CHAPTER 1
TENSE AND LINGUISTICS

Nothing is improbable until it moves into the past tense.
(George Ade)

1.1 Introduction
Many instructed foreign language learners who are asked to elaborate on the concept of tense appear to have some idea of what tense is. They are often able to cite paradigms of textbook examples of verbs in specific tenses in the languages that they are learning. However, providing a nuanced definition of the grammatical category of tense seems to be a different challenge altogether. The challenges involved in defining tense are many and they are reflected in the linguistic literature on the topic. The overall aim of this chapter is to contextualize the grammatical category of tense from a mainly linguistic point of view. I will first highlight some of the most common challenges which are generally featured in discussions of the grammatical category of tense. After this, I will discuss the meanings and uses of the past and the present perfect to locate bygone situations in English and in Dutch.

The first section of this chapter (Section 1.2) will look at some existing definitions of tense and will use these definitions to highlight and discuss the recurring items of agreement and disagreement that may be found in publications on tense. The second section (Section 1.3) will address the issue of how tense may be conceptualized (in English) by using an existing descriptive theory of tense in English. The third and final section (Section 1.4) will use the insights from the first two sections and will investigate the similarities and differences with respect to the past and the present perfect in English and Dutch.

1.2 Defining tense
The grammatical category of tense can be defined as a broad grammatical category in that it may be instantiated in language in a variety of ways and interacts with other grammatical categories (e.g., aspect, mood) and with a number of lexical and/or pragmatic means which are generally used to express temporality in language (e.g., adverbials, connectives, scaffolding). A closer look at a sele-

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3 The three grammatical categories of tense (T), aspect (A) and mood (M) are often referred to as the TAM categories (e.g., Kroeger, 2005; Montrul, 2004) or the TMA categories (e.g., Booij, 2005).

4 See Chapter 3 for a more elaborate, SLA-oriented discussion of adverbials, connectives, scaffolding and references to other lexical and pragmatic means of discussing temporality.
tion of definitions of the grammatical category of tense found in both the general, introductory linguistic literature—applied and non-applied—and the more specialized tense-related literature may help identify some of the most common items of both agreement and disagreement among scholars.

Consider the following definitions of tense (quoted with original highlighting):

**tense** *(adj./n.)* *(1) (tns, TNS)* A CATEGORY used in the GRAMMATICAL description of VERBS (along with ASPECT and MOOD), referring primarily to the way the grammar marks the time at which the action denoted by the verb took place. Traditionally, a distinction is made between past, present and future tenses, often with further divisions (perfect, pluperfect, etc.). In LINGUISTICS, the relationship between tense and time has been the subject of much study, and it is now plain that there is no easily stateable relationship between the two. Tense FORMS (i.e. variations in the MORPHOLOGICAL form of the verb) can be used to signal MEANINGS other than temporal ones. In English, for example, the past-tense form *(e.g., I knew)* may signal a tentative meaning, and not past time, in some contexts *(e.g., I wish I knew - that is, ‘know now’).* Nor is there a simple one-to-one relationship between tense forms and time: the present tense in English may help to refer to future or past time, depending on CONTEXT *(e.g., I am going home tomorrow, Last week I am walking down this street . . .* (see HISTORIC PRESENT). Furthermore, if tenses are defined as forms of the verbs, it becomes a matter of debate whether a language like English has a future tense at all: constructions such as *I will/shall go*, according to many, are best analysed as involving MODAL AUXILIARY verbs, displaying a different grammatical FUNCTION *(e.g., the expression of intention or obligation, which may often involve futurity).* English illustrates several such problems, as do other languages, where tense forms, if they exist, regularly display analytic difficulties, because of overlaps between tense and other verbal functions, such as aspect and mood. Alternative terminology *(e.g., ‘past’ v. ‘non-past’, ‘future’ v. ‘non-future’, ‘now’ v. ‘remote’)* will often be needed. (Crystal, 2003, pp. 459–460)

**Tense**: *(a)* the phenomenon that a language has a special system of verb forms to locate *(the actualizations of situations)* in time; *(b)* the correlation of a particular grammatical form with a particular tense meaning *(e.g., the ‘past tense’).* In more detail: tense is a linguistic concept (as opposed to time) denoting the form taken by the verb to locate *(the actualization of)* the situation referred to in time, i.e. to express the temporal relation between the time of the situation in question and an orientation time which may be either the temporal zero-point or another orientation time that is temporally related *(directly or indirectly)* to the temporal zero-point. English has several tenses, such as the present tense, the past tense, etc., to which correspond different verb forms which are called the tense forms of the verb. (Declerck, 2006, p. 820)

**Tense.** A category used in the description of VERBS which refers to the location of an action in time *(as distinct from ASPECT, which is concerned with its duration).* Many linguists make a distinction between form and function in analysing tense. By this analysis there are only two tenses in English — past and present. In other words, there are only two ways in which tense is grammaticalised. If we wish to indicate the present tense we use the base form of the verb, whilst the past involved adding ‘ed’ *(in the case of regular verbs).* There is no separate inflection for the future, however. To indicate that, we use either the present tense, *I am going home tomorrow,* or the modal verbs shall and will in conjunction with a main verb, *I shall/will go home tomorrow.* The distinction between form and function is a useful one in dealing with the complicated relationship
between tense and time. Tensed forms (i.e. variations in the structure, or morphology, of the verb) can be used to signal a wide variety of meanings other than temporal ones. We can, for example, use the past tense to indicate some kind of hypothetical meaning, as in, I wish I had your money (i.e. have now) . . . What is clear from studies of tense and time is that there is no easily stateable relationship between them. We use the two formal grammatical distinctions, past and present, to perform a number of functions, some of which are purely temporal, and some which are modal, or interpersonal in some way. (Finch, 2000, pp. 118–119)

Tense

The different tense forms of verbs are forms used primarily to express the time at which an event occurred, or at which some state of affairs held. It is conventional, in everyday talk about language, to assume that there are just three basic tenses, namely past, present and future. But when one looks at the different ways in which languages express distinctions related to time, one generally finds a more complicated picture, and often a picture that does not reflect the simple past/present/future division.

Traditional grammarians and modern linguists have approached this complicated area of languages with slightly different terminological conventions. What many traditional grammarians label as various kinds of ‘tense’, modern linguists split into two different ideas, namely: tense, which is strictly to do with WHEN something happened or was the case; aspect, which is concerned with factors such as the DURATION or COMPLETENESS of events and states of affairs. For English, this difference of terminology comes out mainly in relation to the perfect and the progressive, which many traditional grammarians would treat as part of the system of tense, but modern linguists treat as belonging to the system of aspect. In this dictionary, we keep to the traditional grammarian’s terminology. But ‘tense’ is an area in which the traditional terminology is indeed quite crude. The more modern distinction between tense and aspect is a valuable refinement, and advanced detailed work on languages must make this distinction. (Hurford, 1994, p. 239)

tense

‘Tense’ refers to the way that verbs are inflected (i.e., have different forms) to express a relation with time. For example, happen vs happened; run vs ran; can vs could. The relation between tense and time is not an exact match. A present tense verb form may in fact refer to the future or the past, as in The bus leaves at noon tomorrow, Yesterday morning, I’m lying in bed when the phone rings ... And a past tense verb form may refer to the future or the present, as in If we went to Mallorca next summer ... Could I try it on? Nevertheless, there is a loose relation between time and tense. In the absence of context, you are likely to interpret it happens as having present reference, and the sentence it happened as having past reference. It is important to remember, though, that grammatical tense and notional time are not the same thing. Because tense describes the way that verbs are inflected, there are only two tenses in English: the present and the past. There is no future inflection in English; instead futurity is expressed in a variety of ways, including the use of modal verbs: It’ll happen. It’s going to happen . . . Tense combines with aspect to create a variety of verb structures in English that are commonly, if mistakenly, known as its different tenses. (Thornbury, 2006, p. 226)

tense 1.

