

## TENSE AND ASPECT IN THE ERA OF COMPETENCE-BASED ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN CAMEROON'S SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper seeks to show the significance that should be given to tense and aspect as central grammatical features attached to the verb phrase, on the postulate that if tense and aspect are not mastered by the learners of English, in particular and the languages in general, they never build an acceptable sentence in the target language. Analysing the challenges that a French-speaking learner of English in particular can face with tense and aspect, the hypotheses were verified through two tests for 180 students in four secondary schools in Dschang. It became obvious that the target population had a serious problem with tense and aspect. Now what place should be given to tense and aspect in a new era where knowing the language is pushed to the background but not suppressed, and acting effectively with the language is the new order of the day?*

**KEYWORDS:** Tense, Aspect, Errors, Competence, Language Teaching, Secondary School

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### INTRODUCTION

In English like in French, tense and aspect are generally embedded in the verb phrase, not only in the form of the conjugated verb but also, at times, in the time adjuncts that escort the verb. The imbalance between the eight tenses in the French indicative and the twelve tenses of the English indicative mood demands that tense and aspect in English be tackled tacitly with French-speaking learners. Now, with the introduction of the Competence-Based Approach with entry through Real Life Situations (CBA-RLS), more emphasis seems to be laid on what the learner will do with the language than his knowledge of the language. It is rather a good approach. Yet, if linguistic knowledge – referred to in the new syllabus as *essential knowledge*, is not given all its significance, the result will be what the article proves, that even in the era of the Objective-Based Approach when prominence was given to language knowledge, the French-speaking students pending graduating did not master tense and aspect in English. The problem is even more current in a context where there are 280 native languages in Cameroon (Kouega 2008), Pidgin English and *Camfranglais*.

### Tense and aspect

Lyons (1977: 68) defines tense as a category that "grammaticalises the relationship which holds between the time of the situation that is being described and the temporal zero-point of the deictic context." In the same perspectives but more precisely, Fleischman (1982:10) says tense is "a deictic category of grammar [...] whose primary function is to mark sequences of events in direct or indirect relation to a temporal zero-point which is the moment of speech event." Both Lyons and Fleischman consider the temporal zero-point (moment of speech) as the principal reference time point in expressing time grammatically. We mark it  $t_0$  hereafter. Palmer (1995:39) considers tense as the grammatical category whose "most important function [...] is to indicate past and present time." Like some other linguists, he does not consider the

future to be a tense<sup>1</sup>. The question has been broadly studied. This judgment weighs tense as more a morphological than a cognitive element. However, Comrie (1985: 9) postulates that tense is a “gramaticalised expression of location in time.” He also considers the moment of speech as very central to the identification of tense. For him,  $t_0$  corresponds to the present moment, the moment of speech. Everything on the left is the past and everything on the right is the future. As such, he distinguishes absolute tense, relative tense and absolute relative tense. He also discusses the combination of absolute tenses.

An absolute tense is “a tense which includes as part of its meaning the present moment [ $t_0$ ] as deictic centre” (Comrie, *ibid*: 36). Hence three absolute tenses are defined. The present tense for coincidence of the time of the situation and  $t_0$ ; the past tense locates the situation prior to  $t_0$  and the future tense locates the situation after  $t_0$ .

Unlike absolute tenses that locate situations from the moment of speech ( $t_0$ ) as reference point, relative tenses refer to forms whose meaning does not specify that the present moment ( $t_0$ ) must be its reference point, but some point in time, given by the context. This reference point can be given with time adverbials such as *on the same day*, *in the previous month* (e.g. *Daddy will come back next week; certainly, I will have painted the car by then*). Comrie (*ibid*: 2) points out that “in English, typically, finite verb forms have absolute tense, and non-finite verb forms have [only] relative tense.” For example, the present participle is always interpreted as simultaneous with the reference point whereas the past participle is prior to the reference point. Compare “The patients to be received by the doctor were filling the forms” and “the patients received by the doctor were filling the forms”.

It is possible for a single verb to combine both absolute and relative reference. Such forms have a reference point in time (not  $t_0$ ), a situation which is in turn located as before or after  $t_0$ . The reference point can be given by a time adverbial or a subordinate clause. In ‘John had broken his leg the previous day’, the situation of ‘John break the leg’ is indicated as preceding one day (relative reference) which itself is in the past; i.e. prior to  $t_0$ . The time adverbial ‘the previous day’ can be replaced by a clause (before his friends arrived). Another example is ‘I will have finished writing this paper before 6.00 pm tomorrow’, where ‘6.00 pm tomorrow’ is the relative reference point which comes after  $t_0$ . Absolute-relative tense gives insight into what Comrie calls ‘degrees of remoteness’, since temporal distance is relevant only with respect to the parameters of ‘before’ and ‘after’. Some languages like Yemba<sup>2</sup> possess verbal morphemes that indicate degrees of remoteness explicitly (Comrie, *ibid*). Such devices are rather rare in English. An example is ‘be about to’ for the near future. In narration in English, the story teller needs to make the reference point sufficiently clear for the receiver.

