SPECTRUM
Journal of Social Sciences

Vol. 03, No. 03 (2026) 127-136, doi: 10.61552/SJSS.2026.03.002 - http://spectrum.aspur.rs

SHOULD THE FUTURE TENSE BE EXCLUDED FROM THE ENGLISH TENSE SYSTEM?

Jasmina Mirtoska [1]

Received 19.04.2025.
Revised 22.05.2025.
Accepted 03.07.2025.

Keywords:

English language, tense, aspect, future tense, absolute tenses.

Original research

A B S T R A C T

This study outlines the standpoints concerning the inclusion and exclusion of the future tense from the English tense-aspect system. The augments for the exclusion of the future are based on the lexicallity and modality of the future tense and the lack of verbal inflections. Contrary, the arguments for the inclusion of the future are based on theories and definitions about absolute tenses, examples from other languages, and the application of the opponents' criteria to tenses which are already absolute, proving that other tenses also qualify for exclusion following that logic. Finally, the refutation of the arguments against the future, and application of the theories and criteria for absolute tenses, lead to the conclusion that the future tense deserves a steady position as much as the other absolute tenses.

© 2026 SPECTRUM Journal of Social Sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

There is much disagreement on whether there are two or three absolute tenses in the English tense system. While some linguists say that present and past are the only tenses, others insist on the recognition of the future tense as an absolute English tense (Langacker, 2001). The arguments for and against are vast and are stated and quoted in the following sections, representing and supporting each side (Parkinson, 2011).

The reasons for advocating for the exclusion of the future tense from the English tense-aspect system are based on the fact that the future is realized lexically and modally and not inflectionally (Bardovi-Harlig, 2024). More specifically, the future tense makes use of adverbs, auxiliary modal verbs and requires no suffixation for the main verbs for the purpose of expressing future events. (Kakzhanova, 2013).

On the other hand, the same arguments for the exclusion of the future tense as well as several additional criteria and theories have been used to prove the opposite point. What has been specifically used to refute the arguments against the future tense are tense theories, definitions of the term tense itself, as well as, criteria for labeling a particular tense as an absolute tense. Finally, the conditions and the arguments made by the opponents of the future tense are applied to other tense that are already labeled as absolute. Consequently, this paper shows that, following this logic, the other absolute tenses should also excluded from the English tense-aspect system since the same arguments against recognizing the future tense apply to tenses which are already indisputably absolute.

All arguments used for the exclusion of the future tense are easily refuted in this study. Specifically, the arguments that are used against the future namely, that it is modal and not inflected, face opposing claims that tenses can and be formed using free morphemes just as well as they can be formed using bound morphemes. While, the modality issue is contradicted by arguing that other languages use modals to form tenses which can and should also be the case in English. This statement is also contradicted by examples in the following sections which

[1] Corresponding author: Jasmina Mirtoska
Email: jmirtoska@gmail.com

show that the modality of some statements in the future is a feature of choice rather than a feature that defines the tense as a whole.

These and other issues are addressed, analyzed and discussed in the following sections starting with the arguments for the exclusion of the future, followed by arguments for its inclusion in the English tense-aspect system.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

2.1 Arguments for the exclusion of the future tense

Statements like "English has only two tenses, present and past" (Seely 2007, p. 77) only confirm the arguments that authors have used to contribute to this discussion in favor of excluding the future from the category of tense and rather refer to the forms used to express future as "grammatical realities of the English verb" (Crystal, 2003, p. 196). Furthermore, "is not a tense at all" (Cygan, 1972, p. 9) is another strong statement which is not in the favor of labeling the so called 'future temporal forms' as a tense. What is more, the future here is referred to as a 'mode' rather than a tense. In addition, Huddleston and Pullum (2002, pp. 208-209) have also established the nonexistence of the future as a tense by saying that: "we do not recognize a future tense for English…we will argue that will is an auxiliary of mood, not tense." Similarly, Dahl (1985, p. 105) refers to the future tense as predictions and intentions but not a tense. Michaelis (2006, p. 18) also states that there is no future tense in the English tense system and refers to what appears as futuristic forms in this language namely a 'periphrastic construction' making use of the verb will.