A grammatical category which correlates fairly directly with time. Tense is usually, though not invariably, marked in the verb in those languages that have it. Some languages have only two tenses (usually past versus non-past, sometimes future versus non-future); some have three (usually past, present, future); and some have more (for example, they may distinguish recent past from remote past). The largest number of tenses so far reported is eleven, in the African language Bamileke-Dschang. English has only two tenses: past versus non-past (“present”), as in lived/live, went/go, would/will.
Note: traditional grammarians often use the term ‘tense’ in a very loose way that includes also aspect and mood, but this usage is objectionable. (Trask, 1997, p. 218)

Note that some of the definitions above focus on defining the grammatical category of tense from a language-specific perspective—more specifically—an English-specific perspective. However, it should be borne in mind that choosing to focus on one specific language—or on a specific group of languages—when defining grammatical concepts may lead to definitional bias depending on the linguistic features of the language(s) being focused on. The following discussion of the items of agreement and disagreement will focus on English but will also, at times, highlight similarities and differences with other languages wherever relevant.

The first item of agreement that can be found in most of the definitions above is the general consensus that tense may be defined as a grammatical category of the verb. This may not be referred to in all of the definitions explicitly and by means of the linguistic term grammatical category but those definitions that make no explicit reference to the wording grammatical category do use ample examples of tense which show that tense is generally a grammatical category of the verb and that tense is expressed in the form of verbal paradigms. As a result, a large part of the discussion in this doctoral dissertation will focus on form-related, meaning-related and use-related features of temporality in the verb phrase. However, even though tense may be regarded as the “grammaticalised location in time” (Comrie, 1985, p. 9), it is one of several means which can be used to express temporality in language. In extended discourse, one generally finds the presence of several means of expressing temporality. This, in turn, usually results in nuanced forms of interplay between these means. A common example of such interplay is the interaction between the grammatical category of tense and, for example, (temporal) adverbials. The common presence of interplay explains why the other means of expressing temporality—especially the lexical means (e.g., adverbials)—will also be featured and discussed in this dissertation. It also explains why aspects of interplay will be highlighted wherever these are considered relevant for the development of ideas.

The second item of agreement is the reference to the relationship between tense and time. Most of the definitions above explicitly refer to a relationship between tense and time. At the same time, however, most of the definitions also refer to the fact that this relationship is not “easily stateable” (Crystal, 2003, p. 459) (i.e., is not straightforward) and list examples of the relationship.

5 In the majority of linguistic publications dealing with tense, the grammatical category of tense is defined as a grammatical category of the verb (e.g., Comrie, 1985; Leech, 2004; Lewis, 1986; Palmer, 1987). A probable reason for this method of approach is that tense is generally grammaticalized as a feature of the verb phrase in most languages that have tense (Comrie, 1985). However, even though tense is mainly approached as a grammatical category of the verb, it is not necessarily a feature that is exclusive to the verb phrase. Some languages also assign tense to, for example, adjectival phrases, adverbial phrases and noun phrases (Comrie, 1985).
One commonly discussed aspect of this relationship is that there is not always a one-to-one correspondence between tense and time. In other words, the relationship between tense and time is a bidirectionally fluid relationship. In practice, this means that one tense may express several temporal meanings and one temporal meaning may be expressed by several tenses. By way of example, let us have a closer look at the present tense in English and at the times that this tense may refer to. The prototypical or primary meanings of the present tense are meanings that refer to situations that hold at the present moment (e.g., I am here now, Beckham kicks the ball to Shearer, Magnets attract iron, The abbreviation FAQ stands for ‘frequently asked question’, My niece earns a living as a classically trained musician). However, the present tense also has secondary meanings, which need not necessarily refer to situations that hold at the present moment. The present tense may also be used to refer to the future (e.g., The plane leaves tomorrow at 11:15 a.m., I will talk to her as soon as I see her). In addition, it may also be used to refer to the past (e.g., in newspaper headlines (e.g., Drunk Hollywood star breaks his leg) and in narrative descriptions (‘historic present’) (e.g., I am sitting in her room and all of a sudden this guy walks in and starts flirting with me). A second commonly discussed aspect of the relationship between tense and time is that the grammatical category of tense does not always express temporal meanings. Tense is often used to express hypothetical meaning as is the case with the past in, for example, conditional sentences (e.g., If I had children, I would not allow them to talk to me like that). Moreover, modality may also be expressed by means of the grammatical category of tense (e.g., a will-future in He will come to tomorrow’s event even if I have to drag him!).

In this doctoral dissertation, the focus will be on the temporal meanings of the grammatical category of tense, more specifically on the temporal meanings of the past and the present perfect when used to locate bygone situations in English and in Dutch.

The two items of agreement discussed above are counterbalanced by a few items of disagreement, which disclose what is referred to by Declerck (1991) as a “lack of consensus” (p. 8) with regard to the concept of tense. The first item of disagreement concerns the precise number of tenses that are said to make up the tense paradigm in a language. Paraphrased in a more language-specific context, that is, an English-specific context, this item could be reduced to one single question: How many tenses does present-day English have at its disposal? The answer to this question varies according to the scope of the definition of tense that is applied. The two answers—which represent extreme answers to

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6 Some uses of the present tense (e.g., general truths/facts/timeless statements such as Magnets attract iron) refer to situations that not only hold at the present time but also held at past times and will hold at future times. However, there are scholars who question that such instances of references to past and future times are inherent features of the present tense. They explain such references as interpretations which are the result of implications which are derived from world knowledge and/or from the type of situation which is found in the actual clause (e.g., Downing & Locke, 2006).
this tense-related question—are said to be two tenses (according to an extremely narrow definition of tense) and sixteen tenses (according to a much broader definition of tense) (Kortmann, 1999). However, at the same time, other answers, such as three, six and twelve tenses, would also be perfectly possible depending on the criteria used to define the concept of tense. Let us have a look at both the possibilities available to expand the English tense system and the various lines of logic used to explain the scope of the grammatical category of tense and some of the numbers listed above.

Many linguists claim that English has only two tenses (present and past) and that tense is a grammatical category which is expressed morphologically, more precisely, by means of inflectional morphemes only. Consequently, any verb forms which are not created by means of inflectional tense morphology (e.g., the present perfect, the analytic will-future) are a priori not considered true tense forms (e.g., Finch, 2000; Thornbury, 2006; Trask, 1997, 2000). There are, however, many linguists who do not subscribe to such a narrow definition of tense and who include, for example, the analytic will-future as a possible tense in English (e.g., Crystal, 2003; Declerck, 1991, 2003, 2006), bringing the total amount of tenses to at least three (present, past and future). This is a highly controversial issue but the logic behind such a decision will be explained below in the discussion of Declerck’s taxonomy of tenses in present-day English. Another option is to broaden the definition of tense even further and to include the perfect verb forms (present perfect, past perfect, future perfect), often referred to as aspechual variants of non-perfect verb forms, which brings the total number of tenses to at least six (e.g., Declerck, 1991, 2003, 2006). Once again, the inclusion of perfect forms in the tense system is not an controversial issue but a possible line of logic behind such a decision will also be provided below. In theory, the number of six tenses could be doubled by including also the progressive verb forms as possible tense forms, thus yielding twelve tenses. And if the conditional verb forms were added to those twelve tense forms, the result would be a total of sixteen tenses in present-day English (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2).

7 Many linguists refer to the present tense using the term non-past since they believe that the term non-past more accurately expresses the use of the present tense as a means of referring to times other than the past (Trask, 2000). Indeed, the present tense is often used to refer to times other than the present. However, the present tense is also used sometimes to refer to the past (e.g., in newspaper headlines and in narrative descriptions ('historic present')). Thus, the term non-past itself is not as accurate as some linguists claim that it is. Consequently, the term non-past will not be used in this dissertation unless it is explicitly used in references to its use by other scholars.

8 Many grammars of English list the auxiliary shall as a formal and/or less usual alternative auxiliary for the will-future in the first person (singular and plural) (Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Declerck, 2003; Mackenzie, 1997; Ungerer, 2000). However, because the shall-alternative is not as frequent as the more widespread future tense auxiliary will, the concept of will-future will be used in this dissertation to refer to both instantiations of this future form in English.
The inclusion of progressive forms in a possible tense paradigm stretches the narrow definition of tense quite considerably. Many linguists insist that the progressive verb forms are not separate tense forms but rather aspectual variations of non-progressive verb forms. However, grammars of English which have a strong(er) pedagogical focus often implicitly or explicitly include the progressive verb forms in the tense system in such a way that progressive verb forms are represented as verb forms with tense status in their own right rather than aspectual variations of simple verb forms (e.g., Aitken, 1992; Alexander, 1988; De Moor, 1998; Hewings, 1999; Murphy, 1985; Thomson & Martinet, 1986a, 1986b, 1986c).