It is possible for the grammar of English to indicate, in a single form, that a situation holds (or may hold) at one segment of the time but does not hold at another. English has such adverbials as ‘still’, ‘no longer’ and ‘not yet’. Their semantic representations can be given as follows:

Still = [+past] + [+ present]

No longer = [+ past] + [- present]

<sup>1</sup>Amongst other reasons, future only makes use of modals (will/would, shall/should) for its morphological expressions. Also, there are many other means of expressing future time: be going to, be about to, and, even the simple present (e.g. *I give my paper next week.*).

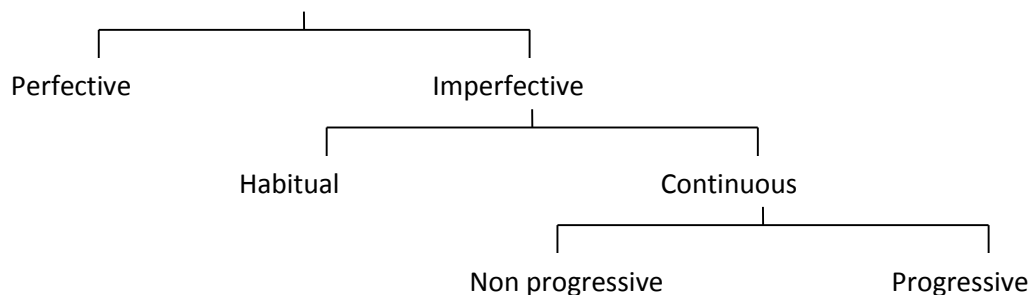
<sup>2</sup>Yemba is the home language in Dschang

Not yet = [- past] + [- present] + [ ± future]

The use of ‘still’ poses that the situation was true in the past and is true in the present (e.g. The capital city of Cameroon is still Yaoundé). ‘No longer’ reveals that a situation was true in the past but is not true in the present (e.g. There are no longer two Cameroons but one Republic of Cameroon.). ‘not yet’ poses that a situation is true neither in the past nor in the present but may be true in the future (e.g. There has not yet been any earthquake in Dschang.)

Crystal (2004: 36) defines ‘aspect’ as “the way the grammar marks the duration or type of activity denoted by the verb.” He sees aspect as mainly definite vs. indefinite; completed or not completed. Quirk and Greenbaum (1973: 40) provide a definition in which the speaker/writer is more felt: “aspect concerns the manner in which the verbal action is experienced or regarded” ,for example as completed or in progress. Similarly, Gaynor (1964), quoted by Awambeng (2009), sees aspect as “a category indicating whether the verbal action or state denoted by the verb is viewed as completed or in progress, as instantaneous or enduring [...]” Comrie (1981: 3) views aspect as an internal element to the structure of the verb. For him, aspect can be defined as different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation. It expresses situation internal time. Anderson (1973) who proposed a localist theory of aspect. This theory is part of a more general localist approach to language whereby various apparently non-locative constructions are represented in localist terms. So, the imperfective is defined as viewing a situation from inside whereas the perfective views it from outside. Progressive/habitual meaning can be represented semantically by using locative constructions such as ‘in the process of’, ‘in the habit of’ (e.g. Samuel is in the process of/in the habit of eating the last loaf of bread). In the same way, directional expressions are used for prospective aspectual meaning like ‘be going to’ (e.g. Samuel is going to eat the last loaf of bread). This theory shapes our work.

Comrie provides, on the one hand, a classification of aspectual oppositions, and, on the other hand, an in-depth study of the perfect. He also discusses inherent aspectual meaning as punctual vs. durative.



#### Classification of aspectual oppositions (Comrie 1981: 25)

The perfective “looks at a situation from outside without necessarily distinguishing any of the internal structure [beginning, middle or end] of the situation unlike the imperfective that looks at the situation from inside” (Comrie, 1981: 4). In other words, the perfective looks at a situation as complete(d) while the imperfective looks at it as not completed. The sentence ‘Samuel ate the last loaf of bread this morning’ has perfective meaning but ‘Samuel was eating the last loaf of bread this morning’ has imperfective meaning. However, it should be noted that perfectivity is not only about punctual situations (e.g. : I wrote an article)but also includes the

expression of duration(e.g. Queen Victoria reigned over Britain for 64 years. / Queen Victoria reigned over Britain from 1837 to 1901.)

Habituals “describe a situation which is characterised of an extended period of time, so extended in fact that the situation referred to is viewed not as an incidental property of the moment but precisely as a characteristic feature of a whole period” (Comrie, 1981: 27 – 28). Habitual situations can be iterative (e.g. In his youth, Samuel used to play football) or non-iterative (e.g. Buea used to be the capital city of Western Cameroon). The form ‘used to’ is typically characteristic of the habitual past in English. On its own, continuousness is “imperfectivity not determined by habituality” (Comrie, *ibid*: 34). The concept of continuity denotes ‘no pause’ and ‘no interruption’ (e.g.: The president knew the truth about the embezzlement / Samuel was making a chair). ‘Continuous’ describes an uninterrupted situation, which can be either progressive or non-progressive.

