



TENSE, ASPECT, AND MODALITY: STRUCTURAL PARALLELS AND DIVERGENCES IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LANGUAGES

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Abstract: This paper presents a comparative linguistic analysis of the grammatical categories of tense, aspect, and modality (TAM) in English and Uzbek. As two languages from distinct typological families, Indo-European and Turkic, they exhibit both structural parallels and striking divergences in expressing temporal and modal meanings. The study explores morphological markers, syntactic constructions, and semantic interpretations associated with TAM in both languages. Using comparative and descriptive linguistic methods, examples from authentic sources and corpora demonstrate that English relies mainly on auxiliary verbs and periphrastic constructions, while Uzbek employs agglutinative suffixation and analytic markers. The findings reveal that, despite structural differences, both systems fulfill universal communicative functions such as situating actions in time, indicating aspectual perspective, and expressing modality through necessity, possibility, and intention.

Keywords: tense, aspect, modality, comparative linguistics, English, Uzbek.

Introduction

Tense, aspect, and modality (TAM) are fundamental grammatical categories that enable speakers to locate actions in time, describe their internal temporal structure, and express attitudes toward the event or its likelihood. The study of TAM systems across languages reveals how linguistic structures encode temporal and modal meanings in distinct yet functionally equivalent ways. English and Uzbek, though historically unrelated, share the universal need to express time and modality, but they do so through very different grammatical mechanisms (Baugh & Cable, 2013, p. 102). English, as an analytic Indo-European language, expresses tense and aspect mainly through auxiliary verbs, inflectional forms of the main verb, and fixed word order. Comparing these systems not only reveals typological differences but also helps linguists understand how distinct structures achieve parallel communicative goals.

Methodology



This study employs comparative-descriptive and typological methods. The research is based on data drawn from English and Uzbek grammar books, linguistic corpora, and authentic literary examples. The following sources were used for primary analysis: The British National Corpus (BNC) and examples from modern English literature and the Uzbek National Corpus and examples from modern Uzbek fiction and academic grammars. Each category is examined through examples from both languages. The research framework follows Bybee, Perkins, & Pagliuca (1994), emphasizing functional parallels between typologically distinct systems.

Results

1. Tense Formation and Expression

English:

English has a relatively simple tense system centered around two morphological tenses, present and past, which are expanded through auxiliary verbs to express future and perfective meanings.

Examples:

I work every day. (Present)

I worked yesterday. (Past)

I will work tomorrow. (Future, expressed analytically)

The future tense in English is not morphologically marked but realized through will + infinitive or be going to, which express futurity or intention (Quirk et al., 2012, p. 403).

Uzbek:

Uzbek verbs are richly inflected for tense through agglutinative suffixes attached to the verb stem:

Men ishlayman (I work / I will work – present/future)

Men ishladim (I worked – past)

Men ishlayapman (I am working – present progressive)

Unlike English, the Uzbek present and future are often merged in form, and context determines the precise temporal meaning. This reflects a semantic rather than morphological distinction.

2. Aspectual Distinctions

English:

Aspect in English is expressed through auxiliary verbs and participles, creating four major combinations:

Simple: He reads.

Progressive: He is reading.

Perfect: He has read.

Perfect Progressive: He has been reading.

These combinations allow speakers to express whether an action is



ongoing, completed, or repeated (Comrie, 1976).

Uzbek:

Uzbek aspectual distinctions are realized through suffixation and auxiliary verbs, not by participial forms. For example:

U o‘qiydi – He reads (habitual/simple).

U o‘qiyapti – He is reading (progressive).

U o‘qigan – He has read (perfective).

U o‘qib turibdi – He keeps reading (continuative aspect).

Thus, while English relies on auxiliaries, Uzbek uses aspectual suffixes (-yap, -gan) and auxiliary verbs (turmoq, qolmoq, yubormoq) to convey the nuances of continuity, completion, or repetition.

3. Modality and Mood

English:

Modality in English is primarily expressed through modal auxiliaries (may, might, must, can, should, will, etc.):

She can swim. (ability)

He must go now. (obligation)

It may rain. (possibility)

These modals are invariant and precede the main verb. They express both epistemic (truth-based) and deontic (duty-based) meanings (Palmer, 2001).

Uzbek:

Uzbek modality is expressed through verbal suffixes, auxiliaries, and lexical markers:

U bora oladi (He can go – ability).

U borishi kerak (He must go – obligation).

Ehtimol u borar (He may go – possibility).

The modal suffixes (-a ol, -moqchi, -ishi kerak) often combine with auxiliaries to form analytic constructions similar to English modals but realized morphologically.

4. Syntactic and Semantic Parallels

Both languages share similar semantic distinctions—time reference (past/present/future), aspectual perspective (completed/ongoing), and modality (necessity, possibility, intention)—but differ structurally.

Function English (Analytic) Uzbek (Agglutinative)

Tense will + verb -di / -yap / -adi

Aspect have/been + participle -gan / -yap / -ib tur

Modality can, must, may -moqchi, kerak

These examples show that while English uses separate words (auxiliaries), Uzbek encodes the same meaning within the verb morphology itself.



Discussion

The comparison demonstrates clear typological divergence: English has moved toward analytic grammar, while Uzbek remains synthetic-agglutinative. Yet both systems fulfill the same communicative functions of TAM. English expresses temporal and aspectual relations through auxiliary combinations, reflecting its loss of rich inflection over time (Baugh & Cable, 2013, p. 110). In contrast, Uzbek's morphological transparency enables a compact expression of multiple meanings within a single word form (Jo'rayev, 2019, p. 72).

For example:

English: He has been working since morning.

Uzbek: U tongdan beri ishlayapti.

Both express a continuing action, yet English uses a multi-word periphrasis, while Uzbek uses a single verb with aspectual suffix. Similarly, modality shows how both systems encode epistemic stance.

English: She must be tired.

Uzbek: U charchagan bo'lsa kerak.

Both express deductions, though Uzbek employs the particle *kerak* (necessity) combined with participial construction. These parallels highlight how different morphosyntactic strategies achieve equivalent semantic effects. Such findings confirm typological theories that language structures differ, but communicative functions are universal (Bybee et al., 1994; Comrie, 1976). Pedagogically, understanding these contrasts is crucial for Uzbek learners of English and vice versa. For Uzbek speakers, the shift from suffixation to auxiliary-based tense marking can be challenging. For English learners of Uzbek, recognizing how one verb form can express multiple meanings (tense + aspect + modality) is equally important.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of tense, aspect, and modality in English and Uzbek reveals both universal and language-specific characteristics. English relies on analytic constructions, using auxiliaries and fixed word order, whereas Uzbek depends on agglutinative morphology and flexible syntax. Despite these structural contrasts, both languages share functional parallels in representing time, process, and speaker attitude. These findings underscore the adaptability of human language in encoding similar cognitive categories through diverse grammatical mechanisms. From a practical viewpoint, the study deepens cross-linguistic understanding, aids in translation accuracy, and informs second language teaching methodologies. Further research might explore how discourse and context influence TAM interpretation in both languages, especially in colloquial and literary registers.



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