



A comparative approach to the English tense system

Marc Schubert

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Seminar paper from the year 2011 in the subject English - Pedagogy, Didactics, Literature Studies, grade: 1,7, University of Hamburg, language: English, abstract: Robert Binnick (1991: vii) wrote „whoever has read in one book that English has three tenses, in another that it has two, and in yet a third that it has sixteen (...) may be pardoned for some confusion and some skepticism as to the claim of linguistic scholars to know a great deal about tense“. This quotation illustrates the problem of the classification of the English tense system on which the focus of this paper will be based. Although linguists' knowledge of the tense system has increased over the years, the problem is that, as Robin Lakoff wrote, they “cannot account for many ways in which tenses are used in English” (Binnick 1991: vii). Therefore, English tense(s) have not yet been understood completely. By comparing different authors and frameworks, this paper will present different approaches to the English tense system. The aim is not to provide a perfect solution to all answers but to introduce different viewpoints and to go a step beyond the common conceptualization of the English language by presenting competing theories.

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