The progressive describes a continuous action as ongoing and evolving. (e.g.: 'I am eating'). It includes the continuative aspect (e.g.: 'I am still eating'), the telic (e.g.: 'John was making a chair' - The action is foreseen as to come to an end), the atelic (e.g.: 'John is singing' –no concrete end can be foreseen.). The non-progressive indicates continuous actions or events in which the idea of process or progress is absent. There are many non-progressive aspects including the stative, the generic, the durative, the attenuative, etc.

Perfective and perfect should be differentiated clearly from the onset. Nforbi and Ngum (2009:122) state the difference as follows: “The perfect and perfective seem to be similar in that they have the notion of completeness. The perfect looks at the result of this completed event whereas the perfective looks at the completed situation as a whole”. The statement ‘John has broken his leg’ can be interpreted as perfective if it is given as mere information or perfect if one is trying to explain to John’s friends why John cannot join them in the football match. Comrie (*ibid*: 52) insists that “the perfect indicates the continuing present relevance of a past situation.” He puts it clearly that the same applies to past perfect and future perfect. It “expresses a relation between two time points: the time of the situation resulting from a prior one, and the time of the prior situation. The perfect has four main uses: The perfect of result (e.g.: John could not play, he had broken his leg.), the experiential perfect (e.g.: ‘John has been to Yaoundé’ [He has had the experience of being to Yaoundé]), the perfect of recent past (e.g.: Diane has just gone out.) and the perfect of persistent situation to describe situations that started in the past but continues (persist) into the present. The English prepositions ‘for’ and ‘since’ are generally used to introduce the time adverbial (e.g.: I have lived in Bambili for 18 months).

### **Problem**

All English sentences must incorporate tense and aspect as important elements and parameters in the conveyance of meaning. These are important aspects of grammar whose function is to reduce the range of meaning signalled by words so as to make them more effective in the identification of features of context. Grammar and language use are interdependent (Widdowson,1991). The tense used in an utterance situates the action or situation in the past present or future. Also, it may tell the hearer whether that situation or action is anterior, simultaneous or posterior to another. Aspect has the virtue of determining if the action or situation is complete or incomplete (Crystal 2004:36), at the beginning, in progress or at the end, repeated or not, and many other such internal views of the verbal action/situation. A successful utterance whose intended meaning must be the meaning actually conveyed must

make skilful use of tense and aspect. Now the mastery of the English system of tense and aspect will not go without challenges for French-speaking learners.

First, there are four morphological groups of what is widely known as the tenses of English in the indicative mood, namely the simple tenses, the perfect tenses, the progressive tenses and the perfect progressive tenses whereas the same mood has only two groups in French: the simple tenses - passé simple, imparfait, present, future - and the compound tenses – passé antérieur, plus-que parfait, passé composé and future antérieur - (Baylon and Fabre, 1978:83). It would only be normal for every learner to desire to know the equivalence between the French and the English tenses. The learner will also need to master the irregular verbs of English that can be organized into eighteen groups following their morphological patterns (Smoke, 2013). In this quest for equivalence, the knowledge of how aspect functions hand in glove with the morphological tenses becomes central. A simple is that the progressive aspect is mainly embedded in the simple tenses in French, but also, in context, these simple French tenses may convey not the notion of continuity but of habituality. Consider these examples:

**French** : *Je mangeais* hier à 16h. [Progressive]/ **English**: *I was eating* yesterday at 4 pm.

**French** : *Je mange* du riz (maintenant)/*Je mange* du riz (d'habitude). / **English**: *I am eating* rice (now) [progressive] / *I eat* rice (habitually)[habitual].

Secondly, when time adverbials are present in the utterance, the learner needs to watch out the negative influence of French tense morphology on his English. Again, a good knowledge of how English encodes aspect differently from French will avoid such interference. Consider these other examples:

(1) **French** : *Je composais* ce matin. / **English** : *I was writing* the exam this morning. (**Tense**: past; **aspect**: progressive)

(2) **French**: *J'ai composé* ce matin. / **English**: *\*I have written* the exam this morning. (<sup>ok</sup>*I wrote* the exam this morning.) [**Tense**: past; **aspect**: punctual)

(3) **French**: *J'ai compété* au tournoi l'année passée. / **English**: *\*I have competed* in the tournament last year. (<sup>ok</sup>*I competed* in the tournament last year. [punctual] / <sup>ok</sup>*I have competed* in the tournament, it was last year.) [experiential perfect]

From this analysis, the following hypotheses evolve:

1. Even the end-of-cycle students do not master the morphological patterns of the English tenses.
2. They remain incapable of connecting tense and aspectual meaning to their grammatical forms and vice-versa.
3. French stills interferes into their use of tense and aspect in English