In his descriptive theory of tense, Declerck (1991, 2003, 2006) recognizes a total of eight common tenses in present-day English, which he refers to using the following grammatical terminology: (1) present, (2) present perfect, (3) past/preterit(e),9 (4) past perfect, (5) future, (6) future perfect, (7) conditional and (8) conditional perfect. A total of eight common tenses may be a surprise to those who define tense extremely narrowly, so let us have a look at some of Declerck’s guiding principles for drawing up this specific taxonomy of tenses in English. Some of the principles have already been referred to above but will be examined in more detail below. In addition, possible controversial issues which

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were introduced above in the discussion of definitional items of disagreement will also be explained.

![Diagram of verb tenses](image)

**Figure 1.2. Conjugation of the verb talk in a possible 16-tense verb system in present-day English**

The first controversial issue is the listing of compound verb forms as possible tensed verb forms (in present-day English) based on morphological features of the verb phrase. Let us investigate this issue by discussing the nature of future verb forms in present-day English. In his list of common tenses in English, Declerck refers to two future tenses in English: the future (e.g., *I will talk to him next time*) and the future perfect (e.g., *I will have talked to him by then*). Two main problems are usually addressed in discussions of the status of future tenses in present-day English: (1) the analytic nature of future verb forms and (2) the modal features of the future auxiliary *will*. For the remainder of the discussion, the second problem will not be of much interest. Consequently, it will not be discussed in great detail. The first problem, the analytic nature of future verb forms, which was already briefly mentioned above, concerns the fact that present-day English does not generally use synthetic verb forms to refer to the future but, instead, uses a range of options to refer to the future, most of which are morphologically analytic.¹⁰ The most neutral way of referring to the future

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¹⁰ Trask (1997) defines the term *analytic* as “a label applied to a grammatical form which is constructed by adding additional words to the word being inflected” (p. 14) and the term *synthetic* as “a label applied to a grammatical form which is constructed entirely by affixing or modifying the
in present-day English is by means of the analytic will-future (Kortmann, 1999). Many linguists do not regard the English will-future as a tense form in its own right since it is formed using the future auxiliary will in combination with the base form of the main verb and not by means of any inflectional tense morphology. In other words, those who do not regard the English will-future as a tense define the grammatical category of tense extremely narrowly. According to this logic, any verb form which is not created using only inflectional tense morphology is not considered a true tense (form). The creation of future tense forms by means of non-inflectional tense morphology (i.e., by means of analytic verb forms) is not unusual in language and it is a linguistic feature in English and in, for example, other Germanic languages such as Danish, Dutch, German, Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish. Such instances of non-inflectional future tense morphology contrast with the most common future tense forms in, for example, Romance languages such as French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish, which do generally have synthetic future verb forms at their disposal—often in addition to other verb forms with future meanings—and which use these synthetic verb forms to refer to the future (See Table 1.1).\footnote{Declerck recognizes the distribution of analytic and synthetic future verb forms referred to above but does not agree with the assumption that tense should be conceived of as a grammatical category which is marked morphologically by means of inflectional morphemes only. “It is well known”, Declerck (1991) argues, “that it is often the case that one and the same idea is expressed morphologically in one language and by means of an independent morpheme in another” (pp. 9–10). He exemplifies this statement by making a passing reference to the morphological features of the definite article in Swedish. In English, the definite article is always realized as a free, lexical morpheme, which is placed in front of the singular or plural noun which it determines. However, in Swedish the definite article is often—though not always—realized as a single suffix, which is generally added to the singular or plural noun which it determines (e.g., bil/bilen (car/the car), bilar/bilarna (cars/the cars), äpple/äpplet (apple/the apple), äpplen/äpplet (apples/the apples). This feature, which is also referred to as the suffixed article, is by no means exclusive to Swedish and is also found—albeit in varying forms of distribution—in other languages (e.g., Albanian, Bulgarian, word in question, without the use of any additional words” (p. 215). With respect to verb forms the analytic/synthetic distinction is reflected in, for example, the following forms: he will eat (analytic, because of the future auxiliary will), he eats (synthetic, because of the inflectional suffix -s).}

It should be stressed that both Germanic languages and Romance language have other (non-future) verb forms at their disposal to refer to the future but for the discussion at hand this feature is irrelevant and will consequently not be discussed. The typological distinction between analytic and synthetic languages and language forms is not a sharp one. Instead, the distinction should be seen as a continuum with most languages located at various points between the two extremes of fully analytic and fully synthetic (Barber, 2000).
Danish, Icelandic, Norwegian, Romanian). With reference to tense, Declerck (1991) subsequently poses the following question: “Why should we not accept that some tenses can be expressed morphologically while others make use of free morphemes (auxiliaries)?” (p. 10). Although Declerck’s reasoning may be viewed by some linguists as simplistic, it does bring home an issue which is found not only in the discussion of tense: the fact that languages may express the same grammatical feature (e.g., aspect, definiteness, number, tense) but that they need not necessarily select the same resources to express these features.

Table 1.1. Distribution of analytic and synthetic future verb forms in Germanic and Romance languages

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Germanic languages</th>
<th>Romance languages</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>(f) skal tale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>(ik) zal spreken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>(I) will talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>(ich) werde sprechen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icelandic</td>
<td>(eg) mun tala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian</td>
<td>(eg) skal snakke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>(eg) ska(ll) tala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>(je) parlerai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>(io) parlerò</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>(eu) falarei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>(yo) hablaré</td>
</tr>
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</table>

As described above, the analytic nature of the future verb forms in present-day English is not the only problem that one encounters in discussions of the tense status of future verb forms in English. In addition to the morphology of future verb forms, many linguists do not recognize any future tense(s) in present-day English on the assumption that the semantics of the will-future verb forms are an example of the fact that the future “is not a tense at all, but a mode” (Cygan, 1972, p. 9, quoted in Declerck, 2006, p. 102). Declerck (2006) recognizes that the future tense may have modal aspects of meaning (e.g., subjectivity) and that there is always an element of epistemic modality in the meaning of a future tense. However, he also claims that some uses of the will-future are close to

12 The rules regarding the forms, meanings and uses of the definite article in Swedish are more complex than computationally adding the appropriate suffixes to singular and plural forms of nouns. However, for the discussion at hand such nuances are irrelevant and will not be discussed. For more detailed information on this feature of Swedish grammar see, for example, Holmes and Hinchliffe, 1994, Meijer, 1997, Ramge, 2002.
being purely temporal since they do not involve any modal aspect of meaning. Consequently, Declerck does recognize future tenses in English.

The second controversial issue concerns the listing of a small group of verb forms as possible examples of tense forms (in present-day English) which are actually referred to as aspectual verb forms in many descriptions of English verb forms. The perfect verb forms fall into this category of verb forms. Declerck distinguishes four perfect tenses in present-day English: (1) the present perfect (e.g., She has studied), (2) the past perfect (e.g., She had studied), (3) the future perfect (e.g., She will have studied) and (4) the conditional perfect (e.g., She would have studied). Like future verb forms, perfect verb forms are ‘at a morphological disadvantage’ for acceptance as tenses as a result of their analytic nature, that is, they are formed using a (tensed) form of the auxiliary have and the past participle of the main verb. In addition, many linguists do not consider perfect verb forms as tense forms in their own right but rather as aspectual variations of existing (non-perfect) verb forms. According to one group of linguists, the present perfect can be considered a combination of a present tense and an aspectual meaning component of current relevance (Declerck, 2006). Another group of linguists claims that the present perfect is actually a representation of the same temporal structure expressed by the past but that the present perfect “differs from the past only in that it also expresses ‘perfect aspect’” (Declerck, 2006, p. 109). Declerck, however, does not adhere to these views and attributes a tense structure to the present perfect which is different from the tense structures found for either the present tense or the past tense.

