and ‘will’ are also used to some extent. Deontic modality expresses ‘permission’ and ‘obligation’ with ‘may’ and ‘must’ and marginally with ‘shall’. Dynamic modality is divided into ‘neutral’ and ‘subject oriented’ modality. Neutral modality is expressed by ‘can’ for
possibility and 'must' for necessity. Subject oriented modality uses 'can' for ability and 'will' for willingness.

Hermeren (1978) analyses modals in the Brown Corpus of American English and observes that 'would' is the most frequent modal form. Ehrman in his pioneering study (1966) and Coates (1983) discuss the semantics of the modals in Modern English.

The following are the three chief meanings expressed by can/could.

a) Possibility – It could have been a disastrous accident.

b) Ability – He can sing well.

c) Permission – Could I speak to John, please?

Though 'can' and 'could' share all these meanings, there are also some differences between the two modals. 'Could' is used quite often as the past tense equivalent of 'can' in indirect speech. For example, I asked him if he could help me.

However, 'could' is not used in BrE to refer to the fulfilment of a single action in the past. For example, it is not possible to say 'I ran after the bus and could catch it'. It has to be substituted by the form 'be able to'. The other difference between 'can' and 'could' is that 'could' can be used to express hypothetical meaning. For example,
(i) If India can overcome poverty, it will become a superpower.

(ii) If India could overcome poverty, it will become a superpower.

Example (i) expresses a ‘real’ or ‘open’ condition. The speaker expects that India will overcome poverty and become a superpower. On the other hand, example (ii) expresses an ‘unreal’ or ‘hypothetical’ condition. Here the speaker does not expect that India would overcome poverty. ‘Could’ is also used to express a polite request. For example, ‘Could you tell me the way to the University of Pune?’

The following two meanings are associated with ‘may’ and ‘might’.

1) Possibility – This monument may be a hundred years old.

2) Permission – May I come in?

‘May’ is considered to be more formal than ‘can’. Like ‘could’, ‘might’ is used as the past tense equivalent of ‘may’ in indirect speech, but unlike ‘could’, outside indirect speech, ‘might’ is rarely used as a past tense equivalent of ‘may’. As far as the hypothetical meaning is concerned, ‘might’ functions like ‘could’.

The modal auxiliaries ‘will’, ‘would’ and ‘shall’ express

a) Prediction – She will have reached Mumbai by now.

b) Volition – I shall have finished writing this book by next Monday.
- Would you do me a favour? (expresses weak volition/willingness).

- I will do this job in an hour. (expresses strong volition/insistence)

Like 'could', 'would' is also used to express hypothetical meaning. For example, 'If you had helped her, he would have been nice to you'. It expresses an 'unreal' or 'impossible' condition. Due to its association with hypothetical meaning, 'would' adds a note of tentativeness to a statement in which it replaces 'will'. So in a request when 'will' is substituted by 'would', it becomes more polite. For example, 'Would you lend me your book?' 'Shall' is also used for making enquiries about the person's volition, making offers and also for making suggestions. For example, 'Shall we go to Paris during the vacation?'

The following are two main meanings associated with 'must'.

a) Logical necessity – He must be an expert in this field.

b) Obligation- You must complete this work before 7:00 p.m.

The modals 'should' and 'ought to' are also used to express obligation. 'Should' is also used to express hypothetical meaning, but unlike 'would' it occurs only with the first person pronouns. For
example, ‘I should be grateful to you if you could complete this work by next week’.

2.5 Introductory Remarks on Tense

Tense in English has drawn grammarians’ attention over the past several decades (See Palmer, 1965; Leech, 1971; Herlt, 1975; Comrie, 1985 and Bhat, 1999).

According to the traditional view, tense is a verbal inflectional category expressing time. The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (1995) defines tense as ‘any of the forms of a verb that may be used to indicate the time of the action or state expressed by the verb’ (p. 1231). Bhat (1999) defines it as ‘an inflectional marker of the verb used for denoting the temporal location of an event (or situation)’ (p.13). These definitions conform to the general view of tense held by traditional grammars.

Joos (1964) takes a structural approach and defines tense as a category in which ‘a finite verb is either marked with -ed or lacks the marker’ (p. 120). In his definition he excludes any semantic connection with time. Comrie (1985) presents one of the comprehensive definitions of tense. He labels it as a ‘grammaticalised expression of location in
time' (p. 9). The structural and semantic approaches seem to have been brought together in this definition. A similar point of view is also discussed in Palmer (1965), Leech (1971) and Dahl (1985). According to Quirk and Greenbaum (1973), by tense we understand ‘the correspondence between the form of the verb and our concept of time’ (p. 40). Comrie (1973) talks about tense as a ‘deictic category’ as it locates situations in time usually with reference to the present moment, though also with reference to other situations. On the other hand, Bull (1968) expresses the view that ‘no tense system deals with time’ (p. 16).