## THEORY AND METHOD

This paper leans on the fact that French-speaking learners of English actually have French in their background and, in 6ème, they are still at a very early stage of learning. The French they

possess will normally influence their acquisition of English, creating for each learner, a distinct language system that is something between English and French. Corder (1971:15) refers to it as the learner's *idiosyncratic dialect* or *idiolect*. Brown (1987:168-169) considers that "learners slowly and tediously succeed in establishing closer and closer approximations to the system used by native speakers of the language". He refers to this as *interlanguage*. Again, he thinks that "the most obvious approach to analysing interlanguage is to study the speech and writings of learners", so as to infer their knowledge of the language. It will therefore be possible to discover their errors – which competence-related, not performance-related, in which case they would be called *mistakes*. He identifies three sources of errors: *interlingual transfer* (e.g. since the plural '-s' is generally silent in French, the learner does not also pronounce it in English), *intralingual transfer or overgeneralization* (e.g. using past form '-ed' even with irregular verbs) and *context* (teacher, materials, policies, social environment).

The data presented and analysed here include students' answers to the test administered to them to check their level of mastery of tense and aspect in English. There are two tests: a set of six exercises focusing on their mastery of tense morphology, their ability to express time through absolute tense, then through relative tense, their ability to translate French into English maintain the aspect, with focus on interference, and in interpreting aspect (See corrected test in appendix). The narrative test was made up of three distinct topics: "An interesting experience of last week", to check their ability to use the past tenses of English in a paragraph, "What I do every morning before I go to school" to check their use of the habitual present tense, and "What I will do this evening before I go to bed" to assess their use of the future. Aspectual errors will also be pointed out. The analysis gives prominence to the erroneous answers to the first test and the erroneous use of tense and aspect in the second test. In the first case, statistical tables are used to express the failure percentages and to what extent they vary from *Troisième* to *Terminale*. In the second case, samples of errors are presented with their corrections, still in tables.

**Table 1: Errors on tense morphology**

	<i>TROISIEME</i>		<i>TERMINALE</i>		Difference (%)
	n	%	n	%	
The simple past tense of regular verbs	41	45,56	30	33,33	12,22
The future simple, affirmative form.	46	51,11	28	31,11	20
The simple past tense, negative form	87	96,67	78	86,67	10
The present perfect progressive	90	100	68	75,56	24,44
The simple past tense, interrogative form	90	100	90	100	0
The simple present tense, third person singular	77	85,56	69	76,67	8,89
The past perfect, negative form	86	95,56	76	84,44	11,11
The future simple, negative form.	86	95,56	67	74,44	21,11
The future perfect	89	98,89	78	86,67	12,22
The future perfect progressive	90	100,00	85	94,44	5,56
The present progressive	86	95,56	68	75,56	20,00
The present simple, negative	85	94,44	69	76,67	17,78
The future simple, interrogative form	83	92,22	68	75,56	16,67

The present simple (to be), negative form.	81	90,00	54	60,00	30,00
The present simple, negative form	85	94,44	66	73,33	21,11
Averages	<b>80</b>	<b>89,04</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>73,63</b>	<b>15,41</b>

The failure percentages for tense morphology range between 45.56 % and 100 % in *Troisième* and 31.11 % and 100 % in *Terminale*. Throughout the exercise, failure is very consistent between 70 % and 100 %. Averagely, the failure percentage is 89.04 % in *Troisième* and 73.33 % in *Terminale*. The estimated performance progress is consistently very slight, between 0% and 24%. Only once does 30% appear as progress, concerning the negative form of “to be”, present simple. The average progress from *Troisième* to *Terminale* is 15.41 %. The present perfect progressive, the interrogative form of the simple past and the future perfect progressive display the maximal failure percentages in *Troisième*. Only the present perfect progressive seems to have reduced by 25 % in *Terminale*. The interrogative form of the simple past remains a stumbling block. Most *Terminale* students seem to have mastered the future simple tense, affirmative form. If in the era of Competence-Based English language teaching, tense morphology is undermined, it is almost guaranteed that the students’ sentences will never be correct.

**Table 2: Erroneous interpretations of absolute and relative tense**

	<i>TROISIEME</i>		<i>TERMINALE</i>		<i>Difference (%)</i>
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	
The absolute past	18	20,00	29	32,22	-12,22
The absolute future	29	32,22	31	34,44	-2,22
The absolute present	11	12,22	9	10,00	2,22
The near future	63	70,00	68	75,56	-5,56
The recent past	47	52,22	36	40,00	12,22
Further in the past	31	34,44	37	41,11	-6,67
Further future	72	80,00	59	65,56	14,44
Further in the past	48	53,33	52	57,78	-4,44
More recent past	53	58,89	57	63,33	-4,44

The failure percentages for the identification of relative tenses range between 12.22% and 80.0% in *Troisième*, and 9% and 68% in *Terminale*. Throughout the exercise, failure is more consistent between 53.3% and 80%, with averages of 45.93 % in *Troisième* and 46.67% in *Terminale*. At the exception of the identification of a further future, the *Troisième* students performed better than those in *Terminale*. This is also where most students failed.