2.1.1 Future tense vs. futurity

Additionally, Larsen-Freeman et al. (2001, p. 3) say that it is "well known" that English has only present and past tense and that "futurity" is indicated by modals, present simple and present continuous. Stating that these declarations are well known implies a consensus among linguists and grammarians that this is indeed a shared view among all or most of them. Moreover, the claim here is that the future tense does not exist as a tense, since other tenses as well as modals are used to express the notion of 'futurity' which is a notion of future time rather than future tense. Consequently, the future tense does not even exist since other means are used to mark events which might take place in the future.

2.1.2 Future tense vs. future forms

Downing and Locke (2006, p. 352) in their descriptive reference book, also outline that English has only the present and the past tense. They also state that English has a form for expressing events in the future which is the form of locating time but has no morphological marking. This indicates that there are special forms or means of expressing actions in the future which are not considered as a tense. Furthermore, on page 353, this is elaborated by saying that past and present are formed by using inflections while the future time is formed with the help of modals, hence, past and present are tenses while future is just a time because of its unreal and potential status. These statements overlap with the arguments that follow hence, lead in to the next section (2.3) which elaborates the morphological nature of the future tense or the lack thereof.

2.1.3 Future tense vs. morphology

Morphologically, the existence of only two tenses in English namely, past and present it entirely based on verb inflection, and the exclusion of the future from the label tense is due to the absence of inflection and reliance on modal verbs to express reference to the future. While present simple uses the third person singular -s and the past simple makes use of the inflection -ed for regular verbs, the future lacks inflections when will and going to future events are concerned.

Additionally, the future expresses its actions lexically and does not use morphological means. This means that, as mentioned before, it doesn't not use bound morphemes, but rather adverbs or adverbials in order to indicate future, which can be observed in the following example:

(1) I leave tomorrow.
(2) They are meeting next weekend.

If these sentences did not provide the temporal references it would be hard to determine when these actions take place.

2.1.4 Future tense vs. certainty and modality

The two widely used arguments against the recognition of the future tense as an absolute tense are the modality and uncertainty if the future. Moreover, it is considered as a modal expression of the future time since it makes use of modal verbs to indicate future actions. In addition, the other counter argument is the uncertainty that these future actions will take place, unlike the present and the past actions which are either taking place now or have happened at an earlier point. In other words, it is difficult if not impossible to make a reference between the future actions and another interval of time since these actions haven't taken place yet. What is more, the future is not considered as a factual tense since it hasn't taken place yet and it is rather referred to as a mode than an absolute tense.

The following section and subsections will present arguments and examples for the inclusion of the future tense in the English tense-aspect system as an absolute tense, as well as it will refute the above-presented arguments.

2.2. Arguments for the inclusion of the future tense

2.1.1 Future tense and futurity

What has been previously discussed is that Larsen-Freeman et al. (2001, p. 3) "well known" fact that in

English only present and past tense exist and that "futurity" rather than future tense is realized by other means. The phrase "well known" is taken out of proportion since not all agree with this statement. In addition, while it is true that the future makes use of other means to indicate future, it also uses inflections and auxiliary verbs like the other absolute tenses (illustrated in sections 3.3 and 3.5).

Another claim that both Declerck et al. (2006) and Salkie (2010) use against the non-existence of the future tense is the fact that the present simple can be used for future purposes, which they use to argue for the establishment of the existence of the future tense as an absolute tense.

They Declerck et al. (2006, p. 100) use various arguments against the exclusion of the future and illustrate and support these with example sentences and therefore see no solid ground for the exclusion in the first place Declerck et al. (2006, p.100-106).

2.1.2 Future tense and future forms

Downing and Locke (2006, p. 352) claim that in English only the present and the past tense exist, clearly intents to exclude the future tense from this language. The forms for expressing the future tense, according to them, are: modals, past and present tenses rather than a form of the future which should be called the future tense. However, this section will show that the means for expressing future actions and future time are not just means that consist of modals and other tenses, but rather an absolute tense, namely, the future tense.

Precisely, when considering the future tense, some grammarians claim that it should be excluded because of its modality, among other reasons, since: She will leave the county tomorrow, is considered a statement that is likely or probable but uncertain, since it hasn't taken place yet. On the other hand, sentences like:

(3) *That will be the taxi you are waiting for.*

clearly contain a futuristic tense form but it does not refer to the future, rather to a moment in the present or even the past (in a matter of second or minutes), since one can say that:

(4) *That will be the taxi you waited for.*
(5) *The taxi you were looking for, has just arrived.*

If these sentences can be considered as synonymous, if not identical, in meaning and time reference, then why should the will construction be considered as not an absolute one, even in cases when it does not refer to the uncertain future?