Though there are differences of opinion, in general tense is perceived as ‘a grammatical category with time relations as its semantic basis’ (Huddleston, 1988, p. 73). Tense is considered to be a category of the verb that is obligatory in the finite verb phrase and the first verb in the verb phrase always carries the tense. The most striking feature of the verb system in English is that there is no necessary one-to-one equivalence between tense and time. Tense is a formal grammatical category, whereas time is a universal semantic category. Thus, to understand the concept of time, we have take into consideration the meaning of the sentence. For example,

The Minister is visiting Mumbai next week.
In this example, the simple present tense is used and the time indicated is future.

2.5.1 A Brief Historical Overview of Tense in English

The English tense system has its roots in Latin and Greek. According to Skeat (1978), the term ‘tense’ is probably derived from the Latin word ‘tempus’, which means ‘time’. Aristotle observed that there were systematic differences in the tenses in Greek, and he is considered to have been the first person to recognize the category of tenses.

Hussey (1995) points out that Old English like Modern English had only two tenses – present and past. However, Berk (1999) argues that Old English had a far more elaborate present and past tense system than Modern English.

Old English tense markers also reflected the number of the subject i.e. singular or plural. The third person singular present tense ending ‘-s’ was a northern form in both Old English and Middle English. The corresponding form in Midland and Southern dialects was ‘-eth’. Berk (1999) gives some examples of Old English verb suffixes. For example, ‘He maketh me to lie down in green pastures’ (p. 99). By the 18th century, all the present tense endings had been lost except the third
person singular -s. The past tense in Old English was also highly
inflected. The markers that distinguished first, second and third person
have disappeared in Modern English and the vast majority of verbs mark
the past tense with an [-ed] suffix. Hussey (1995) argues that most of the
English verbs which form their past tense by using the suffix -ed are
derived from the so called ‘weak’ verbs of Old English. The normal
Middle English method of asking questions was simple inversion of
subject and verb, for example, ‘Parted you in good terms?’
(Shakespeare’s ‘King Lear’).

In the scheme of tenses presented by Jespersen (1924) and
Poutsma (1926) there is no distinct place for the ‘present perfect’.
Jespersen believes that it is essentially a ‘present’ or to be more specific,
a retrospective variety of the present tense. On the other hand, in
Poutsma’s view (1926) it is primarily a past tense having a current
relevance. Thus, it seems that the traditional grammars did not make a
clear distinction between ‘tense’ and ‘aspect’.

2.5.2 Categories of the English Tense

Different grammarians have classified tenses in English in a
variety of ways. Grammarians like Edmondson et al. (1977), Thomson
and Martinet (1960) and Augustine and Joseph (1987) assume that tense and time are really the same and categorize tenses in twelve types as past, present and future in combination with the progressive and the perfective aspects.

Several grammarians have argued that English has three tenses, the present, the past and the future (See Zandvoort and Van Ek, 1962 and Allen, 1947).

As per the structural definition that describes tense as a form of the verb indicating time reference, English has only two tenses- the present and the past. Palmer (1965) does not accept the selection of ‘shall’ and ‘will’ as the markers of the future tense in English as ‘they are not the only indicators of future time in English’ (p. 63) and also because ‘will’ ‘may indicate probability or habitual activity’ (p. 63). Comrie (1985) seems to agree with the analysis presented by Palmer (1965). He points out that ‘will’ has a number of other uses in addition to the expression of future time reference and like Palmer (1965) he also argues that there are many instances of future time reference where it is not necessary to use the auxiliary ‘will’. According to Quirk and Greenbaum’s framework (1973) also, there is no future tense in English.
This study adopts the same view and excludes the traditionally considered ‘future tense’ from the analysis.

Thus, morphologically English has only two tenses - present and past and it has three time references - past, present and future. The two tense system in English is marked by differences in form. The present tense does not have any marker except the suffix ‘-s’ for the third person singular subject. It has the following three phonemic variations.

\[ (-s) \quad /s/ \text{ as in makes} \]
\[ /z/ \text{ as in needs} \]
\[ /zd/ \text{ as in marches} \]

The past tense is generally marked with the suffix ‘-ed’. It also has three phonemic variants.

\[ (-ed) \quad /t/ \text{ as in stopped} \]
\[ /d/ \text{ as in asked} \]
\[ /td/ \text{ as in rounded} \]

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The two tenses - simple present and simple past - are related to distinctions in time, but several linguists have pointed out that they do not correspond precisely to the difference between present and past in the real world. The present tense generally refers to a time that includes the time of speaking, but it usually extends backwards and forwards in time. Leech (1971) refers to the present tense in English as being ‘psychologically present’. Therefore, some linguists consider ‘present’ to be a misleading term and prefer the term ‘non-past’.