**Table 3: Expressing aspectual meaning**

	<i>TROISIEME</i>		<i>TERMINALE</i>		<i>Difference (%)</i>
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	
Expressing progressiveness through the verb only	76	84,44	71	78,89	5,56

Expressing habitual action through the verb only	55	61,11	48	53,33	7,78
Translating French 'en train de' for progressiveness	58	64,44	49	54,44	10,00
Translating past punctual reference	84	93,33	66	73,33	20,00
Expressing resultative meaning through the perfect	65	72,22	58	64,44	7,78
Expressing the prospective	90	100,00	79	87,78	12,22
Expressing future time	47	52,22	44	48,89	3,33
Prospective with 'be about to'	86	95,56	80	88,89	6,67
Ingressive	62	68,89	47	52,22	16,67
Habitual with adverbial	41	45,56	26	28,89	16,67

The failure percentages for the expression of aspectual meaning range between 45.56% and 100.00% in Troisième, and 28.89% and 88.89% in Terminale. Throughout the exercise, failure is more consistent above 50.00%, with an average of 73.77 % in Troisième and 63.1 % in Terminale. The performance progress remains inferior or equal to 20.00%. its average is 10.67 %. The least failure percentages were recorded with the use of the present tense to express habit. Here, the greatest difficulty was to express the prospective; the highest failure percentages were recorded.

**Table 6: Erroneous use of tense and aspect for dating**

	<i>TROISIEME</i>		<i>TERMINALE</i>		Difference (%)
	n	%	n	%	
Past progressive to date punctual	34	37,78	35	38,89	-1,11
Punctual past action	62	68,89	55	61,11	7,78
Past progressive to date punctual action	35	38,89	47	52,22	-13,33
Pluperfect for further past	45	50,00	48	53,33	-3,33
Dating with time adverbial	45	50,00	41	45,56	4,44
Resultative perfect	47	52,22	58	64,44	-12,22

The failure percentages for the use of tense and aspect for dating other events range between 37.78% and 68.89% in Troisième and 38.89% and 64.44% in Terminale. aVERAgely, 50% of the Troisième students and 53% in Terminale face difficulties in using tense and aspect to date other events. The performance progress from Troisième to Terminale is rather negative by 3%, showing an unexpected decrease in the learners' performance. Here, the greatest difficulty was to identify the near future and the recent past; the highest failure percentages were recorded. Could this be that tense and aspect for dating is neglected in the second cycle?



**Table 5 : Interpreting aspect**

	<b>TROISIEME</b>		<b>TERMINALE</b>		Difference (%)
	n	%	n	%	
The near future or prospective	68	75,56	66	73,33	2,22
The perfect as recent past	53	58,89	53	58,89	0,00
The resultative perfect	53	58,89	45	50,00	8,89
The habitual past	59	65,56	36	40,00	25,56
The Punctual past	51	56,67	62	68,89	-12,22
The durative	70	77,78	75	83,33	-5,56

The failure percentages for the identification of aspectual meaning range between 56.67% and 77.78% in Troisième, and 40% and 62% in Terminale. AVERAGELY, 66% of the Troisième students and 40% of those in Terminale face challenges in decoding aspectual meaning. Mean progress is 10.56 %. Most Troisième students found it difficult to identify habituality with “used to” and both group had difficulties in identifying durative situations.

### Error analysis of learners’ compositions

#### Tense.

**Table : erroneous uses of tense**

First topic: “an interesting experience of last week”.		
<b>Present instead of past</b>		
	<b>Students’ sentences</b>	<b>Corrections</b>
<b>3<sup>e</sup></b>	<i>Last week, I <b>get up</b> I <b>do</b> my work ... I <b>read</b> my lessons ... I <b>go</b> to seen a television.</i>	Last week, I <b>got up</b> , I <b>did</b> my work ... I <b>read</b> my lessons ... I <b>went</b> to watch T.V.
	<i>Last week, I <b>have</b> an interesting experience</i>	Last week, I <b>had</b> an interesting experience
	<i>There <b>is</b> a beautiful week because on Sunday I <b>am go</b> to church</i>	It <b>was</b> a beautiful week because I <b>went</b> to church on Sunday
	<i>Last week I <b>go</b> to the village help my grandmother and grandfather.</i>	Last week I <b>went</b> to the village to help my grandmother and my grandfather.
	<i>I <b>am arrived</b> in the party in front of me I saw a man who knew me.</i>	As I <b>arrived</b> at the party, in front of me, I saw a man who knew me.
	<i>It <b>is</b> my interesting experience because I <b>write</b> this exam whit my intelligence.</i>	It <b>was</b> my interesting experience because I <b>wrote</b> this exam with my intelligence.”
<b>T<sup>le</sup></b>	<i>The last week I <b>am going</b> to school for learn.</i>	Last week I <b>went</b> to school to learn.
	<i>I washed everything, I washed my house, I <b>eat</b>, I washing my foot and <b>go</b> to school.</i>	I washed everything, I washed my house, I <b>ate</b> , I washed my feet and I <b>went</b> to school.
<b>Present perfect instead of simple past</b>		