It is evident that the reference in the previous sentences is the present moment and might therefore not make a strong argument for labeling the future tense as an absolute one. However, when one considers the following sentence which has a clear reference to the future the outcome is different.

(6) *Tomorrow will be Wednesday.*

Provided that today is Tuesday it is most certain that tomorrow will be Wednesday the day which follows after Tuesday. This sentence denotes certain future unless the sun doesn't set and rise the next morning or all clocks in the world stop working for some inexplicable reason. Hence, future can be certain even when the future form is a will construction. In addition, the probability of the future action happening, is very high in this sentence.

The same arguments stand for the following sentences in which the future form is also a will construction:

(7) *Next month will be July.*
(8) *He will be 23 next week.*

Unless time stops, the following month will come which makes the statement indisputable and factual. In the second statement, the person in the sentence will turn 23 since time passes and the years go by, again, unless unforeseeable circumstances occur and the person's life is terminated.

2.1.3 Future tense and morphology

Among the previous argument used against the future tense which try to assure the lack of need for a future absolute tense due to the existence of future forms, as well as other means of expressing 'futurity', another very steady argument that has been used is the lack of inflections in the future tense. However, this sections indicates that the future tense can be an absolute one since free morphemes can be used as a part of an absolute tense like in other languages, as well as, the future perfect does in fact make use of inflections to indicate future.

The statement that "many languages use auxiliaries and particles to express time relations" (Salkie 2010, p. 189) shoes that free morphemes are recognized means of absolute tenses in other languages. This would mean that if modals and auxiliaries are used to form tenses in other languages then this could and should also be the case with the future tense of the English language.

Additionally, Declerck et al. (2006, p. 100) claim that a tense can be realized by a free morpheme just like it can be realized by a bound morpheme, which means that will and going to, a modal verb and a modal phrase, can and should be used to form future tenses.

Even though the future lacks inflections when using will and going to future for expressing future action, another form of the future does use inflections similar to the past tense. Namely, when the future perfect is considered it is obvious that the future does not only make use of modal verbs but also inflections in the main verb.

(9) *By next week, I will have taken the test.*
(10) *I am not going to have finished this task before 5 o'clock.*

In these examples it is apparent that the future perfect makes use of modal and auxiliary verbs (will and have) as well as inflections to the main verb like -ed for the regular verb and -en, in this case, for the irregular one.

According to these examples and discussion, modals can be used to form a tense, since they are free morphemes, just as other tenses use bound morphemes or inflection to achieve the same effect. Both Declerck et al. (2006) and Salkie (2010) use Larsen-Freeman et al. (2001, p. 3) statement that future time is realized by other tenses as a ground for proving that there is an absolute future tense.
In addition, Declerck et al. (2006, pp. 102-106), Declerck (2010), Salkie (1989) and Salkie (2010) also offer solid arguments against the exclusion of the future tense from the English tense system. Declerck (2010, p. 273) claims that "the future tense ('will/shall + infinitive') can be used as an absolute tense". Controversially, Larsen-Freeman et al. (2001, pp. 3, 8) who claim that English has only two tenses, also acknowledge will and going to as modals indicating future simple tense.
Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the claim that the future tense relies on lexical means rather than on morphological ones to express future are also debatable. The examples used to prove this are:

(11) I leave tomorrow.
(12) They are meeting next weekend.

However, it is apparent that these sentences are in present simple and present progressive used to denote future actions. The same sentences in the future tense would have a different form:

(13) I will leave tomorrow.
(14) I will leave tomorrow.
(15) They will meet next weekend.
(16) They are going to meet next weekend.

These sentences even without the temporal references make it easy to determine when these actions will take place, namely in the future, since free morphemes have been used. This shoes that the future tense does not necessarily need adverbs to indicate future.
All this leads to the next two arguments used against the future tense which are the future's modality and the lack of certainty.