The features that have been discussed above show that reaching agreement on a possible definition of the grammatical category of tense is a problematic endeavour. Although there are some commonly accepted definitional features which are found in many existing definitions of tense, there are also several controversial features, which render any attempt at defining tense problematic. Two of the most controversial issues that are generally addressed in definitions of tense are the morphological status (analytic versus synthetic) and the aspectual features of verb-phrase elements. For both of these controversial issues arguments may be found in favour of or against accepting specific verb forms (e.g., perfect verb forms) as tenses in their own right (see discussion above). The approach to tense that will be adopted in this doctoral dissertation is the one put forward by Declerck (1991, 2003, 2006). The most updated and most

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13 The concept of epistemic modality is defined by Declerck (2006) as the “modality having to do with the possible degrees of the speaker’s commitment to the truth of a proposition” (p. 775). According to Declerck (2006) such modality may be expressed by “modal adverbs like certainly, perhaps, possibly, etc. or by auxiliaries like must, should, ought to, will, can, could and need” (p. 775).

14 The aspectual meaning of current relevance in perfect verb forms is also described using the adjective resultative (Leech, 2004). However, the idea of current relevance is not completely unproblematic (Lewis, 1986). As a result, it will not be used in the further discussion of perfect verb forms and of the present perfect tense unless it is explicitly used in the literature on perfect tenses.
A comprehensive version of Declerck’s theory of tense will be introduced in the following section. It is the concepts that are put forward below which will be used in the further development of ideas in this chapter.

1.3 Conceptualizing tense

1.3.1 Linguistic time in English

As was mentioned in Section 1.2, Declerck (2006) defines tense as “a linguistic concept (as opposed to time) denoting the form taken by the verb to locate (the actualization of) the situation referred to in time” (p. 820). The concept of time, however, is not as straightforward as one might expect and this has been reflected in Declerck’s work and in the overall development of his descriptive theory of tense in English. Declerck makes clear references to, for example, the difference between objective (physical) time and linguistic time (Declerck, 1991, 2003, 2006). Whereas objective (physical) time consists of two parts (the past and the future), which are separated by the present, linguistic time, according to Declerck (1991), is “time as it is perceived and talked about by language users” (p. 16).

English-speaking language users generally divide linguistic time into two time-spheres: (1) the present time-sphere and (2) the past time-sphere (Declerck, 1991, 2003, 2006). Characteristic of these two time-spheres is that the past time-sphere is defined as an (indefinite) time span which is located entirely before the temporal zero-point ($t_0$) and which does not include $t_0$ (Declerck, 1991, 2006). Declerck (2006) defines the temporal zero-point as follows:

The time which is the ultimate ‘origin’ of all the temporal relations expressed by the temporal structure of a tense, i.e. the only time in a tense structure that is not itself represented as dependent on another (more basic) time. It is the only time that is given (‘assumed known’) whenever a sentence is uttered. In English, the temporal zero-point is nearly always the encoding time, i.e. the time of uttering or writing the message. Occasionally, the zero-point is the decoding time, i.e. the time when the addressee is expected to hear or read the message, as is the case when a note stuck to someone’s door reads I am in room 21. (As always, the present tense locates the situation time at $t_0$, but $t_0$ is the time of reading the message rather than the time of writing it.) (p. 820, quoted with original highlighting)

The present time-sphere, on the other hand, is defined as an (indefinite) time span which does include $t_0$. The presence of $t_0$ in the present time-sphere leads to the division of that time-sphere into three zones (or sectors): (1) the pre-present zone (i.e., the part of the present time-sphere which precedes $t_0$), (2) the present zone (i.e., the part of the present time-sphere which coincides with $t_0$) and (3) the post-present zone (i.e., the part of the present time-sphere which

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15 A time-sphere refers to a length of time. By no means should this concept be interpreted as spherical (Declerck, 2006).

16 The temporal zero-point is also referred to as the time of utterance (TU) (Declerck, 2003).
follows to) (Declerck, 1991, 2003, 2006). The two basic divisions referred to above are schematized in Figure 1.3.

![Figure 1.3. Linguistic conceptualization of the time line in English (adapted from Declerck, 2006)](image)

The eight common English tenses referred to above are used to locate situations in either the present time-sphere or past time-sphere. Consequently, Declerck divides the English tenses into two main categories: (1) present (time-sphere) tenses and (2) past (time-sphere) tenses. The category of present (time-sphere) tenses comprises the present tense, the present perfect, the future tense and the future perfect tense and the category of past (time-sphere) tenses comprises the past tense, the past perfect, the conditional tense and the conditional perfect.\(^\ref{fn:1}\)

The two divisions above (i.e., the division into time-spheres and the division into zones/sectors) form the basic, temporal/conceptual framework in which the English tenses may be used to locate situations. However, when considering the meanings and uses of tenses several factors must be considered. One important factor, if not the most important factor, are the semantics of the individual tenses. Declerck (2006) recognizes this and refers to the semantics issue as follows: “The use of a tense is wholly determined by its semantics (= temporal structure), which has to fit in with the temporal information given by the time-specifying adverbial or by the context” (p. 599). This brings us to an aspect of tense which is considered extremely challenging by linguists, L2 teachers and L2 learners: Even though tense can be found at a subsentential level and at a sentential level (i.e., in simple and complex clauses), it is often active also at a suprasentential level (i.e., in discourse). At both the sentential level and

\(^{17}\) In theory, the eight common tenses recognized by Declerck should actually be interpreted as umbrella terms since each tense comprises both the simple form and the progressive form of that tense. This means that, for example, the present tense comprises the simple present (e.g., *I talk*) and the present progressive (e.g., *I am talking*). This principle applies to all of the eight common tenses recognized by Declerck.
the suprasentential level, situations in clauses are often temporally related to each other by means of temporal domains (Declerck, 2006). The concept of temporal domains can be exemplified using the following sentence:

(1.1) The student told the teacher that he had handed in the wrong paper and that he would hand in the right paper on Tuesday.

In (1.1), the reference is clearly to a past domain, that is, to a structured set of times, which is located in the past time-sphere and which consists of the times of the three situations which are referred to in the sentence (told (past), had handed in (past perfect) and would hand in (conditional)). The first situation (told (past)) is the situation which establishes the past domain and which is therefore referred to as the central situation. A tense that is used to refer to such a central situation is called an absolute tense. The other two tense forms in the sentence above (had handed in (past perfect), would hand in (conditional)) both refer to situations which are temporally subordinated (= temporally related) to the central situation: the situation referred to by had handed in is represented as anterior to the situation of John telling the teacher about what had happened whereas the situation referred to by would hand in is represented as posterior to the situation of John telling the teacher about what had happened. A tense that is used to refer to such temporally subordinated situations is called a relative tense.

Within Declerck’s descriptive theory of tense, the English-speaking language user’s task (in discourse) consists of having to decide, for every new clause, whether the situation contained in that clause should be incorporated into the existing temporal domain, that is, whether the existing temporal domain should be expanded, or whether a new temporal domain should be established, into which further situations may subsequently be incorporated. Establishing a new temporal domain is referred to by Declerck (1991, 2003, 2006) as a shift of domain. If language users decide to incorporate a new situation into an existing temporal domain, they are said to resort to temporal subordination, which involves temporally binding the new situation to an orientation time other than the temporal zero-point (Declerck, 1991, 2003, 2006).

1.3.2 Relative tense: The expression of tense relations within a domain
In addition to dividing linguistic time into two time-spheres and the present time-sphere into three zones, English-speaking language users also use various language-specific systems to express tense relations (T-relations) in a domain established in the past or in the present time-sphere. In essence, there are three types of (domain-internal) relations that can be expressed linguistically by means of tenses: (1) anteriority (e.g., When I arrived at the party, she had already left),

18 English has a total of four absolute tenses: (1) the past, (2) the present perfect, (3) the present and (4) the future (Declerck, 2006).
(2) simultaneity (e.g., That man said that he was looking for his partner) and (3) posteriority (e.g., They promised her that they would visit her every week). The relevance of these domain-internal relations in the language acquisition/teaching process will be discussed in the next section, which will shed additional light on the T-relations of the temporal form–meaning–use (FMU) mappings under investigation and will present the temporal FMU mappings under investigation by placing them into Declerck’s descriptive theory of tense. In addition, a crosslinguistic comparison with Dutch will be drawn up to highlight similarities and differences between these typologically closely related languages.