Some typical time expressions that are used with the present tense are ‘always’, ‘often’, ‘usually’, ‘every day’ and ‘sometimes’. Expressions like ‘yesterday’, ‘last month’, ‘last week’, ‘a week ago’ and ‘that day’ generally go with the past tense. Kilby (1984) argues that present is a form specifying ‘vividness’ or ‘immediacy’ whereas past is a form specifying ‘remoteness’ or ‘distance’. The next two sections comment on the semantic functions of the simple present and the simple past.

2.5.3 Functions of the Simple Present Tense

Linguists like Leech (1971), Palmer (1965), Comrie (1985), Quirk and Greenbaum (1985) and Leech and Svartvik (1973) have discussed
the functional role of the present tense. This section discusses some of
the main uses of the present tense in BrE.

1) Iterative use – One of the uses of the present tense is to express
habitual activities. Thus, it refers to an action repeated at intervals
and the repetition is usually denoted by adverbials like ‘always’,
‘every day’ and ‘often’. For example,

a) Every day my brother takes our dog for a walk.

b) It rains a lot in this part of the country.

2) Unrestrictive use – In the case of sayings or quotations of the
famous persons, the present is used. For example, ‘A stitch in
time saves nine’.

3) Instantaneous use- The present tense signifies an event
simultaneous with the present moment, and normally occurs only
in certain definable contexts. Sportscasters and individuals who
are demonstrating some sort of process often use the present to
lend immediacy to their words. For example, ‘Hacker passes the
ball to Short. Short moves inside, but Burley wins it back’ (quoted
in Eastwood, 1994, p. 84).

4) Reference to the past – The use traditionally known by the term
‘historic present’ is best treated as a story-teller’s licence,
whereby past happenings are portrayed or imagined as if they were going on at the present time. This creates a dramatic effect of the past event of happening at the present moment. For example, ‘The giant enters the castle and takes the child away by force’.

5) Reference to the future- The present is used along with a time adverbial when a speaker wishes to refer to a scheduled future event. For example,

a) The bus leaves for Mumbai at 6:30 tomorrow evening.

b) The sun sets at 6:40 this evening.

Very often, the simple present is also used in conditional and temporal clauses to refer to future time. For example,

a) I will be happy if she comes to my house.

b) I will meet you before I leave for Chennai.

6) Performative function – This use has been discussed by Palmer (1965). The performative verbs express formal actions of declaration. This kind of use is found in situations where the action indicated by a sentence is performed by uttering the sentence. For example,

a) I name this ship Titanic.
b) I thank you for your help.

2.5.4 Functions of the Simple Past Tense

Huddleston and Pullam (2002) use the term ‘preterite’ to refer to the past tense. According to Palmer (1965), there are two general meanings which are commonly associated with the past tense. One basic element of the meaning is that ‘the happening takes place before the present moment’ (p. 13). For example, ‘I wrote a poem on India’. Another element is that the speaker has ‘a definite time in mind…characteristically named by an adverbial expression accompanying the past tense verb’ (p. 13). For example, ‘Last evening I met my teacher’.

The following are some of the specific meanings of the simple past tense.

a) Past state – Verbs with stative meaning can be used in the simple past tense to refer to a state of affairs that existed for a long time in the past. For example, ‘Prof. Joshi worked as the Principal of this school for fifteen years’.

b) Habitual activity in the past – Verbs with dynamic meaning can be used in the simple past tense for a habitual or repeated action in the past.
The habitual meaning of the past can also be expressed by ‘used to’. For example, ‘Last year I used to visit the book exhibitions in Mumbai’.

c) Reference to the present and the future – In indirect or reported speech if the reporting verb is in the past tense, the verb of the embedded clause is in the past tense. This change of tense in the verb phrase is referred to as ‘back-shift’. For example, ‘My neighbour told me that he wanted a glass of water’. It is used in indirect speech to refer to the present and the future. For example, ‘The teacher told the students that she would give them the books on Sunday’. With verbs like ‘wonder’ and ‘want’, the past tense can indicate a present state of mind with a tentativeness that shows that the speaker is polite. For example, ‘I wondered if I could talk to you for a few minutes’.

d) To express hypothetical meaning – In if-clauses and certain subordinate clauses, the past tense can be used to express hypothetical meaning. For example, ‘I wish I knew the truth’.

2.6 Introductory Remarks on Aspect

The terms ‘tense’ and ‘aspect’ are closely related categories in English. There has been a tendency to incorporate the aspectual distinctions under the general category of tenses. For example, Jespersen
(1933) treats the progressive as an ‘expanded tense’ and Huddleston and Pullam (2002) label aspectual differences as ‘secondary tenses’.