2.1.4 Future tense and certainty and modality

The arguments used against the future namely modality and uncertainty were addressed in section 2.5.
One of the arguments used against the future is that it makes use of modals which gives it the feature of modality rather than an absolute tense. However, if one considers the sentences above, it can be seen that in the future perfect inflection is used to indicate future like -ed and -s.
Another argument used against the future is its uncertainty. Nonetheless, if the future tense is so uncertain then how can these sentences or statements which are in the future tense or future form, be considered if I dare say certain and definitely bound to happen. By considering examples like the ones below, the argument against the future tense considering it uncertain and unsure of taking place is not strong enough of an argument to base the exclusion of the future tense from the English tense system. In addition, the future perfect represented in the sentences below displays something that is more factual rather than predictive and uncertain:

(17) Mark will turn 21 next week.
(18) The sun will rise at 6:45 tomorrow.
(19) By the time you arrive the conference will have ended.
(20) She will have finished her studies before she returns to her home country.

Furthermore, making a reference between the future action and another point of time can be made when specific time intervals are indicated. This reference could be the exact time when the action will happen in the future and the moment of speaking. In addition, a future statement could be factual like it the example which states when the sun will rise. Moreover, both time intervals can be in the future and the reference can be made between the two in the example sentence where one future time interval is the completed studies, and the other is her return to her country.
However, it cannot be denied that some statements in the future tense can seem uncertain due to uncertainty and modality like the following example:

(21) I might go to Italy one day.

This is a statement that might not happen, it cannot be proven nor does it provide clear temporal reference. In this case, it can be said that the future in this sentence is uncertain, however this does not apply to the other forms of future. Nonetheless, this same argument applies to the present and the past tense as well when one analyses the probability of the actions taking place in the following sentences. The following examples in the present and past tense share the same features as the future sentence, namely, they are uncertain and less likely to happen:

(22) Denis might be doing some reading at the moment.

The present and the past just like some sentences in the future tense do not have a reference to a certain point of time. Both of the examples that follow have to reference to another point in time, and there is no indication that they are happening right now or have happened in the past even though they have features of the present and past tense. Hence, if the arguments against the future tense stand in terms of it not being able to make a reference to another time, then the same applies to the present and the past since in these two sentences there is no apparent reference time interval nor is there an indicated precise time of when the actions took or are taking place.

(23) If you call me I will answer.
(24) If he has called me I would have answered.

Since the present and the past in these two examples have to point of reference neither to the time of the action happening nor to any other interval of time and lack grounds for linking them to any interval of time, would this mean that these two absolute tenses should also be considered modal and tenses that lack certainty?

What is more, researchers claim that the future time cannot be perceived, remembered or experienced beforehand, and therefore the future tenses are not or should not be considered as absolute tenses in grammar. However, since what is not certain or observable here is time and not tense, this argument does not automatically out rule recognizing the future tense as a real tense. The intangibility of the future is a valid argument; however, the future tense does exist as a means for referring to the future. We talk about the future, make plans and arrangements and discuss the future beforehand which almost puts us in a state of visualizing, experiencing and imagining the future. What is more, using the uncertainty of the future as an argument against the perception of the future tense as an absolute tense is not a strong argument since the future does happen, plans do get realized and future actions do take place, unless unforeseeable circumstances prevent them which are rare.

Equally, researchers like Dahl (1985, p. 105) claim that the future is an intention or prediction rather than a tense, however, the future can also be certain even if it is predicted for instance in weather forecasts, planned events by organizations and institutions and for the most part they do take place unless canceled because of unanticipated situation. Hence, the future tense cannot be excluded from the tense-aspect system of the English language based on its low uncertainty.

The sections that follow, shed light on what are the criteria and theories for labeling a means of expressing time as a tense as well as, based on what do these tenses become absolute tenses.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the methodology and the criteria for labeling a tense as an absolute tense. The arguments presented against and for the future tense are merely the words of one party against the words of another party. What is needed here to determine who is right and who is wrong is a criterion for proclaiming a tense as an absolute tense in the English tense aspect system. In this section, criteria, discussions and theories are provided by Reichenbach (1947), Comrie (1985) and Bybee (1992) which will be addressed in the following lines.

3.1 Criterion 1:

The following statement can be considered as the first criterion in order to make this decision easier, which states that when observing "a particular form in a language, decide whether it does in fact express location in time and whether it is indeed a grammatical category, and then pronounce it to be tense or not" (Comrie 1985, p. 9). In conclusion, the future satisfies both elements of the criterion, since it locates actions in time which is the future time, and it also is a grammatical category since it uses free morphemes to form the tense.