1.4 Locating bygone situations: The past and present perfect from a crosslinguistic perspective

The aim of this section is twofold: (1) to introduce the past and the present perfect, which may be used in both English and Dutch to locate bygone situations, and (2) to provide more detailed information on the nature of these temporal FMU mappings in English and in Dutch, which are typologically closely related languages. Since this section simply seeks to introduce Declerck’s linguistic analysis of the past/present distinction, the information provided will be limited—as much as possible—to a purely (cross)linguistic description of the FMU mappings under investigation. This section will first highlight how the past and the present perfect fit into Declerck’s descriptive theory of tense in English introduced above. In addition, the important interplay between these temporal FMU mappings and their linguistic environments (e.g., adverbials) in English will also described. Subsequently, a crosslinguistic comparison between the English FMU mappings and their Dutch counterparts will be drawn up to highlight the most important similarities and the differences between the mappings in both languages.

1.4.1 The past and present perfect in English

In his descriptive theory of tense, Declerck recognizes the problem involved in choosing between the past and the present perfect. He narrows this problem down to the context of using either the past or the present perfect to refer to what he calls bygone situations (Declerck, 1991, 2003, 2006). A bygone situation is defined by Declerck (1991, 2003, 2006) as a situation which precedes the temporal zero-point \( t_0 \). If this concept is schematized using Declerck’s linguistic conceptualization of the time line in English presented in Section 1.3.1, a bygone situation is located in either the past time-sphere or the pre-present zone (in the present time-sphere). Therefore, bygone situations may be temporally realized using either the past or the present perfect (see Figure 1.4).

\[ \text{For any complexity-related and SLA-related issues dealing with the temporal FMU mappings discussed in this section see Chapters 2 and 3 respectively.} \]
In discussing the nature of this temporal choice, Declerck (2006) makes a distinction between the use of the past and the present perfect in clauses without temporal adverbials and the use of these two tenses in clauses with temporal adverbials. In both cases, language users—or speakers in Declerck’s terminology—are often ‘forced’ to choose between the past and the present perfect. Consequently, both scenarios will be investigated here. The discussion below reflects the distinction between clauses with and without temporal adverbials, and will highlight the issues relevant to the meanings and uses of these tenses in past-zone contexts.

**Clauses without temporal adverbials.** In clauses without temporal adverbials, Declerck’s (2006) general description regarding the use of the past and the present perfect is as follows:

The speaker is concerned with NOW when he uses the present perfect and with THEN when he uses the preterite. In other words, the present perfect implies that the speaker’s ‘temporal focus’ is on the pre-present zone, whereas the past tense puts the temporal focus on the past time-sphere. Whether the speaker is concerned with NOW or THEN can be clear from the way the sentence is used in context or from particular constituents of the sentence. (p. 317, quoted with original highlighting)

Although the description above is relatively succinct, its scope is extremely broad in that Declerck uses it to cover almost all cases in which a choice has to be made between the past and the present perfect to locate bygone situations in clauses without temporal adverbials (and, as a matter of fact, also in clauses with temporal adverbials, which will be discussed later on). Questions, however, remain: What principles are in force in English to guide speakers in their

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20 The terms *language user* and *speaker* will both be used in this dissertation. Although Declerck (1991, 2003, 2006) uses the noun *speaker* to refer to a language user, he does not limit his descriptive theory of tense to the oral mode.

21 The reader is advised to bear in mind that both the past and the present perfect may also be used in English to refer to non-bygone situations. For the current discussion, however, these uses are of no interest and will not be featured in this chapter.
choice between the past and the present perfect to locate bygone situations? Do speakers always have a choice or are there times when they are ‘forced’ to choose either a past or a present perfect?

When referring to bygone situations, (non-interrogative) clauses without any time-specifying adverbials generally allow the use of both the past and the present perfect (Declerck, 2006). The past is used when the speaker is somehow concerned with THEN (e.g., when the speaker is thinking of the time of actualization of the bygone situation or is expressing concern with the actualization of the situation itself (e.g., where?, why?, how?)). In contrast, the present perfect is used when the speaker is somehow concerned with NOW (e.g., when the speaker is announcing the actualization of the bygone situation as news or is expressing concern with the current relevance of the bygone situation). If this idea is linked to the concepts of temporal focus and the time line in English above, the past places the temporal focus on the past time-sphere and the present perfect places the temporal focus on the present time-sphere (see Figure 1.4). Declerck uses the idea of actualization focus (i.e., concern with some aspect of the bygone situation (where?, why?, how?)) to explain the use of the past in clauses without time-specifying adverbials. In addition, he discusses the idea of introducing a new topic into the current discourse (i.e., current relevance) to explain the use of the present perfect in clauses without time-specifying adverbials. Declerck (2006) continues his discussion of this specific feature by providing clear examples and fine-tuning his theory.

Even though the speaker may choose to focus on NOW or THEN when locating bygone situations in clauses without temporal adverbials, there are certain principles with respect to the use of these two tenses, which Declerck describes in his theory of tense. All the instances of past tense use may be subsumed under the feature of actualization focus (Declerck, 2006). If the speaker is concerned with the actualization of the bygone situation, a past will be chosen to reflect this concern. This use of actualization focus is shown in the following examples taken from Declerck’s (2006) work:

Actualization focus may be realized in two ways: (1) focus on the actualization of the bygone situation as a whole or (2) focus on a specific aspect of the bygone situation (e.g., where, why or how the bygone situation took place) (Declerck, 2006). It should be stressed, however, that question words such as where, why, how do not automatically exclude the use of a present perfect. In discourse, there are three conditions in which wh-questions may contain present perfect forms if the environment for using the present perfect is available: (1) if the meaning to be expressed is a continuative meaning (e.g., Why have you been seeing her behind my back?), (2) if the meaning to be expressed is one of an indefinite perfect (e.g., Why has he never tried to talk about this issue with me?) and (3) if the speaker is focusing on the present result (i.e., the (current) relevance) of the bygone situation (e.g., Where has she put my keys?, the speaker is interested in knowing where the keys are now) (Declerck, 2006).

22 Actualization focus may be realized in two ways: (1) focus on the actualization of the bygone situation as a whole or (2) focus on a specific aspect of the bygone situation (e.g., where, why or how the bygone situation took place) (Declerck, 2006). It should be stressed, however, that question words such as where, why, how do not automatically exclude the use of a present perfect. In discourse, there are three conditions in which wh-questions may contain present perfect forms if the environment for using the present perfect is available: (1) if the meaning to be expressed is a continuative meaning (e.g., Why have you been seeing her behind my back?), (2) if the meaning to be expressed is one of an indefinite perfect (e.g., Why has he never tried to talk about this issue with me?) and (3) if the speaker is focusing on the present result (i.e., the (current) relevance) of the bygone situation (e.g., Where has she put my keys?, the speaker is interested in knowing where the keys are now) (Declerck, 2006).
(1.2) *How many cars did you sell?* (There is actualization focus here on the specific time when the cars were sold. The speaker does not have a period up to now in mind.) (p. 322)

(1.3) *How many cars have you sold?* (The present perfect does not yield an indefinite reading but receives a number-quantifying constitution reading. The speaker is concerned with NOW, viz. with such questions as ‘How much profit has our firm made [in an implicit period leading up to now] from selling cars?’ or ‘How much commission do I owe you?, etc.) (p. 322)

Sentences (1.2) and (1.3) show how speakers may choose between either the past or the present perfect depending on whether they wish to make use of actualization focus or not. However, there are instances where speakers are more restricted and are ‘forced’ to use one of the two tenses to express specific meanings. *When*-questions and clauses containing definite noun phrases entailing actualization focus are two such examples. Consider the following examples:

(1.4) *When did I swear at you?*

(1.5) *Did you buy her those expensive shoes?*

If speakers use a *when*-question to enquire about the actualization of a bygone situation, they take for granted that the situation has actualized. Consequently, they are ‘forced’ to use a past. However, this does not mean that a present perfect in *when*-questions is impossible (e.g., *When have I sworn at you?).* By using a present perfect, the speaker does not express an interest in finding out *when* the situation actualized but rather an interest in asking the addressee whether an occasion (or occasions) on which the situation actualized can be provided. Similarly, when a clause without temporal adverbials contains a definite noun phrase entailing actualization focus, the past must be used (see sentence (1.5) above). The presence of the definite noun phrase *those expensive shoes* entails that the bygone situation being referred to (i.e., the buying of the shoes) is assumed to be identifiable. In other words, the definite noun phrase entails actualization focus.