3 <sup>e</sup>	<i>The next week, we <b>have gone</b> to the 'parcourt vita' it was very attractive, I <b>have eaten</b> a lot of cream, we <b>have drunk</b> juice.</i>	The next week, we <b>went</b> to the 'Parcourt vita'. It was very attractive. We <b>drank</b> juice."
	<i>At this birthday party, I <b>have eaten</b> a lot of food.</i>	At this birthday party, I <b>ate</b> much food
	<i>Last week, I <b>have see</b> the match Cameroon - togo</i>	Last week, I <b>saw</b> [watched] the match Cameroon – Togo.
	<i>In the party last week, we <b>have eaten</b> DJ.</i>	At the party last week, we <b>ate</b> DJ.
	<i>On Saturday, I <b>have introduced</b> petrol in camp and created the explosion.</i>	On Saturday, I <b>introduced</b> petrol in camp and created [or caused] the explosion
<b>Amalgamation of present, past and present perfect</b>		
T <sup>le</sup>	<i>In fact, it <b>was</b> on Monday at the morning, when I <b>was</b> come back to the house, I <b>have seen</b> some students who <b>have</b> a maths exercise and we <b>do</b> it together.</i>	In fact, it was on Monday, in the morning, when I <b>was coming</b> back to the house, I <b>saw</b> some students who <b>had</b> a maths exercise and we <b>did</b> it together.
<b>Past perfect instead of simple past.</b>		
T <sup>le</sup>	<i>Last week I <b>had done</b> one visit to the mussee. During this visit, I saw many interesting thing.</i>	Last week, I <b>visited</b> the museum. During this visit, I saw many interesting things.
Second topic: "what I do every morning before I go to bed".		
<b>Near future instead of present</b>		
3 <sup>e</sup>	<i>I study my lessons before [I] come to school. I <b>am going to</b> carry water of the river</i>	I study my lessons before [I] come to school. I <b>carry</b> [fetch] water from the river
	<i>Every morning before I go to school I work <b>after</b> I eat the rice, I stuty.</i>	Every morning before I go to school, I [do some housework]. <b>After that</b> , I eat rice and I study.
<b>Past instead of present</b>		
3 <sup>e</sup>	<i>Every morning, before I go to school, I <b>washed</b> my teeth...</i>	Every morning, before I go to school, I <b>wash</b> my teeth..."
	<i>Every morning, I stand up, I <b>pried</b> my God, then I study my lesson.</i>	Every morning, I get up, I <b>pray</b> tomy God. Then I study mylesson
	<i>In the morning, I do my homework, I <b>pried</b> my God, I <b>moped</b> the floor</i>	In the morning, I do my homework, I <b>pray</b> to my God and I <b>mop</b> the floor.
T <sup>le</sup>	<i>When I finish I eating my food so well, I <b>went</b> to saw my parent because he <b>was giving</b> me a pocket money.</i>	When I finish eating my food, I <b>go</b> to see my father because he <b>gives me</b> pocket money."
	<i>Every morning before when I stan up, I <b>washed</b> my house</i>	Every morning before when I get up, I <b>wash</b> [clean] my house. "
<b>Present perfect instead of present simple</b>		
3 <sup>e</sup>	<i>Every morning before I go to school I <b>have eat</b> rice</i>	Every morning before I go to school I <b>eat</b> rice
Third topic: "What I do every morning before I go to bed"		
<b>Future simple instead of future perfect</b>		
3 <sup>e</sup>	<i>After I <b>will eat</b> a lotof food, I will go to see my grand-mother.</i>	After I <b>will have eaten</b> a lotof food, I will go to see my grand-mother
<b>Present instead of future</b>		

3 <sup>e</sup>	<i>Today, before going to bed, I am eating the rice.</i>	Today, before going to bed, I <b>shall eat</b> rice
	<i>[Today, before going to bed,] I work the exercises in mathematique, French, English and Info I eat...</i>	“[Today, before going to bed,] I <b>shall do</b> the exercises in mathematics, French, English and computer literacy, I <b>shall eat...</b> ”
T <sup>le</sup>	<i>Today, before going to bed, I eat something, I study my lessons, I listen news, and watch television.</i>	Today, before going to bed, I <b>shall eat</b> something, I <b>shall study</b> my lessons, <b>I shall listen</b> to the news and <b>watch</b> television.
	<i>[Before going to bed today,] I help my mother to cook in the kitchen.</i>	“[Before going to bed today,] I <b>shall help</b> my mother cook in the kitchen.”
<b>Past tense instead of future</b>		
3 <sup>e</sup>	<i>Before going to bed, I revised the lesson (four essays)</i>	“Before going to bed, I <b>shall revise</b> the lesson”
<b>Past tense instead of future perfect</b>		
3 <sup>e</sup>	<i>Today before I go to bed I will first of all do my assignment they teacher gave me in class during the day.</i>	“Today before I go to bed, I will first of all do my assignment the teacher <b>will have given</b> me in class during the day.”
<b>Present perfect instead of future perfect.</b>		
3 <sup>e</sup>	<i>Before going to bed today... I have player the Basketball.</i>	“Before going to bed today... I <b>shall have played</b> Basketball”
<b>Incoherence with time adverbials</b>		
3 <sup>e</sup>	<i>I will take at least 1 or 2 cups of the hot tea. Then I will now go to bed and it will be all.</i>	“I will take at least one or two cups of hot tea. <b>Then</b> I will go to bed and it will be all.”