However, linguists like Hockett (1958), Palmer (1965), Chomsky (1965) and Comrie (1976) consider it necessary to draw a distinction between ‘tense’ and ‘aspect’ as the two categories are concerned with two different dimensions of time.

The term ‘aspect’ has its roots in the Russian word ‘вид’ which means ‘gaze’ or ‘view’. It was first used to refer to the basic dichotomy between perfective and imperfective in Russian and other Slavonic languages. Bright (1992) brings out the distinction between tense and aspect as follows. ‘Tense refers to the grammatical expression of the time of the situation described in the proposition relative to some other time. Aspect is not relational like tense; rather it designates the internal temporal organization of the situation described by the verb’ (pp. 144-145). According to Biber et al. (1991), aspect ‘relates primarily to considerations such as the completion or lack of events or states described by a verb’ (p. 126). In Comrie’s view (1976), tense relates to ‘situation external time’ whereas aspect is concerned with ‘the internal temporal constituency of the situation’ (p. 5). The following examples bring out the distinctiveness of aspect in English.
1(a) Leena had cooked when I went to her house.

(b) Leena was cooking when I went to her house.

In both the sentences the past tense is used, but there is a difference in terms of aspect. (a) is in the perfective aspect whereas (b) is in the progressive aspect.

2(a) Nitin plays cricket every day.

(b) Nitin is playing cricket.

The present tense is used in both the sentences, but the difference in these sentences is in terms of aspect. Sentence (a) is non-perfective and non-progressive, whereas sentence (b) is in the progressive aspect.

The above examples reveal that aspect brings in a differentiation in meaning and therefore it should be considered a system in itself. They also indicate that though both tense and aspect relate primarily to time distinctions in the verb phrase, it is essential to make a distinction between the two. Aspect deserves to be studied independently in its own right. Languages have different ways of expressing the aspectual meanings. It seems to be a matter of historical accident that though aspect played a vital role in different languages, the notion of ‘aspect’ did not occur prominently in traditional grammar as the notion of ‘tense’.
2.6.1 Classification of the English Aspectual System

The term ‘aspect’ has been used in diverse ways over the centuries. Modern grammarians disagree about what kind of constructions should be called ‘aspect’ and have offered different analyses of the English aspectual system.

It has been observed that a large number of verbs in English express aspectual meanings. Sometimes such verbs are called ‘aspectual verbs’. Huddleston (1984) observes that a number of catenative verbs in English like ‘stop’, ‘begin’ and ‘keep’ convey aspectual meanings. For example, ‘He keeps disturbing me’. This sentence may be compared with another sentence with a similar meaning, ‘He is always disturbing me’.

Comrie (1976) presents aspect as a part of general linguistic theory. In his study, he offers the classification of semantic aspectual oppositions in general and argues that it is possible to study the aspectual system of a particular language with the help of this classification. Those aspectual distinctions that are grammaticalized in a language generally attract the grammarians. Aspectual distinctions are usually expressed through inflections or periphrasis or both. Verb phrases like ‘is singing’ and ‘have completed’ reveal that in English aspectual distinctions are
expressed through a combination of both inflectional suffixes (-ing and -en) and periphrasis.

The English aspectual system has been analysed in a variety of ways. Willis (1972) discusses five major categories of aspect – inceptive, durative, perfective, terminative and iterative. According to Poutsma (1926), English has momentaneous, durative and mutative aspects. Hirtle (1967) makes a distinction between immanent aspect and transcendent aspect. Trask (1999) classifies aspect into perfective, progressive, habitual, iterative, inchoative and conclusive. Lyons (1968) recognizes four major categories of aspect – progressive, perfective, habitual and mutative. Leech (1971) offers the following classification of aspect in English.
According to this classification, the marked categories have more morphological material than the unmarked ones in each of the two main classes.

Though a variety of classifications of the English aspectual system are available, there is a general agreement among the grammarians that English has two aspects – Progressive and Perfective. (See, for example, Quirk et al. 1972, Comrie, 1976 and Huddleston,
Structurally the progressive aspect is marked by ‘be + -ing’ and the perfective aspect is marked by ‘have + -en’. The present study takes into consideration both these aspects. It uses the term ‘progressive’ to refer to its canonical form ‘be + -ing’ and it uses the term ‘perfective to refer to its canonical form ‘have + -en’. The terms ‘perfect’ and ‘perfective’ are used synonymously in this study.

2.6.2 A Sketch of the Historical Change of the English Progressive and Perfective

Both the progressive and perfective seem to have developed very gradually in English. This section aims at giving a brief outline of the development of the English progressive and the perfective.