**Clauses with temporal adverbials.** Clauses with temporal adverbials pose a different challenge in that compatibility (i.e., semantic alignment) must be achieved between the use of tenses, on the one hand, and the temporal adverbials on the other hand. Various classes of temporal adverbials may be distinguished and since class membership may influence the choice between the past

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23 The use of temporal adverbials is not limited to the sentence in which the tense appears. Often, they may also be found a suprasentential level (e.g., in extended discourse) and contribute to the overall temporal features of a longer stretch of text. See Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 for examples of suprasentential features of temporality.
and the present perfect, a more detailed look at the classes of temporal adverbials is warranted at this point.

In his descriptive theory of tense, Declerck (2006) divides temporal adverbials into deictic (anchored) or non-deictic (unanchored) temporal adverbials, depending on whether the adverbials are related to a temporal anchor (t₀ or another time) or not. Examples of deictic temporal adverbials are *last night, the next day, today, tomorrow, yesterday, two days ago, two days later*. Examples of non-deictic temporal adverbials are *at seven o’clock, every year, in 2007, on Mondays, some time or other*. Consider the following sententially contextualized examples:

(1.6)  *I saw her yesterday*? (deictic adverbial)

(1.7)  *The woman showed up two days later*. (deictic adverbial)

(1.8)  *We generally have dinner at seven o’clock*. (non-deictic adverbial)

(1.9)  *He met Madonna in 2007*. (non-deictic adverbial)

In turn, deictic temporal adverbials can be further categorized into absolute deictics and relative deictics. Absolute deictics are temporal adverbials that are anchored to t₀ (e.g., *this morning, three weeks ago, today, tomorrow, yesterday*) and relative deictics are temporal adverbials that are anchored to another time and not to t₀ (e.g., *the next day, the same day, two days earlier*).

(1.10)  *The e-mail that I sent to you yesterday was sent back to me*. (absolute deictic temporal adverbial)

(1.11)  *The e-mail that I had sent to you two days earlier was sent back to me*. (relative deictic temporal adverbial)

Important for the analysis of L2 learner use of the past and the present perfect is Declerck’s (2006) categorization of deictic temporal adverbials into single-zone adverbials and multi-zone adverbials. Single-zone adverbials refer to only one absolute zone (e.g., past-zone adverbials refer to only the past zone) whereas multi-zone adverbials refer to a timespan which may include more than one time zone (e.g., *today, which may include the present zone as well as the post-present, the pre-present or the past zone depending on the choice of tense*). Consequently, multi-zone adverbials are compatible with more than one absolute tense.

(1.12)  *I spoke to him yesterday*. (single-zone adverbial)

(1.13)  *John is in London today*. (multi-zone adverbial, temporal focus on present)

(1.14)  *John has been in London today*. (multi-zone adverbial, temporal focus on some pre-present part of today)
(1.15) John was in London today. (multi-zone adverbial, temporal focus on some past time in the course of today)

(1.16) John will be in London today. (multi-zone adverbial, temporal focus on some post-present time in the course of today)

In addition to single-zone and multi-zone adverbials, English also has zone-independent adverbials (Declerck, 2006). Zone-independent adverbials are adverbials that specify a time which is not linked to one specific zone (e.g., at seven o’clock, every year, on Mondays). In terms of compatibility, zone-independent adverbials are also compatible with various absolute tenses, and choosing the absolute tense is dependent on the temporal focus. Zone-independent adverbials are inherently non-deictic (Declerck, 2006).

Declerck makes several further distinctions in his categorization of time-specifying adverbials (e.g., homogeneous versus heterogeneous time-specifying adverbials, inclusive versus non-inclusive heterogeneous time-specifying adverbials) but since these distinctions are not relevant to the further discussion of the temporal FMU mappings being investigated, they will not be discussed here. A summary of Declerck’s categorization of time-specifying adverbials into single-zone, multi-zone and zone-independent adverbials may be found in Table 1.2.

The class of past-zone adverbials is of special interest for the discussion of the temporal FMU mappings under investigation in this doctoral dissertation. Declerck (2006) defines a past-zone adverbial as a “single-zone time-specifying adverbial which specifies a time in the past zone” (p. 798). As far as the grammatical category of tense is concerned, past-zone adverbials can be used in combination with the past but under no circumstances can they be used with the present perfect in grammatically correct standard present-day English.24 In other words, once a past-zone context has been established by means of, for example, one or several implicit or explicit time-specifying adverbials, grammatically correct standard present-day English does not generally allow the use of the present perfect (see example sentences 1.17–1.32).

24 The concept of standard present-day English is an umbrella term and is used here to refer to the two most influential regional varieties of English: British English (BrE) and American English (AmE). However, two issues should be mentioned in this respect. Firstly, the selection of BrE and AmE by no means reflects any negative evaluation of other regional varieties of English (e.g., Australian English, Canadian English, South African English). BrE and AmE are simply the two most widely taught standard forms of English worldwide. Secondly, the two most influential regional varieties of English are themselves simplifications of a more complex picture since both BrE and AmE are, in fact, characterized by dialect variation resulting in differences at various language levels (e.g., lexical, phonological, morphological, syntactic) including, at times, differences in verb usage (Leech, 2004).
Table 1.2. Zone-specific categorization of time-specifying adverbials

- **deictic (anchored) adverbials**
  - **single-zone adverbials**
    - (a) past-zone adverbials (e.g., last year, two days ago, yesterday)
    - (b) pre-present-zone adverbials (e.g., since then, so far, up to now)
    - (c) present-zone adverbials (e.g., at this moment, right now)
    - (d) post-present-zone adverbials (e.g., next week, tomorrow)
  - **multi-zone adverbials** (e.g., always, forever, today)

- **non-deictic (unanchored) adverbials**
  - **zone-independent adverbials** (e.g., at seven o’clock, on Mondays)

### 1.4.2 The past tense and present perfect in Dutch

Declerck’s (1991, 2003, 2006) descriptive theory of tense is one which has been developed with English in mind as the main object of investigation. Consequently, Declerck’s theory as a whole is unique to the English tense system. Although individual features in the theory are shared by other languages, the specific constellation of the individual features in Declerck’s theory of tense is what makes up the entire system which is referred to as the English tense system. This section, however, will place the focus on the Dutch tense system. As such, this section has two aims. Firstly, to show that there are indeed specific features of Declerck’s theory of tense—more specifically features related to the past and the present perfect when used to locate bygone situations in English—that are also found in Dutch. Secondly, to show that, for all the shared features, there are also fundamental differences which must be considered when both English and Dutch come into contact with each other (e.g., in the Dutch-speaking ESL learner’s mind). The features which were highlighted in the discussion of the past and the present perfect in English will be used as anchor points but since there is no descriptive theory of tense in Dutch as comprehensive as Declerck’s theory of tense in English, a collection of other sources had to be consulted. In total, three main types of source material will be used in this section: (1) descriptions of the Dutch tense system generally meant for native speakers of Dutch (e.g., Haeseryn, Romijn, Geerts, de Rooij, & van den Toorn, 1997), (2) descriptions of the Dutch tense system meant for English-speaking L2 learners of Dutch (e.g., Donaldson, 2008; Fehringer, 1999; Shetter & Ham, 2007) and (3) descriptions of the Dutch and English tense systems found in contrastive grammars of English and Dutch (e.g., Aarts & Wekker, 1993; Mackenzie, 1997; van Brderode & Koopman, 1990). In addition, a fourth type of source material will also be featured but only sporadically: English grammars
meant for L2 learners of English who are not Dutch-speaking. This may seem somewhat contradictory since the aim of this section is to shed light on the Dutch tense system and on possible similarities and differences between the Dutch tense system and the English system. However, the similarities and differences between the English and Dutch tense systems are not unique to this specific language pair. The Dutch tense system shares many similarities with the tense systems of other typologically closely related languages (e.g., French, German). These similarities may be grouped to highlight fundamental differences with the English tense system. The language which will also be considered here is German since it is also a Germanic language and of all the Germanic languages is most closely related to Dutch. Consequently, several English grammars meant for German-speaking L2 learners (e.g., Hoffmann & Hoffmann, 2001, 2005; Ungerer, 2000; Ungerer, Meier, Schäfer, & Lechler, 2009) will also be used to draw comparisons and as resources of authentic example material.