### Aspect

Table : erroneous uses of aspect

First topic: “an interesting experience of last week”.		
	Students’ sentences	Corrections
<b>Ingressive instead of non-progressive</b>		
3 <sup>e</sup>	<i>In the party we have eating DJ put music and we started dancing till morning.</i>	“At the party, we ate DJ, we put music and we <b>danced till morning.</b> ”
<b>Non-progressive instead of progressive</b>		
3 <sup>e</sup>	<i>Last week I was in my village where is “Foto” pay a visit for my grand-mother. There, I saw them make a ceremony for twins.</i>	“Last week I was in my village which is ‘Foto’ to pay a visit to my grand-mother. There, I saw them <b>holding</b> a ceremony for twins.”
<b>Progressive instead of punctual (perfective).</b>		
T <sup>le</sup>	<i>The last week I am going to school for learn and I have good understand when I am a house when it learn in school.</i>	“Last week, I <b>went</b> to school to [read] and I have better understanding when I am [not in] the house but when I [read] in school.”
Second topic: “what I do every morning before I go to bed”.		

<b>Progressive instead of habitual</b>		
<b>3<sup>e</sup></b>	<i>I study my lessons before come to school. I am going to carry water of the river on doing my work. I am take my bad y going to school.</i>	“I study my lessons before I come to school. I <b>go</b> to carry [fetch] water from the river and I <b>do</b> my work. I <b>take</b> my bag and I <b>go</b> to school.”
<b>T<sup>le</sup></b>	<i>When I finish I eating my food so well, I went to saw my parent because he was giving me a pocket money.</i>	When I finish eating my food, I go to see my parent because he <b>gives me</b> pocket money.
<b>Prospective instead of habitual</b>		
<b>3<sup>e</sup></b>	<i>At 6:45 am, I am going to washing myself.</i>	“At 6:45 am, I <b>go</b> to washing myself.”
<b>Redundancy of completeness</b>		
<b>T<sup>le</sup></b>	<i>Once they are ready, I can now prepare myself too.</i>	“Once they are ready, I can get prepared too.”
<b>Perfective instead of perfect</b>		
<b>T<sup>le</sup></b>	<i>A: When I clean my body, I put on my uniform</i>	When I <b>have cleaned</b> my body [had a bath], I put my uniform.
Third topic: “What I do every morning before I go to bed”		
<b>Progressive instead of punctual</b>		
<b>3<sup>e</sup></b>	<i>Today, before going to bed, I am eating the rice.</i>	“Today, before going to bed, I <b>shall eat</b> rice”
	<i>Today before going to bed, I am eating, I am dancing, and revise may notes.</i>	“Today, before going to bed, I <b>shall eat</b> , I <b>shall dance</b> , and I shall revise my notes.”

Only two *Troisième* students produced compositions with almost perfect use of tense and aspect. Four students’ productions were completely unintelligible in *Troisième*, and three in *Terminale*. Three essays from *Troisième* were almost perfect in terms of tense and aspect, perhaps due to their brevity, and five essays from *Terminale* could not be attacked as far as tense and aspect are concerned. The *Terminale* students had less difficulty in using the future with a chronological sequencing of events to relate their different activities before going to bed.

## The place of tense and aspect in the era of CBELT

### Needs analysis

Essossomo (2013) thinks that involving the learners actively in the language teaching process could enhance the quality of English language teaching in Cameroon to a great extent. He submits the complaint that though

learners can contribute substantially to the course if they are actively involved at all stages of the course design; at the initial, during, and final stages of course evaluation, this, unfortunately, is never the case in the Francophone subsystem of education in Cameroon. Learners seem to be excluded in the teaching process. The process is carried out following the teacher-centred paradigm”.

He thinks that a needs analysis approach with the learners’ present situation analysis and target situation analysis could make English language teaching to Francophones in Cameroon easier and more productive by far. He suggests that there are four basic sources of information: the

learners themselves, the language teaching establishment, the user institution and the surrounding society and cultural events. For all these sources, the ESL/EFL practitioner studies their levels of ability, resources and views of language teaching. This approach strengthens the competence-based English language teaching. Specifically for this paper, the present situation of most learners is the very poor mastery of English tense and aspect that make their speech and writings clumsy to a very great extent, and the target situation is that they be able to make grammatically correct sentences in English.

The new method, Competence-Based Approach with entry through real life situations, as implemented by the Ministry of secondary education, aims at making the learner eventually able to perform competently in real life situations.

