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Using Diagrams for Teaching (and Remembering) the Usage of Tenses [Part 4]

Overview

The main idea of the technique explained in this article series is that the students should memorize the diagrams only, instead of cramming all the rules and situations in which tenses are used. When they need them, they can deduce the rules and situations from the diagrams without using any external source.

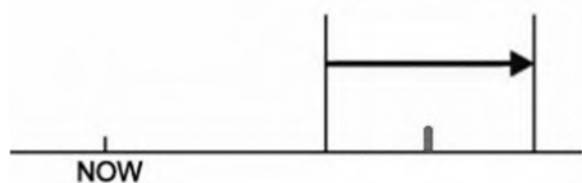
Diagrams, tense usage, and explanations

Future Simple + Going to



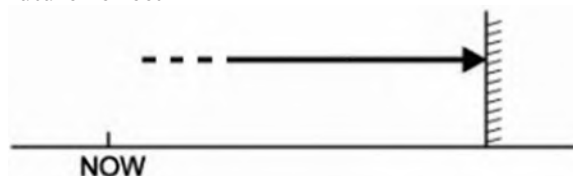
The diagram speaks for itself. If we want to refer to a future time and the situation does not fit into any of the remaining three future tenses, we use either future simple (the outer circle) or the 'going to' structure (the inner dot). The only difference between the two is that we use the latter when we want to express a strong intention (*I overslept. I am definitely going to be late*). While using future simple (especially the interrogative forms), in case of 'I' and 'we' we can use *shall* instead of *will* (*We shall see what happens tomorrow*).

Future Continuous



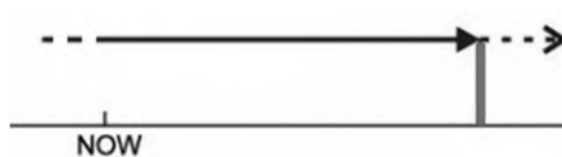
This diagram should already be familiar for the students (Pres. C., Past C.), which means that the teacher might ask them to compare it with the diagram for e.g. Past Continuous. The Ss will probably see the identical elements, such as the blue arrow (indicating the continuous nature of the event/activity) or the movable vertical lines (representing the length of the event/activity). The short, red line indicates the future time of the activity (*I will be studying tomorrow at 5 o'clock*). Future Continuous can also be used in cases where the future event/activity lasts for a specific time, (*I will be studying all day tomorrow*). This situation can easily be illustrated on the diagram by sliding the two vertical lines in the desired position in order to fit the specific time period, or by inserting more short red lines (hence referring to the continuity of the action).

Future Perfect



Similarly to the previous diagram, the teacher should ask the Ss to try to identify any of the elements of the diagram based on their knowledge on the topic. The barrier on the right side of the diagram represents a specific time in the future, when an event/activity will have ended. The dashed line at the left side of the blue arrow indicates that we do not have to know when the event/activity started. E.g. *By this time next year she will have lost 15 kilograms of body weight* (we do not need to know when she started her diet). The teacher might want to emphasize that in case of complex verbs (e.g. to be delivered) the sentence might look like as if it was formed with Future Perfect Continuous, however, it is not. The reason for the accidental mismatch is usually caused by the 'been' in the sentence: *By tomorrow 4 am all the vegetables will have been delivered to the market*.

Future Perfect Continuous



This tense is quite tricky. There are two things which need to be emphasized on this diagram. One of them is the dashed line at the left side of the blue arrow indicating that it might overlap the present moment (NOW). The other one is the vertical red line representing a specific time in the future which might or might not be the end of the event/activity (hence the dashed continuation of the arrow). Let us examine the structure of this tense with the top-down approach. Suppose that we tell the following sentence to our friend this year in June: *Next year in June he will have been a university student for 3 years*. The first thing to be noticed is that this tense needs two time factors ("*next year in June*"; "*for 3 years*"). In case of this example, the action definitely started in the past (two years ago in June) and will continue even after the specific time in the future (next year June). This means that on the left side of the diagram, the arrow will start before the present moment (NOW) and on the right side it will continue even after the vertical red line (the person will continue attending the university). We also can use the word 'when' to indicate a specific future time: *When the sun rises she will have been sleeping for 10 hours*. To summarize, we use Future Perfect Continuous to express how long some activity will have been going on.

Using diagrams for teaching the tenses of the English language is not a new idea. Many coursebooks contain similar diagrams than the ones used in this article series to make the tense usage explanations more clear. However, the technique proposed here suggests that these diagrams can be used to exploit another one of their advantage: remembering the usage of the tenses by simply storing an image of each diagram in our minds and, when the need arises, using that image to deduce the tense usage we need.