Before discussing the Dutch tense system in more detail, one terminological issue must be addressed. In Dutch, a similar temporal choice is made to locate bygone situations. Whereas in English the choice is one between the past and the present perfect, in Dutch the choice is one between two tenses which are generally referred to in Dutch grammars as the onvoltooid verleden tijd (ovt) (‘uncompleted past tense’) and the voltooid tegenwoordige tijd (vtt) (‘completed present tense’). In many Dutch grammars, the Latin names for these tenses are also used: imperfectum for the onvoltooid verleden tijd and perfectum for the voltooid tegenwoordige tijd. As far as form, meaning and use are concerned, the ovt resembles the English past (i.e., past of the main verb) and the vtt resembles the English present perfect (i.e., the present of an auxiliary verb with the past participle of the main verb) even though differences may be found at all three levels of the mappings. Consequently, the following discussion will use the terms Dutch past (tense) and Dutch present perfect (tense). The use of these terms focuses on the similarities between the English tenses and the Dutch tenses. However, differences between the English tenses and the Dutch tenses should not be overlooked.

The most comprehensive grammar of Dutch for native speakers of Dutch is Haeseryn et al.’s (1997) *Algemene Nederlandse Spraakkenst*. In the chapter on the functions of the Dutch tenses, Haeseryn et al. (1997) provide a detailed description of the various functions of the tenses in Dutch, supplying not only theoretical explanations but also practical examples. The approach that they adopt is one which relies heavily on existing analyses of tense in language in general and especially on Reichenbach’s influential analysis found in *Elements of Symbolic Logic* (1947). Reichenbach’s analysis of tense uses three elements to describe tenses: (1) a point of the event (E), (2) a point of reference (R) and (3) a point of speech (S). Haeseryn et al. (1997) also use three elements in their analysis and provide the following Dutch names for their elements: (1) the werking (W) (the equivalent of Reichenbach’s E), (2) the referentiepunt (R) (the equivalent of
Reichenbach’s (R) and (3) the *spreekmoment* (S) (the equivalent of Reichenbach’s S).25 The Dutch past and the Dutch present perfect are schematized by Haeseryn et al. (1997) as follows:

![Figure 1.5. The representation of the Dutch past using the descriptive elements point of the event, point of reference and point of speech (adapted from Haeseryn et al., 1997, p. 115)](image)

Although there are many details to Haeseryn et al.’s analysis of tense which are irrelevant for the discussion at hand, there are striking similarities with Declerck’s approach to the placement of the past and the present perfect on the time line in English to locate bygone situations.26 The most striking are the following:

1. Declerck acknowledges the existence of situations, which Haeseryn et al. call events;

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25 Haeseryn et al.’s *werking*, *referentiepunt* and *spreekmoment* are synonymous with Reichenbach’s *point of the event*, *point of reference* and *point of speech* respectively (Haeseryn et al., 1997; Reichenbach, 1947). Consequently, Reichenbach’s abbreviations will be used since they refer to the English equivalents of Haeseryn et al.’s Dutch terms and since the further discussion of tense in Dutch will be conducted in English. The only exception is Haeseryn et al.’s *werking*, which will be referred to as event (or the plural form *events*). The reason for this decision is that the Reichenbachian analysis systematically uses the concept of points, whereas Haeseryn et al.’s analysis does so too but only for point of reference and point of speech.

26 By extension, the similarities are also clear with Reichenbach’s analysis since Haeseryn et al.’s analysis relies heavily on Reichenbach’s analysis. As striking as the similarities between Reichenbach’s and Declerck’s analyses may be, Declerck does express some fundamental objections to Reichenbach’s system of analysing tense. For more detailed information about these objections, see Declerck, 1991.
2. In Declerck’s discussion of the use of the English past and the English present perfect to locate bygone situations, Declerck defines bygone situations as situations which precede the temporal zero-point \( t_0 \). In Haeseryn et al.’s analysis of the Dutch past and the Dutch present perfect, the events are located before the point of speech, which is Haeseryn et al.’s equivalent of Declerck’s temporal zero-point. This location of Haeseryn et al.’s events would qualify them as bygone situations;

3. In Declerck’s analysis of tense in English, the main difference between the use of the past and the present perfect to locate bygone situations is that the past is used when the speaker is somehow concerned with \( \text{THEN} \) and the present perfect is used when the speaker is somehow concerned with \( \text{NOW} \). This concern with either \( \text{THEN} \) or \( \text{NOW} \) is reflected in Haeseryn et al.’s analysis by means of the placement of the point of reference. In the case of the Dutch past, the point of reference is represented as being concomitant with the event, that is, with \( \text{THEN} \). In the case of the Dutch present perfect, the point of reference is represented as being concomitant with the point of speech, that is, with \( \text{NOW} \).

In their discussion of the functions of the Dutch past and the Dutch present perfect, Haeseryn et al. (1997) contrastively elaborate on the uses of both tenses to locate bygone situations. However, they are extremely careful and highlight—at the very beginning of their discussion—that partial overlaps in certain uses of both tenses do exist and that, consequently, differences may be extremely subtle and the degree of acceptability of these tenses may vary from language user to language user. Although Haeseryn et al.’s discussion is a relatively elaborate one considering the material available about the Dutch tense system, it does not contrast the past and the present perfect in English and Dutch. For such a discussion, one is required to look at descriptions of the Dutch tense system drawn up for English-speaking L2 learners of Dutch and descriptions of the English and Dutch tense systems available in contrastive grammars of English and Dutch.

In his comprehensive grammar of Dutch, Donaldson (2008) states the following when starting his discussion of the Dutch present perfect: “It is in the use of the perfect that Dutch tenses differ most from those of English” (p. 187). Donaldson (2008) continues his discussion by providing the following general contrastive guidelines for using the present perfect tense in Dutch:

All perfects in English are rendered by perfects in Dutch (with one exception, see Present Tense, 11.2.1.3), but most imperfects in English may be rendered by either imperfects or perfects in Dutch, the perfect tense being more common, particularly in speech (for the few instances where English imperfects must be imperfects in Dutch, see Imperfect Tense above). (p. 187)
The example sentences that Donaldson subsequently discusses are the following English sentences:

(1.17) He bought a computer yesterday.

(1.18) He has bought a computer.

In English, a past must be used in (1.17) because of the adverbial yesterday, which is a single-zone adverbial in Declerck’s terminology of adverbials, more specifically a past-zone adverbial. Standard present-day English does not allow the use of the present perfect in past-zone contexts. Dutch, however, often does and translating (1.17) into Dutch would lead, according to Donaldson (2008), to two possible translations:

(1.19) Hij heeft gisteren een computer gekocht. (with a Dutch present perfect)

(1.20) Hij kocht gisteren een computer. (with a Dutch past)

In Donaldson’s (2008) discussion, (1.18) uses a present perfect in English to locate the bygone situation and, in so doing, expresses the language user’s concern with NOW (Declerck, 2006). The Dutch translation would be Hij heeft een computer gekocht (with a Dutch present perfect) because of the same temporal logic that applies to the English sentence. Similar contrastive discussions of the past and the present perfect may be found in other publications (Aarts & Wekker, 1993; Fehringer, 1999; Mackenzie, 1997; Shetter & Ham, 2007; van Brederode & Koopman, 1990). Summarizing the statements above, it can be said that both English and Dutch use the past and the present perfect to locate bygone situations. When no implicit or explicit contextual temporal information is provided (e.g., temporal adverbials, world knowledge), language users in both English and Dutch may use the past when they are concerned with THEN and the present perfect with they are concerned with NOW. However, as soon as contextual temporal information becomes retrievable—either implicitly or explicitly—language users must ensure that semantic alignment is achieved and that the selected tense fits in with the temporal structure (i.e., the semantics) of the context. This is where English and Dutch may differ in certain respects when a choice has to be made between the past and the present perfect to locate bygone situations. English does not allow the use of the present perfect in past-zone contexts whereas Dutch often does and even prefers the present perfect to possible past alternatives. However, often any preferences in Dutch do not appear to be guided by a set of clear guidelines (see, for example, Haeseryn et al., 1997). Example sentences (1.17) through to (1.32) show how the similarities and differences between the English and Dutch tense systems are generally highlighted and exemplified contrastively. Sources have
been indicated except in the event of a few independent translations, which have been based on analogy with other examples.

