



## **WE 030: Tenses in English**

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening. Welcome you all to my new episode and we'll go straight to business, so I will tell you immediately what kind of subject I want to cover today. So, what we have on the agenda today is tenses in English. And now I'm pausing for reaction. I'm pausing for reaction because the subject of tenses in English is the most repeated, is the most revised one. All the people I know, all the learners of English, all the teachers of English, they keep on learning and keep on talking about tenses in English. And I have a very private opinion in here. Private and professional at the same time because it all comes from this experience, these years of experience that I would like to offer to you and I would like to tell you that to me, to my mind, tenses in English are treated as something huge, this subject is treated as something absolutely unbelievable and this is a thing that you have to know and without this knowledge, knowledge of tenses in English, you cannot go any further, you cannot speak the language and I would say that I disagree very, very much.

And I'll tell you why, but before we get to the core of the matter, before I tell you all the things I have prepared for you today, I will tell you that all the information I'm going to share with you today it is rather general, I mean, we are going to talk about very general, very typical, very iconic situations in English. Iconic in a way that if you find yourselves in given situations in your real life and if you follow the guidelines that I'm going to present to you in a minute, you will know what to do, you will know how to behave. But at the same time, I'm referring to this idea of the general statement because, of course, if you want to go into much detail, you would have to study the tenses, like, bit by bit, all the little sentences and all the little phrases that are there. But this podcast and knowledge that I'm sharing with you today is very functional and this is very practical because I am offering you the skill and my experience tells me, I see it very often in my class and I see it very often in everyday life that in very many cases, in very many situations, speakers of English, learners of English are paralysed when they have to



say something, when they have to produce a sentence in English, mostly because they don't know what kind of tense to use.

And the information that I'm going to share with you today is very practical, so if you find yourself in a given situation in real life, you will know what to do and you will know how to react. Everybody, I believe, everybody tells you, everybody repeats that on numerous occasions that studying English is all about tenses and very often when I meet my learners, when they come to me and when I ask them the question, when I want to perform this linguistic audit and I ask them the question what they know from English, like, what kind of knowledge they have, whether they are fluent speakers of English or whether they need a little bit of polishing in the matter, 90% of the speakers tell me that they have studied all the tenses, or they have studied five tenses or they have studied ten tenses. I will tell you that I'm a speaker of English, I have been a speaker of English and I have been a teacher of English for many, many, many years and if you ask me the question how many tenses there are in English, I would need to count. Because I don't know it just like that. And the reason why I don't know it is very simple. It's because I treat tenses in a very, very functional way.

I do not think that the theory behind tenses and the definitions, that definitions that people are forced, people meaning the learners of English, are forced to remember, to memorize, to revise, it is just the theory, let me repeat that. And this theory is not bringing you any closer to real life and it is not bringing you any closer to this real speech of English, real communication in English. And there is a huge difference, I want you to know this that there is this huge difference between the knowledge about the language, the knowledge about English, this knowledge that you get, theoretical knowledge and the usage and the real skill of speaking the language. And the information that we're going to cover today, they are going to give you this very practical information, practical knowledge and not the theory. And when it comes to speaking a given language, you don't need theory, you need practice.



So, what I will start with today is the very names of the tenses, namely simple and continuous. I'm pretty sure that everybody who is listening to me right now they have heard these names and they have heard the following names such as present simple and present continuous, past simple and past continuous, future simple, future continuous. And when we look at these names, we can see that they all have something in common because they have the very name — one is simple and the other one is continuous. And I want to draw your attention to this fact that if these tenses have the same name or half of this name is the same, right, because we've got present simple and then we have past simple, it is not by coincidence. So it means that they all need to have something in common. And I'd like to draw your attention once again to the fact that if you think about all these tenses in English, they are not so much different from each other and I would like you to know from now on that it is not like that that we have these fifteen or sixteen tenses and they are completely different and every single time you encounter a new tense in English, you actually learn something new. That is not true. You learn another aspect but actually you learn the same pattern.

And let me tell you that if you think about all these tenses in English that have the name simple, they all have something in common. There is present simple, there is past simple, there is future simple, there is present perfect simple. And please remember that if you talk about the tense with the name simple, it means that it will describe something that is repeated, that is typical, that is finished, that is regular, that is of this usual, regular nature. But if you think about something that has the name, if you think about the tense that has the name of a continuous tense, it means that something is or something was or something will be happening at the very, very specific moment in time. And if you have that kind of knowledge, it, suddenly everything is simple. So what you can say here is like a little bit of eureka, right. It is all that simple.