In the new paradigm shift, English language, as well as all other subjects, is no longer learned as an isolated school subject and for its own end, nor for the sake of passing an examination, but only as far as it contributes to the learner's overall capacity to listen, speak, read, and write competently in real life situations. This means that, even evaluation as it is known and practised today, has to be re-orientated so as to focus on real-life situations. (MINESEC, 2012:66)

With this new shift, much emphasis is given to the output, not the input, on the skills the learners will have acquired in developing the right attitudes, doing the right thing, saying the right words, and so on in the problem-solving context in which they are found. The importance that ought to be given to tense and aspect seems to be neglected. We went through students note books in four schools and we recorded all the topics treated under grammar through out the school year 2013/2014 in the four schools mentioned above. Their identities are not disclosed, so as to protect their credibility.

**Table: Grammar lessons covered in the year 2013/2014**

First school : 6 <sup>ème</sup>	Second school: 6 <sup>ème</sup>	Third school: 5 <sup>ème</sup>	Fourth school: 6 <sup>ème</sup>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>This is... these are</i></li> <li>- <i>Present simple</i></li> <li>- <i>Auxiliary verbs</i></li> <li>- The definite article</li> <li>- Plural formation</li> <li>- Adjective (positive, comp, sup)</li> <li>- Many/Much</li> <li>- Demonstrative pronouns</li> <li>- Conjunctions</li> <li>- Adverbs</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>10 grammar lessons</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use of contraction</li> <li>- <i>This/that is ... these/those are</i></li> <li>- <i>The simple present tense</i></li> <li>- Personal pronouns</li> <li>- Possessive adjectives</li> <li>- Plural nouns</li> <li>- How many ... How much</li> <li>- Prepositions</li> <li>- Numbers</li> <li>- Question tags</li> <li>- Common nouns</li> <li>- <i>Present progressive</i></li> <li>- Compound nouns</li> <li>- Reflexive pronouns</li> <li>- Negation</li> <li>- Indefinite articles</li> <li>- Relative pronouns</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>17 grammar lessons</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>MODULE 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Present simple</i></li> <li>- <i>Present progressive, - present perfect</i></li> <li>- <i>Simple past</i></li> <li>- <i>Past perfect, past - progressive, future simple</i></li> <li>- <i>Irregular verbs</i></li> <li>- Possessive adjectives</li> <li>- <i>This/that is ... these/those are</i></li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>MODULE 2: Road Safety</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- should ... should not</li> <li>- A few/a little ... few/little</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>MODULE 3: English for better health</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>The first conditional</i></li> <li>- <i>Irregular verbs (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>To be and to have, simple present tense</i></li> <li>- Prepositions of position</li> <li>- Nouns</li> <li>- Possessive adjectives</li> <li>- <i>Interrogative sentences with "can" and "may"</i></li> <li>- <i>The future simple</i></li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>MODULE 3: Interacting with size and measurement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prepositions</li> <li>- Singular and plural nouns</li> <li>- Phrasal verbs with "go"</li> <li>- Too many/too much</li> <li>- should and should not</li> </ul>

		<p><b>MODULE 4:</b>  <b>Language interactions related to sport</b>  - Numbers  - Adjectives in comparison.  <i>14 grammar lessons</i></p>	<p>The imperative to give orders.  <i>11 grammar lessons</i></p>
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It would have been laudable if only few tenses were tackled in 6ème and still few in 5ème, with many exercises and situations where the learners would use the same tenses over and over in a variety of related situations. But the teachers do not provide enough drills, they only fly over the different topics towards syllabus completion (Siéwoué, 2013). Neither have they developed strategies to make the students eventually master tense and aspect.

### **Correcting the negative influence of pidgin English**

The presence of Pidgin English and its influence upon the learners spoken and written English is not negligible. Durcher (2004) puts forward that more than 50% of Cameroon's population use Pidgin as a lingua franca, 13% as second language and a few as their first language. For Nforbi (2013: 18), "although it is referred to as an expression of the Anglophones, French-speaking Cameroonians equally use it". Again, Nforbi (2012:102,205) shows the prominent place that pidgin has had in the spread of the gospel in those early days. It was also considered to be the common code between the White and the allogenes (Nforbi, *ibid*: 241). Pidgin's simple syntax makes its acquisition very easy, even by the children who will only here their elders use it once in a while. This is even in our classrooms, many children who try to express themselves in English will always find Pidgin creeping in their English. This is more remarkable on the verb phrase than any other structure or their vocabulary. In these early classes which are not examination classes, that is *Sixième* and *Cinquième*, tense and aspect should be given the prominence they deserve through serious behavioural training, through a multitude of exercises and translation tasks.

### **CONCLUSION**

Hedge (2008) agrees with Phillipson et al. (1984: 168) that "it is impossible to conceive of a person being communicatively competent without being linguistically competent." Tense and aspect constitute the core grammatical elements in the deep structure of a verb. They are the type of grammatical structures that no conscious language teacher, textbook designer and curriculum designer can overlook, or treat with negligence. They must be mastered if the learner is expected to use the language effectively whether in communication or in competent problem-solving. This paper has rather demonstrated that tense and aspect remain a mystery

for French-speaking students in the schools under study in particular, and in Cameroon secondary education in general. In the era of Competence-Based English language teaching, it would be wise to lay even more emphasis on these grammatical structures in the early classes.

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