There are two main criteria why the future should be considered a tense of the English tense system: first, a tense is a tense when it locates actions in time and when it is a grammatical category (Comrie 1985, p. 9), and second, tense is a means of locating events in time-an action that is conceptual (Comrie 1985, pp. 7-9). Respectively, the future tense identifies events in time in this case the future time and since it uses free morphemes it qualifies as a grammatical category, and the second criterion for labeling the future as an absolute tense falls in line with Comrie's (1985) definition of tense, a definition that supports the contra arguments used for the exclusion of the future tense.

Precisely, since according to Comrie (1985) the role of the category of tense of locating actions in time is considered a concept, therefore, the future tense can be considered as a tense as well. In more detail, by using the contra arguments stating that the future is a notion of future actions or a though, even an idea of the future, one can observe that these arguments which are not in favor of the future tense are precisely what helps labeling it as tense since the definition that Comrie (1985) provides when defining tense is conceptual as well.

3.2 Criterion 2:

Comrie (1985, p. 3) sought to provide a "general theory appropriate to all cultures, and thus to all languages" concerning the category of tense. When defining tense, Comrie (1985, p. 9) says that "tense is grammaticalised expression of location in time" and that "locating situations in time is a purely conceptual notion" Comrie (1985, p. 7). According to the claims here, it can be observed that tenses use grammatical means to identify actions in time, which then again, is not a precise practice since Comrie (1985) calls this identification a concept. Therefore, the correct identification of actions in time is more theoretical and perceptual than concrete.

Following the general across languages theory of tense by Comrie (1985) which states that the location of events on the timespan is a concept and therefore can be considered as an idea or a theory rather than a grammatical fact or norm.

When all this is taken into consideration, the future tense which can also be perceived as a concept or a notion of the future then it can be concluded that the future tense fulfills the theory of tense and should therefore be considered as a valid absolute tense in the English tense system.

4. MAJOR FINDINGS AND OUTCOMES

Discussion of tense theories for the inclusion of the future tense:

4.1 Reichenbach (1947)

Reichenbach (1947) defines tense in terms of the relationship between intervals of time and had named

these intervals as speech time (S) which is the moment of speaking about an action, reference time (R) which is the time the action refers to and event time (E) which refers to the actual time when the action took place. When this is applied to the future tense, the speech time (S) could take place at this very moment when a sentence in the future tense is uttered, while the reference time (R) will be a defined interval of time in the future when the event time (E) will take place. This shows that the future tense satisfies Reichenbach's theory. When considering the following example, it is apparent that the future tense has all three intervals of time. However, what the future tense can also portray is different degrees of certainty of the future tense, which should be considered as a feature of the future tense and not a flaw or reason for excluding it from the English tense-aspect system.

Namely, the following 4 sentences portray different degrees of certainty that the events will take place as one of the characteristics of the future tense. In addition all of them have an event time (E), reference time (R) and speech time (S):

(25) I might go to Dubai next week.

This is a statement that is the least certain of all the sentences illustrated here in the future tense, a sentence that use might as an indicator of the uncertainty which in this case has been created on purpose. Moreover, the reason that this sentence is uncertain does not mean that the future tense all together is uncertain, since the uncertainty in this sentence is intended and not a feature of the future tense.

(26) I will go to Dubai next week.

With this sentence a fact, prediction, decision or promise is expressed about the future. This means that the decision might have taken recently or in the moment of speaking. Moreover, this statement is more certain than the previous one.

(27) I am going to go Dubai next week.

This statement is an already decided plan for the next week and it carries a higher degree of certainty than the precious sentence, which again was intended that way.

(28) I am going to Dubai next week.

This sentence indicates a plan for next week that has already been arranged. This means that the hotel has been booked that the tickets have been paid for and that the suitcases have already been packed. Therefore, this statement is more certain that the previous one.

(29) I am arriving in Dubai at 10 am next week.

This scheduled event which has a specific time of when exactly the action will happen next week, conveys the highest degree of certainty in the future tense.

Nonetheless, even though the previous future statements make use of modal verbs and other tense forms to express the future and have no clear future tense inflections, the following two do:

(30) I will have gone to Dubai when she will arrive.
(31) I will have gone to Dubai before she finished her studies.

These statements are both certain and inflected, since they make use of modal and auxiliary verbs as well as indicate all three intervals of time.

Precisely, the event time (E), reference time (R) and speech time (S) in all examples is present and can be clearly identified. Namely, the speech time is the moment the sentences are uttered, the reference time and event time are next week or the moment she arrives and finishes her studies, which can be abolished if unforeseen circumstances prevent the action of going to Dubai, or prevent her from arriving or finishing her studies.