Now I will guide you through different tenses, like, name by name, bit by bit, with different sentence examples, so that to give you these pictures. I told you that I want to share with you, I told you that I want to share with you this very



practical information and that's why with every single tense what I do, the way I teach my learners, my students is I give them these typical situations and they are sort of pictures, right, they are these typical repeated regular situations. And then, when you want to say something in English or when you want to write something in English and then you recognize a given situation, it is all there, it is, everything is that simple.

So, we will start with present simple. And as everybody knows, it describes this typical, routine-like activity, so anything that is characteristic, anything that describes a given matter or a given pass, anything that is repeated, in here, what we have, we have to remember about are the adverbs of frequency and that's it. Really. So if you want to characterize yourselves, if you want to just present yourselves that's a very, that's a very crucial piece of information because that kind of tenses, the one that you would use when you want to present yourselves, for example, at a job interview. We have covered the subject a couple of times in this podcast, in the World of English podcast and I will repeat that once again because you know that repetition is the key to success. So if you want to say the very, say something about yourself and present the very crucial information, you will use present simple. So you will say that my name is this and I live in this place, right, so, for instance, *I live in London, I have a family, I have two children, I own a car, I don't have any pets. What I do on a regular basis is I go to work and then I spend my time with my family. I often cook and I never ride a bike.* And that's it. So this is what you do about yourself and this is what you can do about another person. So you can characterize like your brother, your father, mother, husband, wife etc., etc., sister. And if you want to characterize another person, the only thing that you have to remember about is the "s", right. The "-s" at the end of each verb. So if you want to talk about your sister, you would say that *My sister's name is Kate. She lives in Dublin. She works as a secretary. She has a wonderful family. She enjoys her life there very much. She usually wakes up at seven and she starts her work at eight, she finishes at five. She comes back home and then she has dinner with her family. On the weekends, she often goes for a walk or she*



*travels to the country.* That's it. You're good, you are safe. All the information is there.

Then, we will look at the present continuous tense and let me just repeat what I have already told you that if you talk about something that has this very name of continuous or continuity, it means that something is happening at the very moment of speaking. We know this definition, we know this situation, so we will just say what we are doing right now. So, as you know, I'm speaking English right now, I'm talking to you and possibly you are listening to what I'm talking about right now. So that is the continuous tense but not many people know that if we think about the situation right now, we actually can make it a little bit broader and here comes the continuous tense. So the present continuous tense, so we can talk about all the projects or all the books or all the activities that you're working on right now. So, *I'm working on an interesting project*, of course, it does not mean that you are working on this project right now, but it means that you started on Monday and you will finish on Friday, right. So, generally speaking, like at present you are working on an interesting project or you are reading a very interesting book, like *Harry Potter*, for instance, or you are waking up this week a bit earlier because you left your car at the mechanic's and you just have to use the public transport. There you go.

One more thing, one more piece of information that you have to remember about the present continuous tense is that you use this tense to talk about the future, to talk about your plans. And here what I usually say is that it is nothing new, I mean nothing new for the speakers of English that speak Polish, so for Polish speakers of English, because we do the very same thing in Polish. I mean, we also use the present continuous tense to talk about our plans, for instance, *I'm meeting my friends on Friday, I'm going to the dentist tomorrow or I'm flying to London on the weekend.* That's it, this is all you have to know and if you know this, if you recognize these situations, you are safe, you are good, you will speak a very good variety of the language.



Now we are moving to the past. And of course, we have to understand this difference between present and past which is very natural and very obvious but the difference between the tenses stays the same. There is still the same difference, I mean the same difference between simple and continuous. So if you talk about past simple and if you want to use this tense to describe what you did in the past, you will describe these activities that are chronological, that are finished, that are typical, that are repeated. So if you want to tell me about yesterday, you will tell me that you woke up at seven, that you had this very nice breakfast and that you went for a walk afterwards and then you met your friends and then you had this lovely dinner together, then you walked your dog and you read a book in the evening. There you go.