Some linguists have argued that old English was poor in the expression of aspect (See for example, Hussey, 1995). However, though the frequency of the use of the progressive and the perfective was less, the analysis of Old English prose and poetry reveals that both the progressive and the perfective existed in Old English.

The use of the progressive in writing in Old English was probably influenced by Latin originals, especially in translations. The origin of the development of the English progressive aspect was the Old English
construction that used a form of beon/wesan (to be/ to become) with a present participle ‘-ende’. Mustanoja (1960) suggests that the likely source of the current progressive in English is the Celtic languages that were spoken in Britain in the past.

It has been argued that in Old English the progressive had the same overall function of emphasising contextually defined temporal reference as in Middle English. Thus, it seems that many features of the modern progressive were recognizable in Old English.

About the history of the progressive in Middle English, opinion is divided. According to Van der Laan (1922), the progressive ‘being an exotic plant, could not hold its own, and disappeared’ (p. 8). On the other hand, Scheffer (1975) argues that it was only at the beginning of Middle English period that the progressive did not develop much, but the continuity of the progressive throughout the Middle English period can be demonstrated by different texts. In certain respects, the meaning of the progressive changed during the Middle English period and its uses became more defined than what they were in Old English. It has been argued that during the Middle English period, the progressive developed the functions that are more or less equivalent to the ones prevalent in
Modern English. In the course of the Middle English period the ending of the present participle in Old English 'ende' changed into 'ing'.

Quantitative research on the development of the progressive has indicated that the frequency of the construction has been increasing ever since the late Middle English period. Thus, with the exception of the beginning of the Middle English period, the history of the progressive shows a steady increase in its use. The use of the progressive has increased in Modern English in comparison to what it was in Old English and Middle English. According to Beal (2004), 'Possibly the most spectacular change in English syntax during the later modern period is the increase in both the frequency and range of uses of the progressive' (p. 78).

The Old Aryan system of tenses assigned no place to the perfect. It was at first an 'intensive present' or 'permansive' (See, Jespersen, 1924). According to Berk (1999), the term 'perfective' is derived from an old meaning of the adjective 'perfect' which meant 'something that is thoroughly made or fully accomplished and finished' (p. 111). Sarauv (1933) points out that the perfect originally denoted the state. He comments that the meaning of perfect was 'gained by an inference. He
who possesses has acquired, he who wears a garment has put it on’ (quoted in Jespersen, 1933, p. 269).

According to Brunner (1963) to refer to an action in the past, Old English had preterite (another term for simple past) as well as the perfective, but these forms were not sharply differentiated in Old English as in Modern English. The perfect was probably restricted to transitive verbs in the beginning. According to McCoard (1978), ‘The adjectival participle postponed as a complement of the object reflects the old form of the perfect as it is first encountered in English’ (p. 219). Thus, in Old English ‘have’ in collocation with a past participle was a notional verb denoting possession.

Traugott (1972) points out that the absence of perfective with auxiliaries like ‘He may have seen her’ is a noticeable feature of Old English.

Brunner (1963) has noted the use of perfect in Middle English especially in Wycliffe’s Bible and in Chaucer. The perfect seems to have developed considerably in Middle English. Visser (1966) observes that in Middle English the perfect was employed in place of the past tense in Modern English and vice versa. As late as Shakespeare’s time, the construction ‘He is come’ was far more frequent than ‘He has come’. It
has been observed that till the 17th century ‘be + past participle’ was frequently used, later on it became more and more recessive and this construction was lost entirely in the twentieth century.

According to McCoard (1978) there are several cases where we would use perfect for Chaucer’s preterite. This suggests that the perfect has taken over or at least shared some of the earlier domains of the past. The current opposition between the perfect and the preterite in English is strong.

Thus, the above discussion reveals that the use of the progressive and the perfective in English has been expanding over the last few centuries.

2.6.3 Uses of the Progressive in British English

The term ‘Progressive’ has been given a variety of labels like ‘expanded tense’, ‘continuous tense’, ‘definite tense’, ‘imperative tense’ and ‘periphrastic form’. Some linguists have derived the term ‘progressive’ in language-universal semantic terms, whereas others have defined it in language—specific formal terms. This evidently leads to a lot of terminological confusion, but the two approaches are
complementary. Comrie (1976) classifies aspect in general linguistic terms in the following way.