As mentioned above, if no explicit or implicit contextual information is provided, both languages allow the past and the present perfect. The past is used when the language user is concerned with THEN, whereas the present perfect is used when the language user is concerned with NOW.

(1.21) (a) *Kees turned off the radio and rolled a cigarette.* (Fehringer, 1999, p. 65)
(b) *Kees zette de radio af en rolde een sigaret.* (Fehringer, 1999, p. 65)

(1.22) (a) *Have you seen my cat?* (Aarts & Wekker, 1993, p. 215)
(b) *Heb je mijn kat gezien?* (Aarts & Wekker, 1993, p. 215)

(1.23) (a) *He has already read the book.* (Fehringer, 1999, p. 68)
(b) *Hij heeft het boek al gelezen.* (Fehringer, 1999, p. 68)

Once explicit or implicit contextual temporal information becomes retrievable, semantic alignment must be achieved. As far as semantic alignment with past-zone adverbials is concerned, English does not allow the use of a present perfect. Dutch, on the other hand, often does allow the use of a present perfect in past-zone contexts.

(1.24) (a) *The train left at two o'clock.* (Fehringer, 1999, p. 69)
(b) *De trein is om twee uur vertrokken.* (Fehringer, 1999, p. 69)

(1.25) (a) *Jane frequently walked to work in those days.* (Aarts & Wekker, 1993, p. 212)
(b) *Jane liep in die tijd vaak naar haar werk./Jane is in die tijd vaak naar haar werk gelopen.* (Aarts & Wekker, 1993, pp. 212–213)

(1.26) (a) *Vijfentwintig jaar lang hebben de paleontologen gepeculeerd over de vraag welke collega de schedelfragmenten van een primitief mens (tussen 1912 en 1914 ontdekt in een steengroeve in Sussex) heeft vervolgd.* (van Brederode & Koopman, 1990, p. 128)
(b) *For twenty-five years paleontologists have speculated about the question of which colleague faked the skull fragments of a primitive human being, discovered in a quarry in Sussex between 1912 and 1914.* (van Brederode & Koopman, 1990, p. 128)

(1.27) (a) *The Romans founded York.* (van Brederode & Koopman, 1990, p. 128)
(b) *De Romeinen hebben York gesticht.* (van Brederode & Koopman, 1990, p. 128)
CHAPTER 1

(1.28) (a) I saw him last night. (Mackenzie, 1997, p. 40)

(b) Ik zag hem gisteravond. (Mackenzie, 1997, p. 40)

(1.29) (a) When did you write this? (Hoffmann & Hoffmann, 2001, p. 196)

(b) Wann haben Sie das geschrieben? (Hoffmann & Hoffmann, 2001, p. 196)

If multi-zone adverbials are used with a past, they will automatically receive a past reading. Once again, English will use a past to establish a past-zone context whereas Dutch may use either a past or a present perfect to establish the past-zone context.

(1.30) (a) He cycled to school every day. (Mackenzie, 1997, p. 40)

(b) Hij fietste iedere dag naar school. (Mackenzie, 1997, p. 40)

(1.31) (a) We’ve been particularly busy at work this week. (a remark made on a Wednesday) (Ungerer, 2000, p. 151)

(b) We hebben het enorm druk gehad op het werk deze week. (Ungerer, 2000, p. 151)

(1.32) (a) We had a very busy time in the office this week. (a remark made on a Friday) (Ungerer, 2000, p. 151)

(b) We hadden het heel druk gehad op kantoor deze week. (Ungerer, 2000, p. 151)

1.5 Conclusion

In this first chapter, I have contextualized the grammatical category of tense from a mainly linguistic point of view. The overall goal was to provide a linguistic foundation for investigating the target structures of interest in this doctoral dissertation: the past and the present perfect when used to locate bygone situations in English and in Dutch. I started with a number of existing definitions of tense to focus on recurring items of both agreement and disagreement. The selected definitions highlighted two items for which there appears to be consensus: (1) tense is generally defined as a grammatical category of the verb and (2) there is a relationship between tense and time, which appears to be fluid and bidirectional, meaning that one tense may express several temporal meanings and one temporal meaning may be expressed by several tenses. However, the definitions also referred to items of disagreement, which are often addressed in discussions of the grammatical category of tense. The first item of disagreement which was investigated was a purely formal one and was related to the morpho-
logical nature of certain verb forms. Synthetic verb forms (e.g., present, past) appear to be more easily accepted as tense forms than analytic verb forms (e.g., will-future, present perfect). The second item of disagreement relates to the aspectual features of specific verb forms (e.g., will-future, present perfect) which would disqualify them as candidates for tense forms in their own right. Both items were discussed and it was decided to follow the characteristics of Declerck’s (1991, 2003, 2006) descriptive theory of tense in English, which accepts that certain verb forms (e.g., present perfect), even though they are analytic verb forms, are tenses in their own right since they have temporal structures which are unique and cannot be found in any other verb form in the English tense system.

Subsequently, I tackled the challenge of conceptualizing tense. Since tense is such a broad grammatical category, conceptualizing temporal features of the verb phrase in English may be a highly complex endeavour at times. Declerck’s descriptive theory of tense in English was used to first introduce the basic features of tense (e.g., linguistic time, temporal zero point, time-spheres, time zones). This was followed by a more detailed discussion of the specific features involved in conceptualizing the past and the present perfect in English to locate bygone situations (e.g., actualization focus, semantic alignment, temporal adverbials). The overall conclusion was that both the past and the present perfect may be used in English to locate bygone situations. In clauses without temporal adverbials, the past is used when the speaker is concerned with THEN, the present perfect is used when the speaker is concerned with NOW. In clauses with temporal adverbials, the speaker must ensure that semantic alignment is achieved between the tense that is used and the temporal adverbials, which provide crucial information regarding the contextual temporal information.

The last section in this first chapter was dedicated to the past and present perfect in Dutch. Both tenses in Dutch show many form-related, meaning-related and use-related similarities with the past and the present perfect in English. There are, however, also some fundamental differences. One of the most striking differences, for example, may be found in the possible co-occurrence of tenses and temporal adverbials. Whereas English does not allow the use of past-zone adverbials with a present perfect (e.g., *I have seen her yesterday versus I saw her yesterday), Dutch often does and even prefers the present perfect to the past on many occasions (e.g., Ik heb haar gisteren gezien/Ik zag haar gisteren).

The next chapter will continue the discussion of the FMU mappings under investigation in this doctoral dissertation but will move the focus to aspects of temporal complexity. The choice between a past and a present perfect to locate bygone situations in English is indeed a complex one, which many ESL learners—including Dutch-speaking ESL learners—grapple with when learning English. It is a choice which is generally highlighted in grammars of English. Many grammars of English for foreigners discuss the choice between the past and the present perfect in English. However, the complexity-inducing factor is
generally identified as interlingual differences between the language learners’ native languages and English. But is negative crosslinguistic influence the only factor that contributes to (SLA) complexity? Chapter 2 will shed light on the complex choice that L2 learners are forced to make and will provide a more comprehensive account of both complexity-related SLA issues at play in this choice and the contributors to complexity.