But if you want to talk about some very specific situation, something very specific that was happening at a very specific moment in time, you would use past continuous and I usually compare this usage of past continuous to taking a picture. Because past continuous is like a picture, it is the picture of the past, so if you have a look at the gallery of the photographs that you have on your phone, if you look at them, if you look at the pictures, you will be very ready to use past continuous and tell me what you were doing at a very specific moment in time. So if you look at one picture, you will tell me that *Oh, I was spending my holidays with my friends at that time, we were having this great time and I will never forget the holiday back then*, for instance, or I can ask you another question, I can ask you what were you doing at 7 pm yesterday, and this time of 7 pm is very specific and you will tell me that you were eating supper or that you were preparing supper or that you were cooking or that you were backing or that you were reading. It is all that is happening at that very, that was happening at that very specific moment in time.

I hope you are following me, I hope you agree with me that this difference between tenses, this division into different tenses and different names it is not that difficult, it is not difficult at all. Now I'd like to talk about the future and as I



told you there is, of course, this future simple and future continuous tense and the difference, let me say it, the difference is still the same.

So if you want to talk about these activities that will happen in the future and that is this non called future, so you want to just give me this information about tomorrow or about next week or about next month and you will tell me *I will cook dinner tomorrow* or *Tomorrow will be a nice day* or *I hope we will win* or *I believe everything will be fine*, then you use this future simple. But if you want to talk about a very specific activity, a very specific action, thing that you will be doing in the future and please come back to what I told you a couple of minutes ago that if you want to talk about some activities that are happening right now, you use present continuous, if you want to talk about some activities that were happening at a very specific moment in time in the past, you use past continuous.

But if you want to talk about some activities that will be happening in the future and they will be happening at a very specific moment, you will use future continuous. So, each single time you need the continuous tense but for a different timeline, right, or for a different time zone, so to say, right. So, present is present, past is past and future is future. Just to give you a couple of examples, sentence examples here, what I would say is *This time tomorrow, I will be learning* or *This time next week, we will be flying to London* or *This time next year, we will be living in a completely different house*.

Let us sum up what I have just said. Please remember, please bear it in mind that there is this very basic division of the tenses in English, I mean simple and continuous and each and every time, each time, the simple and continuous tense is the same. So the same idea is described with that kind of tense. So, there is the present simple, past simple and future simple and there we have present continuous, past continuous and future continuous.

What I also have prepared for you today, when we think about the subject of tenses, is the present perfect tense and again I'm pausing for reaction here because I do believe, I mean this is what my experience tells me and I would say



that many teachers, many teachers of English would agree with me that this is so, this is really so that present perfect is the most difficult tense because we do not have, we, I mean, the speakers of Polish, Polish speakers of English, we do not have this immediate equivalent of this tense in Polish and that's why we find it very difficult.

We will start with the very name — present perfect, and here there are two groups of speakers of English and there are two groups of teachers. So, some teachers say that present perfect is actually a past tense because it describes activities from the past and some other teachers and some other learners would say that this is actually a present tense and I belong to this other group. I mean I belong to this group who says that present perfect is actually a present tense because whatever you describe with present perfect it has this connection to the present every single time. Even if you describe some activities from the past, but you describe them in a way in which all these activities are kind of here, I mean they are connected with the present because if you say *I have finished the report*, it means that the report is ready, you can look at the report. If you say *I have read the book*, it means that you know the book, right, you know what the book is about, you know the plot, you know the characters. If you say *I've been to England*, it means that you know the country, that you went there some time ago, that you came back, that you enjoyed it, possibly.

And in very many situations, if you want to translate a sentence in the present perfect tense, you want to translate this sentence into Polish, very often you would use this present tense in Polish. And the examples of such sentences are, for instance, *I have lived in London for ten years* or *I have worked in this company for five years* or *I have lived, I have studied English for half a year*. If you think of this translation of these sentences into Polish, you will immediately know that what you, the tense that you want to use, the way you want to translate it into Polish is this present tense.

There is this difference between present perfect simple and present perfect continuous and there is this difference between present perfect and past simple. I



will start with present perfect, with this difference between present perfect and past simple. And what I will share with you right now, I think, is this key to success. Because every single time I share it with my students, they say *Oh my gosh, nobody has ever told me that*. Many students struggle to understand this difference between present perfect and past simple. Many students don't know how to use these tenses. They find it difficult. But there is one simple difference between them and this difference is as follows: if you want to tell me or if you want to tell anybody else when you performed a given activity, when you performed a given action and you give the exact date or the exact time or the exact place, because place is connected with the time, you use past simple.