4.2 Comrie (1985)

Comrie (1985, p. 9) says that "we would look at a particular form in a language, decide whether it does in fact express location in time and whether it is indeed a grammatical category, and then pronounce it to be tense or not". The examples he uses to clarify this are the following, where he states that the difference between: "John sang and John sings in English is one of tense.

As previously illustrated and discussed, sentences in the future tense, from the previous section, do express location of time and should be considered a grammatical category since the future tense uses free and bound morphemes to express future actions.

4.3 Bybee (1992)

Furthermore, Bybee (1992, p. 223) who clarifies tense in relation to another time reference, describes it in the following way:

TENSE refers to the grammatical expression of the time of the situation described in the proposition, relative to some other time. This other time may be the moment of speech: e.g. the PAST and FUTURE designate time before and after the moment of speech, respectively […].Tense is expressed by inflections, by particles, or by auxiliaries in construction with the verb.

With this definition Bybee (1992) claims that tense is a means of grammatically defining an action in time, in relation to another point in time, which could be the time of speaking anterior or posterior to this moment. The future is a time of a situation relative to the present moment when this future action is determined. The definition claims that the action could take place before or after the current moment which qualifies the future tense as a tense. Moreover, since a tense can be expressed by inflections, auxiliaries or particles, the future should be an absolute tense since it uses free morphemes and

bound morphemes in future perfect, and should therefore be considered as an absolute tense.

When we take this explanation of what tense is, then, Declerck's et al. (2006) discussion about the future tense is entailed by this description of the category tense. However, when taking Bybee (1992) definition of tense into account the present simple definitely fulfills the requirements of the implications in the above-mentioned definition.

All in all, Bybee's (1992, p. 223) claims that: "tense is expressed by inflections, by particles, or by auxiliaries in connection with the verb", can be used to backup Declerck et al. (2006) argumentation for considering the future tense as an absolute tense and against the attempt to exclude it from the English tense system. Bybee (1992) in his definition of how tense is realized in the language lists three ways of how a tense can be expressed and one of these ways is by means of using auxiliary verbs which help form a particular tense. Since this is how the future tense is formed, namely with the help of auxiliary and modal verbs, this statement supports Declerck et al. (2006) argumentation for the perseverance of the future tense and its proclamation as an absolute tense.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF THE REFUTATION OF THE OTHER TENSES

Other indicators that the future should not be excluded from the English tense system are provided by applying the criteria for exclusion which have been used for the future tense, to the other tenses that have a stable position in the tense system. In other words, the same arguments that are used to validate the exclusion of the future tense can be used to disqualify the other tenses, which will be illustrated and discussed though examples in this section.

5.1 Arguments against the present

The future tense is regarded as a relative tense based on the morphological description of the tense (modality and lack of morphemes), as well as arguments based on the sematic description of this tense (location of actions in time). The argumentation and discussion of different linguists offer arguments which cover both the morphological and semantic description of the tense all of which were refuted in section 3.

If one would, for argument sake, agree that the reasons for excluding the future tense are valid and have a firm ground for discussion and acknowledgement of these reasons, this would be equally the case when attempting to exclude the present tense from the past-present distinction of tenses. This being said, the arguments against the future can be applied also to the present simple, which both of: morphological and semantic nature, admittedly , they do not fully cover the morphological aspect of this tense since there is one inflection in the present simple and there is no modality in this tense.

When considering the semantic description of the present simple then one part of the description of the present simple is that it can be used to denote future events. Provided, that one agrees and accepts the arguments against the future tense, also taking into account that the same arguments are used against the present simple tense, it can be seen that there is a part of the semantical description of the present tense that makes it uncertain, namely its use for future event. As a result, if one were to accept the arguments against the future tense this would mean that the present simple has also a feature which makes it uncertain and therefore this can be considered as a reason for excluding this tense as well.

Comrie (1985) among other scholars who make use of the past non-past distinction in the English tense system, have chosen this opposition since the present tense in English is not strictly used for present actions only, what is more it can be used to denote future actions as well as temporary actions. Since the future tense has been excluded from the English tense system based on arguments claiming its uncertainty, modal features and lack of morphemes, it appears that the present simple tense is likely to be excluded as well since it has some future tense features, or is used to express future plans and intentions. Since this is the case, then some the same arguments used for the exclusion of the future tense apply for the exclusion of the present tense.