![Diagram of Aspectual Oppositions]

This diagram reveals that Comrie (1976) does not make a distinction between ‘Progressiveness’ and ‘Continuousness’. He defines progressiveness as ‘imperfectivity that is not occasioned by habituality’ (p. 33) and comments that it is ‘the combination of progressive meaning and non-stative meaning’ (p. 35). For example, the sentence ‘My mother is watching the cricket match’ refers to an action that is in progress at the moment of utterance and it conveys an action of limited duration. This example combines both progressive and non-stative meanings.
It has been observed that the use of the progressive has been expanding over the years and many of the uses of the progressive in English do not fit appropriately in Comrie’s general definition of the progressive. This discussion brings out the point that it is necessary to draw a distinction between the progressive in a particular language and the general linguistic definition of progressiveness.

Some of the main uses of the progressive in BrE are as follows.

1) The progressive implies an action of limited duration. For example, the sentence ‘He is playing football’ indicates that the activity of playing continues only for a short period of time.

2) One of the most important functions of the Progressive is to suggest incompleteness of an activity. For example,

   a) My parents are talking to my teacher.

   b) I was reading a short story yesterday. (I might not have read the whole story).

3) It is used to suggest a pejorative attitude. For example,

   He is always breaking things.

4) It is also used to refer to a future happening anticipated in the present. Its basic meaning is ‘fixed arrangement, plan or programme’. For example,
I am presenting a paper tomorrow in the conference.

Leech (1971) provides a list of verbs that can occur with the progressive aspect.

He also discusses the types of verbs that are generally not used in the progressive.
2.6.4 Uses of the Perfective in British English

The semantics of the English perfect is quite complex. According to Bauer (1970) the perfect in English has always proved to be ‘a somewhat inconvenient case’ (p. 189). Some of the main uses of the perfective are given below.

1) One of the most important meanings conveyed by the perfective in BrE is that an action which took place in the past has some significance at the moment of speaking. For example,

I have completed all my work.
The present significance of this sentence can be ‘I am free to come to your house’.

2) The perfect is used with reference to a past event to imply that the result of the event is still operative at the present time. For example,

The train has arrived on platform number 2. (It means that the train is right now on platform No.2).

3) The two aspects - perfect and progressive - frequently combine in BrE to convey the meaning of a persistent situation. The perfect progressive denotes a situation that begins in the past and continues up to the point of reference. The prepositional phrases ‘since’ and ‘for’ are generally used along with the perfect progressive. For example,

I have been learning music since 2001.

There is a difference between the action expressed by the present perfect and the present perfect progressive. For example,

a) I have written a story.

b) I have been writing a story.

(a) suggests that the process of writing is over, whereas (b) suggests that the job of writing a story is not completed. It continues in the present and may continue even beyond.
4) It is used to point out an event that takes place in the immediate past. It is often associated with adverb phrases of time like 'just' and 'recently'. For example,

My neighbour has just gone out.

5) The use of the past perfect is usually associated with an action completed before a past moment. In BrE, the past perfect is generally used when there are two actions in the past. For example,

I had finished my work when my friend arrived.

*The following diagram clarifies the meaning of the past perfect.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finishing Work</th>
<th>Friend’s Arrival</th>
<th>Now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past in the Past</td>
<td>Past</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6) The perfect progressive can also be used to denote habituality. For example,

I have been watching only horror films.
2.7 Introductory Remarks on Mood

The term ‘mood’ is a variant of the word ‘mode’ and it was borrowed from the Latin word ‘modus’, which means manner. Willis (1972) defines mood as ‘a grammatical term which refers to a set of verb forms used to indicate the speaker’s attitude toward or understanding of the factuality or likelihood or desirability of the action or condition expressed’ (p. 173). Thus, mood is a property of verbs which denotes the psychological attitude of the speaker towards an event. Chalker and Weiner (1994) define it as ‘one of the formal categories into which verb forms are classified indicating whether the verb is expressing fact, command, hypothesis etc’ (p. 247).

Several linguists have pointed out the fact that there is a lot of terminological confusion between the terms ‘mood’ and ‘modality’. Berk (1999) argues that the terms ‘mood’ and ‘modality’ are etymologically related. Several definitions of ‘mood’ reveal that there is a very close relationship between ‘mood’ and ‘modality’. For example, Huddleston and Pullam (2002) comment, ‘Mood involves the grammaticalisation of Modality within the verbal system’ (p. 172). Traditional grammarians also treat imperatives, subjunctives and modal auxiliaries under the notion of mood or modality. Lyons (1968) has only the category ‘mood’
under which he places imperatives, interrogatives and other scales of 'modality' like wish, intention, necessity and obligation. Panfilov (1968) argues that mood is a phenomenon at the 'syntactic' level, whereas modality at the 'logico-grammatical' level, although the two might coincide in a number of cases. According to Householder (1971), mood is a wider category of which modality forms only a part.