If you want to share the same kind of information but you don't want to tell us or tell anybody else when you performed this activity, you just want to inform us that the activity has been performed, you don't give this information and you use present perfect. Let us compare these two sentences: *I bought the shoes last weekend* or *I have bought a new pair of shoes*. The information is pretty much similar because you know that somebody has got a new pair of shoes but in the very first sentence, you get this extra information of the time and always, please remember, it is that simple, always when you want to give this information of when something happened, you use past simple. If you don't want to give this information, you use present perfect.

And another definition that is there, that also helps to understand this difference between these two tenses is as follows: if you think about present perfect and past simple, you think about a finished action. But in past simple the time is finished as well, but in the present perfect tense the time is not finished. And again, this is exactly the definition of the sentences that I have just introduced to you. *I bought the shoes last weekend* — the activity is finished and the time is finished. *I have bought a new pair of shoes* — the activity is finished because I do have a new pair of shoes but the time is not finished. We have no idea when and possibly there is yet more to come. So this is this difference, I mean, between present perfect and past simple.



And I promised to you that we would also cover this difference between present perfect simple and present perfect continuous. And here the difference is also, also very simple. We know that both of these tenses, like, present perfect simple and present perfect continuous they talk about the effect. *I have bought a new pair of shoes* — that's a sentence I have repeated — and *I have been running* or *I have been drinking coffee* or *I have been cooking*. And when you think about these two sentences or these two types of effects, you will know that in the present perfect simple the effect is what you actually wanted. So you have bought a new pair of shoes because you wanted to have a new pair of shoes.

When you think of this effect of the present perfect continuous tense, the effect is not what you wanted. So if you see somebody who has got this blouse and there is this brown spot on the blouse, you can tell them, you can comment on the situation, you can tell them *Oh, I can see you've been drinking coffee*. Well, we do not drink coffee to get stains on our clothes, that's obvious for us. But if you look at these traces, you will know what somebody has been doing. Another situation, if you are entering your office and you see that there is this mess on your desk, what you can say is like *Somebody has been working on my desk* or *at my desk, somebody has been working at my desk*. Because you are like detectives, you see the traces of this effect. Present perfect simple — the effect is the one that you wanted to have and present perfect continuous it is the effect you did not want to have.

The last little bit about tenses, the last little bit of general information about the tenses, let me repeat it once again, it is just general information, of course you will not cover all the tenses that there are in English in twenty or twenty-five minutes but you can have this very golden rules that will help you study and that will save you, that will save your face in many real-life situations.

So the third thing I'd like to cover today is this feeling, I want you to have this feeling that if you speak English and if you decide between different tenses, what you actually decide about is what you want to say. I will give you a couple of examples, four to be precise. I will convey a message in four different ways with



four different tenses but all in all, when we think about the information that is communicated through it and in this skill, in the skill of speaking English and in the skill of using a given language, you need this communication skill. This is crucial, conveying a message is crucial in here. So if you think about this message that is conveyed, you will see that the message is more or less the same.

Let me give you these sentence examples. So the first sentence is *I live in London*. The second one is *I'm living in London*. *I have lived in London*. And *I have been living in London*. Four different tenses: present simple, present continuous, present perfect simple and present perfect continuous. And of course, all the advanced speakers of English would tell me right now, would raise their hands and would say *Hey, but they are different tenses and they talk about a little bit different situations*. I agree that there are these subtle differences between them. But once again, if you think about the message, the message is still the same. So if somebody tells me something like that, I know from the sentence where they live. So I just know that they live in London. Of course, when you think about sentence number one *I live in London*, you know that this is permanent. That this is a characteristic piece of information about somebody. If you think about *I'm living in London*, you would know that maybe it is a student who is talking to you, maybe they don't think about London as their permanent place of residence, maybe. *I have lived in London* or *I have lived in London for a couple of years* — what we know from this sentence is that this person still lives in London but they also lived in the past. When you think about *I have been living in London*, they still live in London, they lived in London in the past and it is this continuous action for them. So here what we have, what you have listened to, they are these very subtle differences but the message is the same.

Guys, I hope you have managed, I hope you have managed to listen to it all. As always, I'd like to get a bit of feedback from you. Please tell me if you find it useful. Well, it works, for me, it works every time when I share this knowledge with my learners and I have decided to share this knowledge with you, with my listeners, with listeners of the World of English podcast. Please listen to it



carefully, please think about all the information I have covered, all the information I have shared with you. And I do believe that you will find the information useful and if you stick to these rules, you will simply speak a better variety of English and this is what I want for you. Thank you so much for listening. Bye-bye.