Following the arguments against the present simple, the discussion continues and provides more claims contra the present tense. Namely, the present simple tense is considered as a tense that has "no explicit meaning at all; it refers to the default situation from which other tenses represent deviations" (Bybee et al. 1994, p. 152). The lack of semantic orientation of this tense is what makes it seem to be missing obvious meaning. A tense construction which is meaningless semantically and only serves and a means for further derivations of another tense can only be viewed as the stem of a tree which then branches out into other tenses. In other words, this would mean that the present tense only serves as an orientation point for events or tenses that come before the present (past tense) and the ones that happen after the present (future tense). Consequently, this statement does not provide basis for the establishment of the tenses that precede and follow it, but it also shakes the so far stable position of this tense in the English tense-aspect system.

5.2 Arguments against the past

Just like the arguments claiming that the future is uncertain, hence, it should not be considered a tense, the past can be uncertain too, which is exemplified in the following sentence:

(32) I might have seen him but I'm not sure.

This is an uncertain action we don't know whether the seeing happened or not. Similarly, in the following sentence there is no certainty that the speaking took place.

(33) I might have spoken to him, I don't remember.

Therefore both sentences are uncertain, or better yet, the actions in the sentences are not definite nor can they be proven. Consequently, if this were the criteria for excluding tenses from being considered as part of the English tense system, then the past simple in this case by default, needs to be excluded as well.
If the future tense should be disregarded as an absolute tense, then this should apply to the past tense, especially when it is used for conditionals and wishes. For example, if one says:

(34) I wish I had enough money to buy this car.

then this is an unreal situation, hasn't happened and is definitely uncertain. The same applies to the wish statements for which the past tense is used, like in the example:

(35) I wish I knew what I know now when I was younger.

This is a situation which expresses and action that didn't take place, it is an action which is unreal and uncertain if not impossible. What is more, the time reference in the examples in this section, fail to provide a concrete event and reference time. The only interval of time that is certain is the time of speaking which is when these sentences are uttered.
Additionally, the past simple can be even more uncertain than the future when one considers the following example: "There once was a princess called Snow White" – who can claim that this refers to something that really happened? Hence, this is just one more argument which is not in favor of considering the past tense as an absolute tense.
When one takes all these arguments into consideration, then based on the uncertainty of the statements the past simple should not be considered as an absolute tense either.

5.3 The validity of the refutation of the present and past tense

What follows from the application of the criteria used for not labeling the future tense as an absolute tense, to the present and past tense, is that none of these tenses should be considered as absolute, which would deprive the English tense-aspect system from entailing any tenses at all. It can therefore not be assumed that if a tense shoes features of modality or uncertainty, as well as lack of bound morphemes when free ones can be used for the same purpose, that this is reason enough and sufficient grounds for disregarding a certain tense and eliminating it from the English tense-aspect system.
Moreover, the arguments provided against the present tense seem trivial since the feature which makes the present tense uncertain in merely only one extended uses of the tense, namely, for future purposes, and therefore cannot serve as a good enough reason for excluding the present tense from the English tense-aspect system. This also applies to the future tense and argues against its exclusion.
In addition, the two arguments presented previously, namely that the present tense is not an absolute present tense because it can serve to express future actions, intentions and plans as well as the second argument about the present simple implying that this tense lacks overt meaning do not present enough grounds for excluding the present tense as well as for referring to it as a meaningless tense. First of all, the present tense is an absolute tense because of its form, usage and meaning. This being said, this tense makes use of morphemes, it is used to describe actions which took place in the past, present and sometimes these actions might continue in the future, as well as, the present simple in the sentence 'I am a human being' caries much meaning and can stand on its own and leaves no space for further tense forms derived from the present simple of this sentence since one cannot say *'I was a human being' or *'I will be a human being'.
Next, considering the present simple as a tense which can denote future actions and situations is also not enough for excluding the tense from the English tense system. Finally, the present simple tense is not specifically aimed at expressing future actions, rather, this feature is just one extended use of the tense namely to express scheduled future actions and situations which are very likely to happen.
Since the present and the past tense cannot be exclude from the English tense-aspect system based on modality, lack of certainty, and inability to link them to link them so certain points in time, the same arguments against exclusion can serve as reason for not eliminating the future tense from this system.