The above discussion shows that there have been divergent views about the relationship between 'mood' and 'modality'. However, there seems to be a general agreement among the linguists that 'mood' is a grammatical category. According to Quirk and Greenbaum (1973), mood in English is expressed to a minor extent by the subjunctive and to a much greater extent by the past tense forms and by means of the modal auxiliaries. Thus, this framework seems to treat 'mood' as a wider category than 'modality'. It is felt that in further large scale studies an attempt needs to be made to arrive at a clear distinction between the terms 'mood' and 'modality'. It is generally agreed that there are three standard moods in English - indicative, imperative and subjunctive.
2.7.1 A Brief History of Mood in English

According to Berk (1999), unlike Latin or classical Greek, Old English did not have an elaborate system of mood markers. Old English verbs were inflected for person, number and tense in the indicative mood and for number and tense in the subjunctive mood. It seems that in Old English the imperative required special forms of the verb. The term ‘imperative’ has been derived from Latin ‘imperativus’, which means ‘to command’.

Willis (1972) and Jacobs (1995) point out that the frequency of the subjunctive was far more in Old English than in Modern English. For example, Willis (1972) gives the following example of the use of subjunctive in Old English,

If it were done when ‘tis done, then t’ were well, it were done quickly
(p. 175).

He also points out that in the past, constructions like ‘Unless he go quickly, he will miss the opening’ were common, but now generally the indicative mood is used in such constructions. The term ‘subjunctive’ is derived from Latin ‘Subjungere’ which means ‘to join to’. Several linguists have expressed the view that in Old English special verb forms existed to communicate non-facts, e.g. wants, hopes and hypothetical
situations but the subjunctive in Modern English is somewhat weak. Curme (1931) makes an observation that in the course of a long phonetic development, the subjunctive forms lost their distinctive endings and modal auxiliaries were pressed into service to express the same ideas. In the mandative subjunctive, when the subject of the clause is in the third person and its verb does not take third person {-s} ending and ‘be’ is used in its infinitive form, these typical verb forms are considered to be the vestiges of the Old English subjunctive system. The use of ‘were’ with first person and third person singular subjects is also a remnant of the old subjunctive system.

2.7.2 The Formal and Functional Features of Mood

As discussed in 2.7, mood expresses the attitude of the speaker to what is said. In English there are three categories of mood – indicative, imperative and subjunctive.

The indicative mood is used to state facts, describe events or ask questions. It is the usual mood in declarative, interrogative and exclamatory sentences. The subject is overtly present in the indicative mood and there is a subject-verb concord. For example,
a) He goes to the church every Sunday.
b) How well does Sachin play?

The imperative mood is used for making requests and commands. The formal characteristics of the imperative mood are that it does not make tense distinctions and the verb is always used in the base form. Unlike the indicative mood, the subject is generally not overtly present in case of the imperative mood and it almost never co-occurs with the perfect. For example,

a) Open the window.

b) Please work fast.

The subjunctive mood is considered to be the most complex of the three moods. The subjunctive verb forms express doubt, unlikelihood, condition, wish uncertainty, desirability, probability, denial and many other such concepts. Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) discuss three categories of the subjunctive.

![Subjunctive Mood Diagram]

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The mandative subjunctive can be used with any verb in subordinate that-clause when the main clause contains an expression of recommendation, demand or resolution. The term ‘mandative’ is derived from the Latin word ‘mandate’ which means ‘a command or an order’. This type of subjunctive is commonly used in formal contexts. For example,

a) The workers demanded that John be granted leave.

b) I suggest that he leave.

The formulaic subjunctive is used in utterances that are learned as a whole. For example,

a) God bless you.

b) Long live the king!

The subjunctive ‘were’ is hypothetical in meaning and it is used in conditional and concessive clauses and in subordinate clauses after verbs like ‘wish’. For example,

a) I wish I were a bird.

2.8 Introductory Remarks on Voice

According to Willis (1972), voice is concerned with ‘whether a sentence subject performs or receives the action stated in the verb’
English verbs have two voices - active and passive. The active voice expresses an action performed by the subject and the passive voice is used when the subject receives the action of the verb. For example,

a) My uncle teaches English. - Active voice

b) English is taught by my uncle.- Passive voice

The relationship between active and passive has always attracted a lot of scholarly attention. Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) see the importance of the passive voice as a means of reversing the normal order of ‘agentive’ and ‘affected’ element and thus of adjusting clause structure to ‘end-focus’ and ‘end-weight’. Scholars like Jespersen (1933) and Poutsma (1926) have also argued that the sentences in the active and passive voice are not synonymous in every respect and they maintain that there is a difference in meaning between the active and the passive voice. Poutsma (1926) comments, ‘... It is a mistaken notion that an active sentence and its passive construction are identical in meaning, there being a distinct difference in the prominence assigned by the speaker to the two participants in the action, and in the degree of passiveness in which the object of the activity is represented’ (p. 102).
Chomsky (1957) derives passive sentences from kernel active sentences. He argues that the structure ‘NP₁ + V + NP₂’ can have a corresponding sentence ‘NP₂+be +en +by +NP₁’. Lakoff (1970) argues that in the historical genesis of transformational grammar, the ‘passive’ transformation occupies a very important place.