6. CONCLUSION

All in all, the claims for labeling and not labeling the future tense as an absolute tense are numerous and strong. However, it can be concluded that the future tense can be an absolute tense since it can refute all the arguments used against it, namely, modals or free morphemes can be used to form tenses just like in other tenses and other languages, as well as, it can be certain as illustrated with examples, moreover, it can provide exact time intervals for speech time, event time and reference time. Likewise, the criteria for calling a tense an authentic tense should not lie in the inflection of the verb which means that will and going to should also be accepted as means for forming the future tense. Moreover, in section 4 there was enough evidence provided that the future tense fulfills the criteria for being considered as an absolute tense.
Additionally, when the same arguments used against the future tense are applied to the already absolute tenses, it was evident that these also showed features similar to the future tense which equally qualifies them for the exclusion form the English tense-aspect system.
Since the reasons for excluding the present and the past tense from the system of absolute tenses along with the

future tense seem drastic and as a consequence, if this were to happen the English tense-aspect system would end up without any absolute tenses, it seems unreasonable to acknowledge these reasons for disregarding any tenses as absolute tenses.

Finally, since the future tense satisfies the criteria and theories for absolute tenses, uses free and bound morphemes (future perfect), is certain since future actions take place, it is evident that it needs to be considered as an absolute tense in the English tense-aspect system.

7. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORKS

The arguments used for the inclusion of the future tense in the English tense-aspect system could gain in strength if further research explored other theories and criteria for labeling a tense as valid absolute tenses of other languages. Furthermore, input of the status of the future tense in languages that come from the same language family, can serve as backup for the inclusion of the future tense in the English tense-aspect system.

Acknowledgement: *I would like to thank my professors at the research institute for English language and linguistics at that university of Cambridge by sparking my love for the English language and for encouraging debates about the various grammatical systems in English which is how this study came about.*

References:

Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2024). Future tense and future expressions. In *The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition, Morphosyntax, and Semantics* (pp. 297-310). Routledge.

Bybee, J. (1992). Tense, Aspect and Mood, In Bright William (ed.). *International Encyclopedia of Linguistics*, V2, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bybee, J. P., R. & Pagliuca, W. (1994). *The Evolution of Grammar*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Comrie, B. (1985). *Tense*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Crystal, D. (2003). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*. Cambridge University. Press

Cygan, J. (1972). Tense and aspect in English and Slavic. *Anglica Wratislaviensia, 2*, 5-12.

Dahl, O. (1985). *Tense and Aspect Systems*. Basil Blackwell Inc.

Declerck, R. (1995).Is there a relative past tense in English? *Lingua*, *97*(1), 1-36.

Declerck, R. (2010). Future time reference by be to in Present-day English. English, *Language and Linguistics 14*.271-291.

Declerck, R.; Reed, S.; & Cappelle, B. (2006). *The grammar of the English tense system: a comprehensive analysis*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Downing, A. & Locke, P. (2006). *English Grammar - A University Course*, 2nd Edition. London & New York: Routledge.

Huddleston, R. & Pullum, G. (2002). *The Cambridge grammar of the English language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kakzhanova, F. A. (2013). What modals are: Modal verbs, modal words, and auxiliary modals. *European Researcher*, (10-2), 2530-2535.

Langacker, R. W. (2001). The English present tense. *English Language & Linguistics*, *5*(2), 251-272.

Larsen-Freeman, D., Kuehn, T. & Haccius, M. (2001). Helping Students Make Appropriate English Verb Tense-Aspect Choice. *TESOL Journal*, *11* (4), 3-9.

Michaelis, L. A. (2006). Time and Tense in B. Aarts and A. McMahon, (eds.), *The Handbook of English Linguistics.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Parkinson, J. (2011). The Discussion section as argument: The language used to prove knowledge claims. *English for specific purposes*, *30*(3), 164-175.

Reichenbach, H. (1947). *Elements of Symbolic Logic*. New York: Macmillan & Co.

Salkie, R. (1989). Perfect and pluperfect: what is the relationship? *Linguistics*, *25*, 1-34

Salkie, R. (2010). Will tense or modal or both?' *English Language and Linguistics*, *14*(2)187–215.

Seely, J. (2007). *Grammar for Teachers*. Tiverton: Oxpecker.

Jasmina Mirtoska
University of Vienna
Austria
jmirtoska@mail.com
ORCID: 0009-0002-6753-1431