2.8.1 A Brief History of Voice in English

Several grammarians have argued that the terms ‘active’ and ‘passive’ were initially borrowed from Latin. Bloomfield (1935) points out that Latin had two types of construction, one was an actor-action construction, as in ‘amat’ (he/she/it loves) and another was a goal-action construction as in ‘amatur’ (he/she/it is loved). Hockett (1958) states that two of the inflectional categories that Latin verbs have are voice and aspect. A distinction was made between active and passive and perfective and imperfective aspects in Latin. Myers (1966) points out that Latin had one set of active inflections called the ‘active voice’ and an incomplete set of inflections called the ‘passive voice’. He rightly points out that English does not have two comparable sets of inflections, but the term ‘voice’ is still used in English.
Hartmann (1954) believes that the tendency towards the passive mode of expression is traceable to the ancient megalithic civilisation of Western Europe. Mustanoja (1960) asserts that primitive Indo-European languages did not have active and passive, but they had ‘active’ and ‘middle’. Thus, the passive seems to have been a later development. He argues that the ultimate origin of the passive voice is obscure, but points out that the passive seems to have gained ground after the ‘middle’ disappeared.

The term ‘Passive’ is derived from the Latin term ‘Passivum’. In Old English the passive voice was formed with the verbs ‘to be’ or ‘to become’ and the past participle. Nehls (1984) comments that the semantic distinction between ‘beon’ (be) and ‘werden’ (become) was lost later on and since the 12th century onwards the only auxiliary available for the formation of the passive in English has been the verb ‘be’. Barber (1993) states that in Old English many verbs took an object in the accusative case, the dative case and the genitive. However, the passive in Old English could only be formed with verbs which took an object in the accusative case.
2.8.2 The Formal and Functional Features of Voice in English

As stated in 2.8, the active sentence in English has the construction SVO, and the passive voice is formed by placing the object of an action in the grammatical position of the subject. The transitive verbs are usually passivized in English, and the intransitive verbs are not passivized.

The passive voice is morphologically represented by ‘be + -en’. However, a passive verb phrase can also be formed with the verb ‘get’ instead ‘be’. For example,

‘The letter got lost in the office’.

This kind of passive sentence is labelled the ‘get-passive’. Biber et al. (1999) point out that the get passive is a recent innovation in English and is almost exclusively found only in conversations.

The passive construction with a by-phrase is called a ‘long passive’. In contrast, in BrE when we do not know the agent of the action or we want to be tactful by not mentioning the agent, the by-phrase is omitted and such sentences are called ‘short passives’ or ‘agentless passives’. For example,

It seems a mistake has been made in writing the final amount.
Kruisinga (1931) comments, ‘The passive construction is most frequently used without any mention of the agent. When the agent is not mentioned, the result rather than the process of the action may be expressed’ (p. 122).

Svartvik (1966) and Kilby (1984) point out that when the native speakers are faced with a choice between active and passive voice in actual sentences, they usually prefer the active voice. However, there are some situations where the passive is preferred to active. Some of these situations are given below.

1) When the agent is obvious from the context and is therefore redundant. For example,
   Apples are grown in Kashmir.

2) When we wish to put emphasis on the agent of the action. For example,
   This was given to me by my neighbour.

3) When we wish to avoid referring to the person performing the action, either because his identity is not known or because it is felt unnecessary to identify the person. For example,
   He was immediately admitted to the hospital.
4) It is commonly used in scientific and academic writings. For example, Sulphuric acid was added to the solution and then it was heated.

Svartvik (1966) analyses the data of the passive collected from a corpus of 3, 23,000 words and draws some conclusions about the use of the passive in various registers in English. He concludes that the highest frequency of the passive is found in scientific exposition. Biber et al. (1999) also provide a corpus-based description of the use of the passive voice in spoken and written English. They find that passives are most common in academic prose. However, both Svartvik (1966) and Biber et al. (1999) seem to agree that the most frequently used passive class in English is the agentless passive.

2.9 Concluding Remarks

This chapter reveals that tense, aspect, mood and voice are the major sub-systems that constitute the verb phrase in BrE. It shows that the verb is one of the most important elements of the sentence structure in BrE. The next chapter is devoted to a detailed description of the formal and functional features of the verb phrase in IE. It also explores the relationship between BrE and IE with reference to the verb phrase.